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Elisabeth Bakke. *Doomed to Failure? The Czechoslovak Nation Project and the Slovak Autonomist Reaction 1918-38.* Oslo: Unipub forlag Akademia, 1999. 533 pp. NOK 354 (cloth), ISBN 978-82-570-4471-8.

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On the Limits of Nation Building: The First Czechoslovak Republic

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In her dissertation, Bakke sets out to answer two questions (p. 2): What was the basis for increasing national conflict between Czech and Slovak politicians, and, secondly, why did the Czechoslovak nation project of the inter-war period turn out to be unsuccessful. While Bakke convincingly answers the first question, her response to the second falls short of serving as an overall explanation; her work is, however, to be seen as an important step in the right direction.

Bakke treats Czechoslovakism mainly as an ideology. She evaluates the "success" of that ideology from within the debates among political elites (Czech, "Czechoslovak", and Slovak). Her work can therefore be taken as an excellent study about political bargaining in ethnic terms. Parts of the analysis are based on quantitative research, a fact which turns out to be of advantage in most cases, like when Bakke evaluates the percentage of Slovak politicians within the new state elite. It turns out to be less effective, however, when Bakke ventures to take census and voting behaviour as a basis for describing the reception of the nation-building project by the population in Slovakia. Here the consultation of more archival material (e.g. from the Masaryk Institute of the Academy of Science in Prague, or the Slovak National Archives) would have been necessary.

Bakke starts with a broad theoretical framework. The reflections on the creditability of sources, or quantitative versus qualitative methods can be easily skipped by scholars not entirely new in the field. Then Bakke considers the nature of national identity, concluding that no national identity is totally voluntary, and is therefore at least to some extent acquired. Turning to the question of whether traditions are invented or not, Bakke makes it clear that nation-formation is to be understood as a process, the success of which is "by no means guaranteed" (p. 34). Regarding the debate over nationalism's relationship to modernization, she argues that modernization is more of a catalyst than an initiating or driving force in the rise of nations. In her words: "nations are not invented, but historically constituted and are as such no more artificial than any other cultural phenomena" (p. 41).

Bakke avoids instrumentalist interpretations for explaining why elites took up the national program. The author argues that "after national consciousness has become common [...] national identity becomes more or less inescapable, because it is reproduced through the institutions of society" and becomes a legal category through the concept of citizenship (p. 55). Bakke also includes theories of conflict prevention and conflict management, and distinguishes between symbolic and practical demands. The author argues that different national identities are not per se a source of conflict; the problem of perception is just as important as "reality" (p. 6).

The next part contains an outline on Czech and Slovak historical development from the first Slav settlement in the area until 1918. This is, unfortunately, the weak-

est section of the book. Bakke develops only a synthesis of traditional national historiography, and many details are irrelevant for the analysis following later. In the last chapter of her introduction, Bakke analyzes the role of language, history, "national character", and of the Slav idea in nation-building rhetoric. In her description of the "national revival" of Czechs and Slovaks the author follows Miroslav Hroch's model more or less. Important aspects of the political system of Dualism (1867-1918) and the Hungarian nation building efforts remain unclear; they deserve more space and more consultation of secondary literature.

In the main section of her book, Bakke presents the findings of her research. With some limitations, this is a great piece of analysis. It contains hitherto unknown evidence for the limits of the success of the Czechoslovak nation project. Bakke starts by defining the actors in the nation building efforts, and describes the political system of the first Czechoslovak Republic. A quantitative analysis of the political elite shows only low Slovak representation in party organizations and government, as well as a considerably high amount of "scholar-politicians".

