

Metternich, the Slavs and the Habsburg Monarchy, 1842–1849

On the Relationship between Nation and State

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Abstract. The prevailing scholarly consensus regarding Prince Metternich's policy within the framework of the Vienna System of 1815 is that it was hostile and repressive towards the nationalities within the Habsburg Monarchy. However, a re-evaluation of this judgement is provided by the history and circumstances of the Prague Slav Congress of June 1848, as it was here that discussions on the problem of the relationship between national emancipation and state organisation reached a peak. The article examines the knowledge Metternich had of the national diversity of the Slavs even before 1848, and the extent he judged the so-called 'Pan-Slavism' not as a problem of nationalities, but as an ideological pretext for Russian expansion. The article also deals with Metternich's criticism of the repressive Hungarian Slav policy, showing him to be a defender of multinational statehood in Central Europe. In the context of the Frankfurt National Assembly of 1848/49, which sought to delineate the national territory of a unified Germany by the Central European borders of the German Confederation, Metternich recognised the belligerent potential of modern nationalism. His concerns stemmed from his perception of the modern movement to align nationality and state boundaries with language-defined national identities as a perpetual catalyst for state-building conflicts. However, the Emperor's resistance and the internal bureaucracy's opposition (the Kolowrat system) hindered the implementation of the model of a multinational federal state he drafted in 1816. This concept bore a resemblance to the notion of 'Austroslavism', a concept developed by the Czech historian and politician František Palacký.

Keywords: Metternich, Slav Congress 1848, Revolution 1848, German Confederation, nation-building, Austroslavism, Habsburg Monarchy

The initial situation: the upheaval of the Central European order in the Spring of Nations

The March Revolution of 1848 had an impact on the European continent like no other revolution before; it shattered the international order that had been laid down in international law at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Central Europe suffered

the most, with traditional state frontiers cutting through ethnic settlements like nowhere else on the continent. This was possible because the government structure did not consider the distribution of nationality. We are talking about the Habsburg Monarchy, which was constitutionally interwoven with the German Confederation in an elaborate construction. The borders of the two territories overlapped. Both states had a multinational character. The political opposition saw the Habsburg Monarchy as the ‘prison of peoples,’ the German Confederation as the ‘un-German’ outgrowth of the Congress of Vienna, and the supposedly omnipotent Austrian Chancellor Metternich as the political embodiment of both.

In the spring of 1848, the message of the revolution was condensed into the slogan of liberating peoples from the chains of the Viennese system, ideally united in the grand vision of a ‘springtime of nations.’ A participant in the Slavic Congress, Karl Malisz, a member of the Polish Committee in Lviv, gave a telling subtitle to his writing about the Congress: “A contribution to the understanding between the peoples and to eternal peace.”¹

The French graphic artist Frédéric Sorrieu (1807–1887) created a lithograph on the subject. Its powerful imagery made it iconic and famous throughout the world. He gave it the title *République universelle démocratique et sociale* and the subtitle *Le Pacte*.² The lithograph shows the long procession of peoples through an open landscape, some of whom are identified by their national flags as American, French, German, Austrian, Sicilian, Lombard, Roman, and English. They are moving towards the monument of a female allegory—the personified Republic—holding the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen” in her right hand and the torch of enlightenment in her left, on their way to the new treaty, obviously with divine blessing.

This image of the ‘springtime of nations’ was based on a narrative, or more precisely a historical myth, shared by all its pre-March adherents: An all-powerful prince had suppressed all national aspirations with his police-state despotism—the so-called ‘Metternich system’—through the Vienna Order of 1815. Now, however, the peoples managed to throw off their chains and live together in peace, united by a common treaty, to achieve universal equality and their own free national constitutions. The great Czech historian and national pioneer František Palacký echoed this myth when, in rejecting elections to a constituent national assembly in Frankfurt, he claimed that Metternich was “the most implacable enemy of all Slavic nationalities in Austria.”³

1 Malisz, *Der Slaven-Kongreß*.

2 Displayed at Gall, ed., 1848. *Aufbruch zur Freiheit*, 112.

3 Palacký, “Eine Stimme über Österreichs Anschluß,” 84.

Metternich's knowledge of the national diversity of the Slavs, 1843

Was this really true? The files of the Vienna State Chancellery, which Palacký could not yet see, contradict the prejudice of his “coldness towards national will,” which was still widespread according to his former biographer, Heinrich von Srbik.⁴ One must therefore ask: How well did the State Chancellor know the nationalities in the Monarchy as a whole, and the Slavs in particular?

