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EDVARD BENEŠ AND THE SOFT SELL

Czechoslovak Diplomacy toward Lusatia, 1918-1919

At the 1919 Paris Peace conference, diplomats sketching the world's new frontiers considered assigning Lusatia to the new Czechoslovak Republic. Lusatia's status is no longer a topical issue, and indeed its location is not common knowledge even among central European scholars. Lusatia lies in the far east of the contemporary Federal Republic of Germany along the Polish border, and has since medieval times been divided into Upper Lusatia (in Saxony) and Lower Lusatia (in contemporary Brandenburg, formerly Prussia). At the 1815 Congress of Vienna, Upper Silesia was further partitioned: the northern part went to Prussian Silesia while the southern part remained in Saxony. No administrative unit called Lusatia exists today, though memories of the historic region linger. Schemes for a Czechoslovak Lusatia illustrate how historic claims and great power politics clashed with the idealistic national rhetoric that the First World War brought to European peacemaking.

However improbable the idea of a Czechoslovak Lusatia may seem today, documents from 1918 and 1919 show that several influential Czech politicians desired a Czechoslovak Lusatia, including Edvard Beneš and Karel Kramář, Czechoslovakia's two accredited representatives at the Peace Conference, and Czechoslovakia's first President, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, later remembered as the "president-liberator" (prezident osvoboditel). The Serbski Narodny Wubjerk (Sorbian National Committee), which declared Sorbian independence in late 1918, also showed a certain sympathy for Czech aspirations: its two main leaders, Arnošt Bart and Jan Bryl, both had long-standing Czech contacts.

The little-studied history of prewar Czech-Sorbian cultural interaction foreshadowed postwar notions of Lusatia-Czecho-Slovak unity,¹ but this paper seeks primarily to explain why the Czechoslovak government, with Beneš as its spokesman, ultimately refrained from demanding Lusatia, despite pressure from Kramář, the provisional Czechoslovak government in Prague, various popular organizations in the Czech public sphere, and the Sorbian national council in Bautzen (Budyšin). Historians, as a rule, devote more effort to explaining why historical actors took the decisions they did, rather than explaining why they rejected the options they rejected. Understanding how choices appeared to those who made them, however, requires a vigorous exploration of counterfactual alternatives. Czech and Sorbian activists openly petitioned for Czechoslovak annexation during the Peace Conference, including several figures in Beneš's own entourage. Why did Beneš not?

¹ *Maxwell*, Alexander: The 1848 Revolution and the Limits of Sorbian Czechoslovakism. In: *The New Zealand Slavonic Journal* 46 (2012) 9-22.

Czechoslovakia had a legal claim to Lusatia, but not a particularly compelling one. Czechoslovakia claimed legal continuity with the historic Bohemian Crown Lands, and Lusatia had belonged to those crown lands during the middle ages. John the Blind of the Luxembourg dynasty acquired Upper Lusatia in 1319; in 1367, his son Charles IV purchased Lower Lusatia from Brandenburg. Habsburg Emperor Ferdinand II, however, ceded his claims to Lusatia at the Peace of Prague in 1635, during the Thirty Years War.² The peace treaty supposedly specified that the territories would revert to the Czech crown should the Saxon royal issue ever fail. The abdication of German royal families, it was argued, caused Lusatia to revert to the Czech crown.³

The numerous suppliants at the Peace conference, however, showered the Entente with a welter of competing historic legal claims. In the heyday of what Erez Manela eloquently dubbed the “Wilsonian moment,”⁴ successful petitioners had to bolster legal arguments with appeals to nationality. American president Woodrow Wilson had not, of course, single-handedly destroyed the monarchical principle, and indeed Borislav Chernev usefully reminds us that in fact the Central Powers had already introduced the principle of national self-determination to European diplomacy during the peace negotiations at Brest-Litovsk.⁵ Nevertheless, the rhetoric of national self-determination suffused the Paris Peace Conference. Wilson was the hero of the hour, and political actors at the Paris Peace Conference routinely invoked his name and the slogans associated with him.

As it happens, Czechoslovak patriots could also deploy the rhetoric of national self-determination to justify a Czechoslovak Lusatia. Lusatia is the homeland of a partly-Catholic, partly-Lutheran people usually known in English as the Sorbs, but also referred to as Wends, Lusatians, Lusatian Serbs, or, occasionally, Sorabs.⁶ Linguistically, the Sorbs are closely related to the Czechs, though the politics of Sorbian ethno-linguistic classification has its controversies. Illustrious Slavists such

² For a Sorbian perspective on Lusatia’s legal status, see *Kapras*, Jan: *Prawne stawizny Hornjeje a Delnjeje Łužicy za čas českeho knježerstwa* [The Legal History of Upper and Lower Lusatia in the Era of the Bohemian State]. Bautzen 1916.