In the next two chapters, Bakke turns to the discussion of the official version of Czechoslovakism, which she analyzes on the ground of school textbooks, a few important official documents, debates in parliament, and the publishing activities of scholars in different fields. Due to its amount, the press is cited only in limited number. With the exception of the autonomist "Slovak", Bakke also refrains from examining journals and weeklies. She sets out by describing the roots of the idea of creating an independent Czechoslovak state during World War I. When analyzing debates among Czech politicians in 1917/18, Bakke rightly says that the shift from "Czech" to "Czechoslovak" perspectives was not linked with a shift in national identity. The author describes the fluidity of terms (Czech, Czechoslovak, Czechoslav) at that time. She continues to analyze the national question in the constitution of 1920, the state symbols, and official statistics.

Much space is dedicated to the educational system. Here Bakke holds that Slovak schoolbooks for primary education were more Czechoslovak in orientation than their Czech counterparts. The latter dwelled upon a very Czech-centered interpretation of history with only some additional chapters on Slovakia added, and many textbooks did not convey a Czechoslovak identity at all. Considering the reasons for these differences, Bakke hypothesizes that the alteration of Slovak historiography was easier to make because it was much less established than the Czech one. Regarding religious conflict, Bakke shows that despite some incidents in the early 1920s, this was never itself a serious problem although, as she shows with respect to Andrej Hlinka, religious rhetoric was used as a means for political mobilization.

Bakke next discusses the scholarly debate over the concept of Czechoslovakism with special focus on the interpretation of Greater Moravia and the language question. The author argues that a purely political nation concept was absent in the writings (according to Bakke this concept was only applied by Milan Hodza and, implicitly, by Emanuel Radl). Some voluntarist elements were, however, also present. Bakke points to the parallel rhetoric in the concept of Czechoslovakism and the already existing Czech and Slovak national narratives. The author shows how the reliance on traditional elements can be counterproductive to the claim of a new national narrative.

According to Bakke, the failure of an overarching Czechoslovak identity is caused by the one-sidedness of the concept. It was complementary rather than contradictory to the existing Czech narrative, whereas it had to attack core parts of the Slovak. For most Czech politicians, the Czechs were the giving, the Slovaks the receiving part, the Czech were the norm and the Slovak the deviation (p. 522). From a Czechoslovak perspective, a separate Slovak identity therefore seemed to be artificially cultivated (p. 241). In contrast to that, the autonomist Slovak rhetoric was much more essentialist; it interpreted regional differentiation as a clear national divide.

What puzzles Bakke herself is the absence of Czech actors in the scholarly debate. When comparing the scholarly debate with the political one, Bakke states that the latter merely echoed the former. According to her findings, the main cleavage in the discussion over Czechoslovakism seemed to be between the Slovak autonomists and Czechoslovakists (most of them were in fact of Slovak background). This impression intensifies in another chapter, when Bakke describes various plans for Slovak autonomy and the debates over the Pittsburgh agreement and the Martin declaration. For the Czech side, Bakke restricts her analysis mainly to politicians and did not include the works of most of those Czech scholars and publicists who were publishing on Slovak topics (like Karel Kadlec, Stanislav Klima, or Karel Kalal); this would, however, not have changed the picture drastically. What is more important is that hardly any Czech writer or scholar who had published on Czech national

identity is included in the analysis (like e.g. Ferdinand Peroutka, Frantisek Xaver Salda, or Emanuel Chalupny).

One of the merits of Bakke's analysis is to demonstrate with great efficiency the differences between political language and political action. Although the Czechoslovak governments kept unity as a must on the level of symbolic policy, they were able to consent with some of the autonomists' demands. One example for this is the decreed use of the Slovak language in Slovak administration, another the founding of a technical high school in Kosice. Bakke also shows that the recruitment policies within state administration applied in the early 1920s was corrected by time (as with the abolishment of pay privileges for Czech teaching personnel in 1925/26). Despite all arguments in parliament, the autonomists were also successful in establishing coalitions of interest with Slovak representatives from other parties. Bakke is therefore right when she defines the policy of the Czechoslovak government in this field as being "neutral" (p. 518).