As an aristocratic landlord in Königswart (Kynžvart) and the owner of an industrial ironworks in Plaß (Plasy), Metternich was often personally involved with his Slavic tenants, agricultural and industrial workers, as well as members of the local Jewish communities. Where necessary, proceedings were conducted and recorded in Czech before the Patrimonial Court of his estates. This was not the way of a “most implacable enemy of all Slavic nationalities,” but of a politician who recognised and respected the rights of other nationalities.⁵

One particular event may shed light on Metternich's attitude towards the various nationalities in the Habsburg Empire even before the revolution. In early 1843, German press reports conjured national conflicts and, in particular, the spectre of ‘Pan-Slavism,’ i.e., “the tendency of Austrian Slavs to unite into a compact whole and to throw their sixteen million into the balance of the Austrian Monarchy as a decisive weight.”⁶

This public propaganda led Metternich to draw up an inventory of the nationality situation in the Monarchy. His basic ideas, which he summarised in a so-called ‘lecture’ (*Vortrag*) to the Emperor on 9 March 1843, are outlined here. Due to its historical context, the document has the character of a manifesto.⁷ Metternich recognises in the “nationality of the tribes” (*Stämme*) a natural individuality that must be respected at all costs. He defined this in the spirit of Johann Gottfried Herder (and his *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, published between 1784 and 1791). It was based on the most important social conditions: common descent, history, languages, customs, but also political characteristics, such as forms of state and government. By this, he meant the specific legal guarantees of individual territories, such as the Bohemian Land Code (*Landesordnung*).

In his *Vortrag*, Metternich devoted a separate section to ‘Slavism,’ which he recognised as having existed in Europe since the earliest times. He identified Russians,

4 Srbik, *Metternich*, vol. 1, 197; Siemann, *Metternich*, 13.

5 Siemann, *Metternich*, 640–44; bilingual protocol 15 May 1834 in German and Czech of a hearing at the central administration of Plaß, 643.

6 ÖStA HHStA StK Vorträge 1844, Krt. 291, Fol. 104. “Aus Oesterreich, 2. März” *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung* no. 68, 9 March 1843.

7 ÖStA HHStA StK Vorträge 1844, Krt. 291, Fol. 80–91. Metternich, “Vortrag über das Slaventhum” to Emperor Ferdinand, Vienna, 8 March 1843 [Cover: 9 March].

Poles, Czechs, Croats, Slovaks, Illyrians, Dalmatians, Bulgarians, Serbs, Austrians, and Mecklenburg Wends. He did not assume rigid national characters, but described them as dependent on their material conditions, conditions of production, and levels of education and civilisational development. In his judgement, this represented a west-to-east divide on the European continent.

In a special section, the State Chancellor praised the advanced socio-economic development of the Czechs, which for him also meant “progress in the field of civilisation.” This advantage was due to the ‘Czechs’ (he does not explicitly say ‘Bohemians’), who differed in their level of development from the Slavic population in the southern provinces of the Monarchy.

The warning against Pan-Slavism as an ideological pretext for the expansion of Russia, 1843

Metternich strongly warned against taking ‘[Pan-]Slavism’ as a generalised given. His rejection of the generalised term shows that he had a precise idea of the differences and peculiarities of the various Slavic populations within the Monarchy. It is instructive to quote his own words:

“The mere designation of a whole tribe [i.e., ‘Pan-Slavism’ or ‘Slavism’] throws little light on the peculiarities of the situation. Slavism is, of course, based on a spirit, but it is substantially modified in its directions by a variety of conditions; for example, the Polish and Russian tribal members are now sharply opposed to each other; there is less sympathy between the Poles and the Czechs than between the former and the Hungarian Slavs and even the Magyars. The Bohemians [Czechs] are closer to Western liberalism than the Croats and the Illyrians.”⁸

His analysis exposes publicly propagated Pan-Slavism as an ideological pretext for Russian expansion. He asks whether and to what extent the nationalities had become politicised since the French Revolution and the subsequent Napoleonic wars, whether they had subversive aims and, above all, whether they would unite in a great movement of ‘Pan-Slavism.’ His memorandum completely disproved these concerns to the Emperor and, therefore, did not justify a policy of repression, but advocated an individual and targeted observation of political conditions. He accurately describes the internal conflicts and divisions between the Slavic nationalities, and this alone refutes his assumption of a great Slavic unification movement. He did not see the danger of a national state forming within the monarchy. For him, the Poles outside the Monarchy were an exception.

8 Metternich, “Vortrag über das Slaventhum,” Fol. 91, cp. Note 7.

Metternich's criticism of Russia is striking, a concern that Palacký would later articulate in his letter of rejection to the Frankfurt Committee of Fifty. The State Chancellor observed how the "Eastern autocracy"—as he called the Tsarist regime—was trying to instrumentalise Slavs in order to gain influence in the Habsburg lands. The lever was religion. Based in Russia, he recognised a confessional political Slavism that appealed to the "community of Slavic nationality." More recently, Russia also spread to Hungary, which belonged to the Habsburg lands.

Since Orthodox services included readings from Russian liturgical books containing intercessions for the monarch as protector of Orthodox Christianity, these prayers were logically addressed to the Tsar and his family, not to the Habsburg head of state. In this way, the loyalty of the Orthodox Slavs and Hungarians to the Habsburg Monarchy was cunningly and subtly undermined. Even the affected Slavs recognised this as an unlawful external intervention, which, for example, made the Poles feel once again oppressed by the Tsar.

Where the Slavs followed the Orthodox rite, the Tsar treated them as objects to be protected by Russia, without having been called upon to do so. Metternich interprets this as "the political encroachment of Russian power since its emergence in the last third of the seventeenth and the first third of the eighteenth century." He was referring to what we would now call the "imperialist expansion of the Russian Empire towards the West (Poland) and South-east (Moldavia)," which, as we now know, also took place in the same period towards the Crimea and Afghanistan.

Criticism of the Hungarian policy towards the Slavs, 1843/1844

In his survey of the areas of conflict in Slavism, Metternich identified a particular factor of unrest on the part of the Hungarians; from the Imperial Diet of 1825, the 'Hungarian nationality' carried out particularly ruthless attacks on the Slavic part of the population, although the latter was far superior in numbers, and not inferior in property to the Hungarians.

In Hungary, the arising paradoxical situation was that the Hungarians complained about the "uprising of the Slavic nationality," which they themselves had caused, while the Slavs, especially the Slovaks, complained about the unbearable pressure of 'Magyarism.' The issue was the imposition of Hungarian as the sole official language. Needless to say, the Kingdom of Hungary was also a multinational state. This conflict between nationalities put the Habsburg Emperor in a precarious situation, as he was also head of state as King of Hungary but felt obliged to protect the nationality of the Slovaks.

Metternich's disapproval was in line with his own governing maxim, which was characteristic of Habsburg rule in their multi-ethnic state: The head of state was

not allowed to be a party. In an 1844 memorandum on the situation in Hungary, Metternich was even more explicit in his criticism of ‘Magyarization,’ the policy of forced linguistic and cultural assimilation. He compared this cultural rape of a nationality to the analogous practice of the French and praised the Habsburg practice of not wanting to ‘Germanise.’ He repeatedly makes pejorative remarks about Joseph II, who tried to do the same.⁹

Where nationalism defined its ‘identity’—as Metternich put it—in cultural terms, the State Chancellor tolerated it and even encouraged it with regard to academies and university professorships. In reality, however, there was a great deal of discrimination against the Slavs compared with the Germans on the part of the lower authorities. Metternich attached an anonymous memorandum to his “lecture” to the Emperor on 8 March 1843, in which he claimed the rights of the Bohemians, i.e., the Czechs, which had been denied to them. It begins with the remarkable words:

“Slavism is often called the awakening of the Bohemian national feeling. The fact that Bohemians feel that they are Bohemians and do not want to deny their ancestors and their language cannot be held against them as a sin.”¹⁰

For Metternich, nationality, defined by language and ethnic affinity, was a value to be respected, as in the specific case of this memorandum. It was part of the “educational offensive of enlightened absolutism.”¹¹ Similarly, in terms of constitutional law, the author argues in favour of the “Revised Constitution [*Verneuerte Landordnung*] of the Kingdom of Bohemia” of 1627, which guaranteed equal rights to the “Bohemian,” i.e., Czech, language. He complained bitterly that some administrative officials spoke only German rather than both languages, as required by law.

But when the suspicion arose that foreigners, and not only educated people—as Metternich pointed out—but also members of the “lower classes,” were meeting at the Brno bishop’s theological seminary to give political speeches “about Slavism,” he felt that a line had been crossed.¹² Where there was a danger of nationalism becoming political, Metternich literally demanded action, even in the case of the Czechs, who were considered advanced: “This country therefore requires keen

9 Metternich (handwritten autograph), “Ueber die Ungarischen Zustände.” StA Prague RAM AC, sect. 8, Krt.9a; printed (partly inaccurate) Metternich, Richard von, ed. *Aus Metternich’s*, vol. 7, 51–63; analysis: Siemann, *Metternich*, 656–57.

10 ÖStA HHStA StK Vorträge 1844, Krt. 291, Fol. 94–101, anonymous submission on the improper treatment of the Slavs, “Slavismus,” attached to the lecture of 8 March 1843.

11 Moritsch, “Revolution 1848,” 7.

12 ÖStA HHStA StK Vorträge 1844, Krt. 291, Metternich, “Slavische Umtriebe im Brüner Alumnat betr.,” lecture of 7 April 1843 to Emperor Ferdinand [without Fol.].

attention.” President of the Police and Censorship Court Joseph von Sedlnitzky preferred the word “observation,” but the State Chancellor himself crossed it out in the handwritten draft of the Chancellery Secretary.