In general, Elisabeth Bakke elaborates on how a national vision constructed to reinforce national unity can fail when it is not accepted by the very people it is supposed to mollify. Compared with the Czechoslovak nation project, existing Czech and Slovak interpretations were more in touch with "reality" (well established self-perceptions would perhaps be better). It seems that existing Czech and Slovak interpretations were lent more credibility because the Czechs dominated the ruling elites and state apparatus, making it difficult for Slovaks to see themselves as constituting an important component in Czechoslovak identity. This in turn reinforced their sense of Slovak distinctiveness and led to attempts to create a national movement. Bakke comes to the conclusion that "overarching nation projects may have a greater chance if they are based on a political or a voluntarist nation concept that can also respect cultural differences" (p. 531). For her case, the author holds that both sides had the capacity (personnel and mass media) to formulate competing nation projects.

After years of neglect before 1925, the Czechoslovak government committed itself to the economic development of Slovakia, but this had only limited impact before the World Economic crisis hit. Ironically, this meant that Slovakia was less effected by the hard times than its western partner. Bakke sees that development after 1929 revealed a lack of experience of Slovaks who lost out in the competition for jobs in higher state administration. It was this factor that stirred essentialist convictions on the Slovak side, and thereby provided another justification for Slovaks to reject Czechoslovakism. Thus, Bakke's quantitative analysis illustrates how the economic crisis further encouraged Slovak essentialist tendencies

Important as economic developments may have been in the failure of the Czechoslovak project as Bakke suggests, they illustrate the limitations of Bakke's analysis by reminding readers of the broader context in which Czech-Slovak relations were developing. It is not correct to reduce the Czechoslovak nation project exclusively to the development of Czech-Slovak relations. Bakke is right when saying that the main features to constitute Czechoslovak unity were not political, but ethnic and cultural. The author is not right, however, when she states that the national minorities "were never meant to be a part of the Czechoslovak nation project; indeed, in the case of the Germans and Magyars, they were even represented as the enemies of the 'Czechoslovak' state-nation" (p. 3). Bakke neglects the function of the "other" for nation building processes here, and, moreover, the question of how to integrate Germans and Magyars by a change of their political mentality is not dealt with. Prominent Czechoslovak politicians thought of keeping them as independent "nations" but changing them into loyal citizens through a politics of "de-Austrianizing".

It was this context that influenced decision making in Czech-Slovak relations to a certain extent. Whereas in some parts of her analysis Bakke refers to the minority question, she fails to elaborate on the interdependencies between Czech-Slovak relations and the Sudeten-German and Magyar problem. Her analysis of the regional reform of 1927/28 or of a Sudeten German schoolbook, however, clearly show that such interdependencies existed. Moreover, Bakke deals with the Slovak problem and Czechoslovak nation building as if these were of strictly internal character. The destabilizing effect that Hungarian and, after 1935, German revisionism had on political debates and decision making within Czechoslovakia is hardly analyzed. Hungarian irredentism only appears in the form of references to alleged Magyarone renegades made by some Czechoslovakists. Bakke therefore fails to elaborate on the external pressure exerted on Czechoslovakia since 1936, and presents the Slovak question of summer 1938 as one isolated from other trouble spots of the republic, namely the Sudeten German problem.

Despite its valuable and original findings, *Doomed to failure?* therefore falls short of explaining the failure of a nation building concept in a fully satisfying way. Never-

theless is has to be stressed again that Bakke's work does not only contain new and important details, but ventures to put them into new contexts while applying new theoretical approaches. So it is safe saying that *Doomed for failure?* can be recommended to scholars analyzing the first Czechoslovak republic or nation building in Eastern Europe in general; this is true not only because of the structure of the case study itself, but also because of the theoretical introduction, which contains many stimulating thoughts. In this respect, the work of Elisabeth Bakke also means a turn for both Czech and Slovak historiography, and we can only hope that there will be a broad reception of her findings and a thorough discussion of her main points.

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