Metternich as defender of multinational statehood in Central Europe

If this article focuses on Metternich, who was frowned upon by his patriotic contemporaries, it is not primarily because of his personality, but because of a fundamental historical problem that was difficult for his contemporaries to see and is still difficult to recognise today. This made him an outsider to the *Zeitgeist* of the time, which invoked linguistic-national unity in a territorially defined, homogeneous nation-state as the only binding goal. In the text of the German national anthem composed in 1841, the demand was “Unity, Justice and Freedom for the German Fatherland,” and it was to apply to all the surrounding, as yet unredeemed *Fatherlands* of other nationalities in Central Europe, without any thought given to the border problems this would provoke.

A close examination of many hitherto unpublished archival sources shows that Metternich was one of the few contemporaries who understood early the social and political explosive power of the slogan “One nation—one nation state” in the conditions of Central Europe, its socially destructive means: the struggle of nationalities against each other, and its politically destructive means: the deconstruction of the existing state order.¹³ From a distance, we can say that the spectrum of potential conflicts ranged from “oppositional or secessionist nationalism” in the sense of Helmut Rumpler¹⁴—which was the tendency of the Hungarians—to ‘Austro-Slavism’ integrated into the Habsburg Monarchy in the sense of Palacký—which was the concern of the majority of Slavs in the Monarchy.¹⁵

13 In a conversation with Georg Klindworth, the diplomat and (secret) agent of various European princely houses, the content of which Klindworth conveyed to the French politician François Guizot (Georg Klindworth to François Guizot, Vienna, 12 April 1847. Archives nationales, François Guizot [42AP], box 68), Metternich spoke about nationalism and his relationship to the state: “La nationalité est maintenant un Palladium qui sert à couvrir tous les crimes et toutes les tentatives les plus violentes contre les bases de l’ordre politique et social. C’est la une theorie tout a fait fausse et perverse; ce nationalisme payen (?) est en contradiction flagrante avec l’organisation de nos sociétés et de la morale de notre tems. Nationalisme et Etat sont deux choses bien differentes. [...] Toutes ces hallucinations politiques ne sont que d’absurdes anachronismes, contraires á la marche de la civilisation et par consequent sans aucun chance de se réaliser jamais.”

14 Rumpler, *Eine Chance*, 155.

15 Kořalka, “*Idea státu rakouského [Österreichs Staatsidee] als föderalistisches Programm*,” In: Kořalka, *Palacký*, 448–59.

At the outset, reference was made to the complicated, interwoven construction of the German Confederation and the Habsburg Monarchy. Why did the Congress architects decide against nation states, even though some Congress observers and patriots wanted this as early as 1815?

When in the 1820s, a second wave of constitutionalizing swept Europe after the French Revolution, Metternich received well-meaning advice to introduce a progressive constitution for the Habsburg Monarchy, similar to that of Greece or Naples. He commented sarcastically:

“Yes, but what to do! Good God! Grant Germany a good American constitution within three weeks and thus set an example for Austria and force our neighbours to follow suit? [...] And this with eight or ten different nations, all of which have their own particular language, and hate each other.”¹⁶

Was Metternich passing anti-national and anti-democratic judgement, or was he, as a political pragmatist, simply describing a fact that contradicted the myth of the “springtime of nations”?

There is a geographical map of the statistical population data of the entire Monarchy, showing how and where the various linguistic-national majorities were distributed throughout the territory.¹⁷ The “ethnic structures” presented here show the historical basis of each of the nationalities involved in the Spring of Nations. The nationalities are distinguished in different colours; the gradations of colour help quantify more precisely their regional share in the population. The blue framed area outlines the part of Austria that was also part of the German Confederation: On the Austrian side, the German Confederation included the Czechs in the north, the Slovenes in the south, and the Italians in the south-west as major non-German national groups.¹⁸

We should bear in mind the seemingly anachronistic nature of the German Confederation and the Habsburg Monarchy. Both state structures embodied a so-called ‘composite state,’ also known as an ‘empire,’ in contrast to the nation-state. The head of state was dynastic and monarchical, and therefore indifferent to nationality. Emperor Franz and Metternich believed that Austria was not in principle a monarchy but a conglomerate of historically inherited territories, each with its own laws, always populated by Germans, but mostly by Slavs.¹⁹

16 StA Prague RAM AC, sect. 6, Krt. C19.5, Fol. 26, Letter 20 January 1820 from Metternich to Countess Lieven; for more on Metternich’s opinion on the American Constitution, see: Šedivý, *Victory of Realism*, 226–27.

17 Rumpler and Urbanitsch, eds, *Soziale Strukturen*, 60–69, overview map 61.

18 The regions dominated by Czechs appear in blue, those of the Slovenes in green, and those of the Italians in yellow.

19 Siemann, *Metternich*, 433–34.

In the logic of this historical view, the Habsburg monarch acted as individual head of state for each dominion: He was King of Bohemia, Margrave of Moravia, Duke of Lower Silesia, of Carniola, and of Tyrol. Each dominion relied on its own historically inherited constitutional law.²⁰ This archaic form had the modern side-effect that no nationality was superior to another, and that Czechs, Moravians, Germans, Poles, and Slovenes could live in common legal circles. This fact led Palacký, in 1848, to the reasonable conclusion that the Slavic nationalities could coexist on an equal level in a federal empire with a Habsburg at its head; it also prompted him to make the famous proclamation: “Truly, if the Austrian imperial state had not existed a long time ago, one would have had to hasten to create it in the interests of Europe, in the interests of humanity itself.”²¹

In the interests of humanity? Here Palacký’s views undoubtedly overlapped with those of Metternich. Metternich saw the nationalities in their multilingualism as “hating each other” and wanted to protect them from each other. Consequently, both saw the overarching roof of the Habsburg Monarchy as a protective space for individual nationalities.

Metternich had the same intention at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 when he founded the German Confederation. He constructed it in analogy to the Habsburg Monarchy as a ‘composite state’ in the centre of Europe: too weak to attack others, too strong to be attacked. The Confederation also included the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Kingdom of Denmark, and (until 1837) the United Kingdom of Great Britain, each through its own provinces within the territory of the Confederation. Other non-German nationalities living in the Confederation included Danes, Sorbs, Poles, Italians, and Luxembourgers. As a loose association of thirty-four princes and four city republics, the Confederation neutralised multi-nationalism. The ratio of this complicated construction in the middle of Europe was not a mechanism for suppressing nationalities, but was certainly a mechanism for neutralising them. For Metternich, this was a political means of securing internal and international peace.

German unity in 1848/49 as a national explosive: the National Assembly elections as a threat to the neighbours

After the honeymoon of the ‘Spring of Nations’ in the March days of 1848, fears and conflicts between nationalities began to grow. There seemed to be something wrong with the narrative of the ‘Metternich system.’ It turned out that “there was

20 The aforementioned memorandum refers to this legal fact. Note 10.

21 Palacký, “Eine Stimme über Österreichs Anschluß,” 83.

no ‘Metternich system,’ but rather a plurality of power centres.”²² Instead of the fraternisation of peoples, the result was international discord,²³ the “entanglement of nationalism with civil strife.”²⁴

Even if the “awakened” peoples did not demand their own state from the outset, the discussions inevitably led to the question of how a single nationality should relate to the existing and possibly doomed multinational states. Between March and June 1848, serious political observers believed that the Habsburg Monarchy might collapse. The aforementioned Malisz wrote: “If no geographical borders were necessary for the unity of the state, the matter would be quite simple. The peoples of the same language would then belong to one state unit.”²⁵ In reality, however, the patriots did not want to follow this logic. They wanted to impose clear territorial borders for the national language regions.

The problem is illustrated by the lands of the Bohemian Crown, comprising the Kingdom of Bohemia, the Margraviate of Moravia, and the Duchy of Silesia. In the rush of patriotic feeling, most contemporaries were unaware of what it meant to establish German unity in the form of a nation state. Even in today’s German jubilee events and speeches, which rightly praise the struggle for freedom and a constitution, one important aspect is missing: Hardly anyone took or takes note of what the first paragraph of the Imperial Constitution, finally adopted on 28 March 1849, meant for non-German nationalities in the new Empire. The article read: “The German Reich consists of the territory of the former German Confederation.”

When the Moravian-born ‘Bohemian’ František Palacký, who was working in Prague, was invited to take part in the elections to the Frankfurt National Assembly, he wrote his famous letter of refusal on 11 April 1848, in which he made his most important confession:

“I am a Bohemian of Slavic origin and have [...] devoted myself entirely and forever to the service of my people. Although this people is small, it has always been peculiar and independent [...]. But to demand that the Bohemian people unite with the German people beyond the previous princely union is [...] an imposition.”²⁶

The Slovenes in Carniola, the Italians in South Tyrol, and the Poles in Poznań voiced similar objections. The Slav Congress was a direct response to the so-called Frankfurt Pre-Parliament, which met from 31 March to 4 April 1848 and initiated

22 Clark, *Revolutionary Spring*, 303.

23 Siemann, “Einheit der Nation,” 24–34.

24 Clark, *Revolutionary Spring*, 750.

25 Malisz, *Der Slaven-Kongreß*, 19.

26 Palacký, “Eine Stimme über Österreichs Anschluß,” 80.

elections to a constituent German National Assembly. In Prague, this was seen as a frightening prospect. After all, people were discussing what would happen to the Slavs in the Kingdom of Bohemia if the Austrian Monarchy fell as a result of German unification.²⁷

Palacký was therefore right to turn to the Committee of Fifty in Frankfurt, which had been appointed by the Pre-Parliament to determine the electoral districts for the entire territory of the German Confederation, including the “lands of Bohemian constitutional law.” Realising the gravity of the situation, the Committee of Fifty sent a delegation to Prague to change the minds of the members of the National Committee meeting there and to participate in the elections; personal negotiations were held with Palacký, but naturally with no success.²⁸

Palacký’s famous refusal revealed a paradoxical situation. The pioneers of the German nation-state were actually defining the borders of their hoped-for German Empire conservatively, because they were guided by the status quo: The previous borders of the German Confederation were to be the borders of the future German Empire. They did not realise that the establishment of a central nation state would qualitatively change the status of its members, who would all become ‘German’ citizens.

What had been possible since 1815 was no longer possible in 1848/49 with the establishment of the Reich. Because nationality initially did not play a decisive role, the Kingdom of Bohemia, the Margraviate of Moravia, and the Duchy of Silesia could belong to the German Confederation based in Frankfurt as Habsburg crown lands of the federal member Austria. In the unified German nation-state, however, the Slavic nationalities became a minority, because the reference point was no longer imperial-Habsburg but imperial-German. Habsburg meant dynasty; German meant nationality. Article XIII, § 188 on the rights of national minorities in the Bill of Rights (*Grundrechten*), as laudable as it was, was no use, for the “non-German-speaking tribes” listed there did not want to be downgraded to a minority. The European revolutionary spring of 1848 promised equal rights and self-determination for all as a message and hope, but not classification as a minority.

Two factors were decisive in the emerging conflict. The first was the definition of nationality through language. Only in the course of the communication revolution of 1848 in the German Confederation and the Habsburg Monarchy did some contemporaries become aware of this. Suddenly it mattered whether one’s national language had to be spoken, might be spoken, or could be spoken at school, in public offices, and in professional life.

27 Cvirn, “Die Slovenen und der Prager Slavenkongress,” 127–35; Moritsch, “Revolution 1848,” 9–15.

28 Kořalka, *František Palacký*, 269–90.

The second factor was territory. This problem revealed the entire inherent conflict. The most prominent member of the Committee of Fifty, the bookseller and publicist Robert Blum, explained the importance of language in defining nationality. At the meeting on 26 April 1848, when Palacký's rejection in Frankfurt was already on the table, he made a proclamation that was bound to frighten the non-German neighbours:

“Did we ask whether the people of Schleswig spoke Danish when we demanded that they be cleansed of the Danes? Above all, did we not ask for our soil to remain inviolate? Did we ask how many Tyrolians spoke Italian when we demanded our soil? And did we consider how many people in Bohemia spoke Bohemian [i.e., Czech] when we sent our deputation there yesterday? No, we only demanded the land to which we were entitled, and only when we had it did we want to start negotiations.”²⁹

In German historical memory, Robert Blum appears as a much-praised freedom fighter, an exemplary democrat, and a revolutionary martyr who was executed in Vienna on 9 October 1848. However, his personality appears in an ambivalent light when one considers the way in which he understood the interests of the German nationality as a struggle for the political space of other nationalities, for he demanded territorial possessions—space—to be conquered without regard for the national linguistic minorities living there.

To put it more generally: German unity meant the willingness to go to war against one's neighbours, as the deputies in the Kieler Landtag and, later, in the Frankfurt National Assembly demonstrated when they advocated using the old federal army to go to war against federal member Denmark in order to expand the territory of the German Confederation and incorporate Schleswig. For the deputies, German unity also meant the annexation of the Prussian provinces of East and West Prussia, which were not part of the German Confederation, and finally, on 31 March 1848, in the Pre-parliament, the German patriots “almost unanimously” declared that the partition of Poland was “a flagrant injustice” and swore that their sacred duty was to restore Poland.³⁰ This was no longer the case on 27 July 1848, when the deputies in the Frankfurt National Assembly revoked the almost identical resolution by a majority of almost three quarters. They also divided Posen according to its German and Polish population and annexed the larger part to the Confederation.³¹

29 *Verhandlungen des Deutschen [Vor]Parlaments*, vol. 2, 391. “Stenographischer Bericht über die Verhandlungen des Fünfziger-Ausschusses am 26. April.”

30 *Verhandlungen des Deutschen [Vor]Parlaments*, vol. 1, 37.

31 Wigard, Franz, ed., *Stenographischer Bericht*, 2, 1240–47.

Metternich's comments from exile in London in 1848/49 on the relationship between nationality and the state

In the context of the general theme of “Metternich, the Slavs and the Habsburg Monarchy,” the obvious question is: How did Metternich deal with the problem of nationalities during the revolution of 1848 in parallel in his London exile, or in Richmond or Brighton, when he learned from the press what was being negotiated in the Paulskirche in Frankfurt with Austria, the German Confederation, and German unity? Was the question of nationalities important to him at all? And how much did he actually know about the proportions of German and Slavic nationalities in the Habsburg Monarchy?

His papers in the National Archives in Prague provide fascinating information. One has to imagine Metternich sitting at his desk every day, spreading out newspapers from all corners of the continent, reading them, cutting out articles, and putting them aside or pasting them onto sheets of paper. He carefully underlined what he thought was important and often added comments in the margins. Later, on his return, he took his entire collection of newspaper clippings from London to Plaß, where he kept his family archive in the prelatore of the monastery.³² Some of them contained articles that he had inspired or even written. He boasted that he had supplied opinion-forming information to the leading press organs, namely *The Times*, *The Morning Chronicle* and the *Quarterly Review*, and relied in particular on two English publicists, Edward Cheney and Travers Twiss, who had approached him for clarification and advice.³³

The two gentlemen would ask questions in the manner of an interview, which Metternich willingly answered—sometimes in the form of extensive memoranda. They then passed the material on to the press. They preferred to have the peculiarities of the Habsburg Monarchy explained to them. There was a whole series of articles on the subject, which Metternich directed. These articles can also be found neatly bound together in his estate.

For example, Travers Twiss's questions to Metternich on the possibilities for the unification of Germany were as follows:

“I should be obliged to you further to consider the objections to a federal state.

1. including the German states of Austria as members of the federal state
2. excluding them—but united with them as the Swiss Confederation with the [?]

Germany to be a Federal State—(*Bundesstaat*). Austria to remain as (*Staatenbund*) at present—Germany to be united with Austria in respect

32 StA Prague RAM AC sect. 9, Krt. 6–9 with the collection of newspaper clippings from 1848/49.

33 Andics, “Ansichten und Tätigkeit des gestürzten Metternich,” 68; Siemann, *Metternich*, 731–32.

of her German provinces on the principle of confederation.”³⁴

“1. What is the correct legal view of this assembly? Is it a tradition from the old Diet or not?

2. I should now be obliged to you for a little skeleton of facts connected with the Viennese insurrection and the Hungarian Rising. I mean only a skeleton. I will set the bones together, if any of them should be detached.

3. Is there any certainty as to the Poles and the Hungarian Jews being the leaders of the *émeute*?

4. Have the Poles a separate organisation, or are they merely a band of the tribe of Red Republicans?”³⁵

A multi-part series on “The Austrian Empire” then instructs the English audience. The question of the Empire’s multinational character is given its own weight and shows once again that Metternich had a differentiated view and took this problem seriously as a fundamental structural feature of the Monarchy. More specifically, he saw the Slavs as the most important group in terms of numbers. For this reason, he drew up a tabular list and commented on it, which in turn left its mark on the press (see Table).³⁶

For example, one of Metternich’s newspaper clippings on Austria’s nationalities, preserved in his estate, reads: *Das österreichische Reich. [Part] V. Nationalism and races. Pan Slavism and Magyarism.*³⁷

It was in this context of his reflections on the relationship between nationality and the state that he formulated his most ingenious sentence. He recorded it as an aphorism, and in a way, it is the quintessence of his political philosophy, a sentence that is probably timeless. It reads:

“Two elements have appeared in society which are suitable to shatter its calm [*Ruhe*] to the core. I call these elements the extension of the fundamental concept of nationality to the realm of politically and legally defined territories and their signification through language.”³⁸

34 StA Prague RAM AC, sect. 10, Krt. 12, Fasz-774, Fol. 4. Letter from Travers Twiss to Metternich, 23 Nov. 1848, with questions about various forms of German national unity with regard to Austria.

35 StA Prague RAM AC, sect. 10, Krt. 12, Fasz-774, Fol. 41–42. Letter from Travers Twiss 2 December 1848 to Metternich.

36 StA Prague RAM AC, sect. 10, Krt. 12, Fasz-774, Fol 99–100. Survey of nationalities in the Habsburg Monarchy, hand-drawn by Metternich for Travers Twiss (undated).

37 NA Prague RAM AC, sect. 9, Krt. 6, Fasz-155. *Morning Chronicle*.

38 NA Prague RAM AC, sect. 8, Krt. 1,8, No. 7 “Über Nationalität,” Aphorism by Metternich in his own hand 1849; Siemann, *Metternich*, 556.

<p>Les nationalités dans l'Empire d'Autriche se trouvent, d'après les relevés plus récents, Répartis de la manière suivante :</p> <p>1. Allemands 7.285.000</p> <p>Ils forment la majorité prépondérante de la population dans l'Archiduché (basse & haute Autriche) dans la partie supérieure de la Styrie (à peu près la moitié de ce Duché) dans une partie plus restreinte de la Carniole [Krain] & dans celle nommé Allemande du Comté du Tyrol.</p> <p>Dans ces pays au nombre de peu près 4.500.000.</p> <p>Le reste de la population Allemande composant entre 1.500.000 & 2.000.000 soit répartie entre les cercles au nord & à l'ouest, de la Bohême, de la Moravie et de la Silésie, ou elle se trouve entremêlée avec la population Czéche [tchèque].</p> <p>En Hongrie vivent 1.200.000 Allemands y compris la Colonie dite Saxonne en Transylvanie, forte entre 3 et 400.000/</p> <p>2 Slaves 17.033.000 Répartis en Czéches, Moraves & Slovaques 7.224.000</p> <p>a. Polonais 2.375.000 b. Ruthènes (Russiens) 2.822.000 c. Illyrs-Serbes (Croates, Slovènes & Serbes) 4.605.000</p> <p>a & b. habitant la majeure partie de la Bohême, de la Moravie, de la Galicie & la partie Septentrionale [am Nordrand] de la Hongrie. Ils forment ainsi une ligne compacte dans la partie nord de l'Empire depuis les frontières de la Bavière jusqu'au Pruth et la Transylvanie.</p> <p>c. comprend la partie méridionale de l'Empire depuis la frontière du Tyrol, jusqu'à celle de la Transylvanie y compris la Dalmatie.</p>	<p>3. Italiens 5.183.000</p> <p>Ils habitent le royaume Lombardo-Vénitien, la partie méridionale du Tyrol et les parties riveraines de l'Adriatique.</p> <p>4. Valaques 2.156.000</p> <p>Ils forment la majeure partie de la population de la Transylvanie et de la frontière orientale de la Hongrie.</p> <p>5. Magyars 4.800.000</p> <p>Ils sont répartis dans la plaine au centre de la Hongrie, ou ils sont à peu près partout mêlés avec les populations slaves et allemandes.</p> <p>Ils forment sous les dénominations de Magyars & de Székler une partie de la population de la Transylvanie.</p> <p>6. Juifs 475.000</p> <p>7. Bohémiens (Gypsters) 128.000</p> <p>En Géorgie il y en a beaucoup de sédentaires.</p> <p>La population allemande forme à peu près 1/5. [20 %]</p> <p>Celle Slavé au-delà des 3/7. [43 %]</p> <p>Celle Magyare entre 1/8 et 1/9. [13 % / 11 %]</p> <p>de la population totale de l'Empire</p> <p>(<i>Survey of nationalities in the Habsburg monarchy</i>, hand-drawn by Metternich for Travers Twiss StA Prague RAM AC, sect. 10, Krt. 12, Fasz-774, Fol 99-100.)</p>
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In other words, the reconciliation of linguistic nationality and state territory in order to build a unified nation-state is a never-ending source of political and military struggle. The failed German Empire was no longer in a position to prove this in 1849.

In Central Europe, every state that wanted to define itself as linguistically homogeneous created a minority problem on its territory. When these incorporated minorities in turn demanded their own nation-state, this inevitably meant war.

This argument is also the key to why Metternich rejected a central parliament for the entire Monarchy—not because he was an absolutist, but because it would have meant prioritising one nationality over all others. For him, this was the equivalent of ‘Germanisation.’

In judging Metternich, one must distinguish between will and ability. The emperor, the opposition of the archdukes and especially his great antagonist Franz Anton von Kolowrat-Liebsteinsky set him limits. As early as 1816, Metternich wanted to both unify and decentralise, one might even say federalise, the entire Monarchy according to rough national classifications: He divided the Empire into German, Czech, Polish, and South Slavic-Illyrian regions; Hungary would have been the fifth region.³⁹

He also favoured the continuation of the land estates (*Landtage*) within the Monarchy and rejected the neo-absolutism of the 1850s—the so-called “Bach system,” named after the neo-absolutist Minister of the Interior Alexander Bach. Fundamentally, his political goals for the Habsburg Empire were not so far removed from Palacký’s Austro-Slavism. In contrast to many German Austrians, he never spoke of the danger that a Slavic majority in the Monarchy might outnumber Germans, because he understood the integrating head—the emperor—to be dynastic rather than national. This meant that the supreme head was acceptable to all nationalities. In this respect, Metternich was not unlike today’s supporters of the British Monarchy, who still feel part of an empire—an empire that is not a nation-state and has no written constitution.

Dieter Langewiesche has recently summed up what Metternich, as a politically far-sighted observer of the times, feared:

“The European ideal of ‘one nation – one nation-state’ had a devastating effect in nationally and ethnically mixed areas. But it promised protection to everyone who was recognised as belonging to this state. Through nationalisation, the nation state destroyed the traditional living spaces of millions of people. At the same time, however, it bundled together the hopes of a secure life for those who belonged to it.”⁴⁰

39 Siemann, *Metternich*, 532–45.

40 Langewiesche, “Internationale Politik,” 37.

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