³ *Je samostatny serbski stat nuzny, možny, wopravnjeny?/Ist ein selbständiger Wendenstaat notwendig, möglich, berechtigt?* (Bilingual document). *Serbski Narodny Wubjerk, Serbski kulturny archiw Budyšin* [Serbian Cultural Archive, Bautzen], MS XIX-1/A, 10. Flier number 18. – The Peace of Prague makes no mention of Lusatia, speaking instead only of “what his Electoral Highness in Saxony occupies of the Kingdom of Bohemia and the Duchy of Silesia.” See *Abdruck des Friedens-Schlusses von der Röm. Käys. Mayt. und Churf. Durchl. zu Sachssen etc zu Prag Auffgerichtet den 20/30 Maij Anno 1635*. Dresden 1635, 18.

⁴ *Manela*, Erez: *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*. Oxford 2007.

⁵ *Chernev*, Borislav: *The Brest-Litovsk Moment: Self-Determination Discourse in Eastern Europe before Wilsonianism*. In: *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 22 (2011) no. 3, 369–387.

⁶ This paper refers to “Sorbs.” See *Statkowska*, Ewa: *Serbowie, Wendowie, Łużyczanie* [Sorbs, Wends, Lusatians]. In: *Studia Łużycoznawcze*. Warsaw 2000, 316–324. – On Sorbian ethnonyms in Anglophone diplomatic documents, see *Barke*, Peter: *Wends, Serbs or Sorbs? The British Foreign Office and the Sorbs of Lusatia (1942–47)*. In: *German Life and Letters* 48 (1995) no. 3, 362–370, here 365, 369.

as Aleksandr Pypin, Vladimir Spasovich,⁷ and Pavel Josef Šafařík,⁸ for example, posited two Sorbian “dialects,” while the equally respected scholars Josef Dobrovský⁹ and Lubor Niederle perceived two “separate Slavic languages.”¹⁰ Today, two Sorbian literary traditions exist, Upper Sorbian (hornjoserbšćina) and Lower Sorbian (dolnoserbšćina); scholars variously describe them as two closely related languages,¹¹ or as dialects or varieties of a single language.¹² Czechoslovakia’s ethnographic claim to Lusatia rested on the notion that Sorbs were closely related to Czechs, and could therefore better enjoy national self-determination in Czechoslovakia than in non-Slavic Germany.

Even assuming ethnic sympathy between Sorbs and Czechs, however, the ethnographic principle offered only equivocal support for Czechoslovak Lusatia. Lusatia’s population remained predominantly German. During the Peace Conference, both Sorbian and Czech patriots typically claimed a total Sorbian population of 200 000,¹³ often attributing the figure to the ethnographic work of Sorbian savant Arnošt Muka, but sometimes speaking merely of “Sorbian statistics.”¹⁴ Imperial Germany’s 1910 census, however, counted only 103 000 Sorbs in Lusatia, with an additional 26 576 in Silesia.¹⁵ German census figures are controversial, and some scholars believe that Germanizing census-takers may have undercounted by as much as 60 000.¹⁶

⁷ Pypin, Aleksandr/Spasovich, Vladimir: *Istoriya slavyanskikh literatur* [History of Slavic Literature]. Petersburg 1879, 19. – This influential work is also available in Czech translation by Antonín Kotík (*Historie literatur slovanských*, Praha 1880), in German translation by Traugott Pech (*Geschichte der slavischen Literaturen*, Leipzig 1880), and in French translation by Ernest Denis (*Histoire des littératures slaves*, Paris 1881).

⁸ Šafařík, Pavel Josef: *Slowanský Národopis* [Slavic Ethnography]. Praha 1842, vol. 1, 5-6.

⁹ Dobrovský, Josef: *Geschichte der Böhmisches Sprache und ältern Literatur*. Prag 1819, 32-33.

¹⁰ Niederle, Lubor: *Slovanský Svět* [The Slavic World]. Praha 1909, 70.

¹¹ Sussex, Roland/Cubberley, Paul: *The Slavic Languages*. Cambridge 2006, 527. – Brozović, Dalibor: Die sorbischen Sprachen – Varianten einer Standardsprache oder spezifische selbstständige Standardsprachen? In: *Lětopis* 33 (1986) 45-56.

¹² Stone, Gerald: *The Smallest Slavonic Nation: The Sorbs of Lusatia*. London 1972, 104. – Kaspar, Martin: *Language and Culture of the Lusatian Sorbs throughout their History*. Berlin 1987, 52.

¹³ One article suggested both the figure “200 000 souls” and “more than 160 000.” Černý, Adolphe: *Question des Serbes des deux Lusace*. In: *La Nation Tchèque* 4 (15 January-1 March 1919), nos. 14-17, 590-601, here 591 and 593. – See also Páta, Josef: *Lužice* [Lusatia]. Praha 1919, 48.

¹⁴ See e.g. Bart, Arnošt: *Memorandum: The Principles of Autonomy of the Lusatian Slavs*. In: Scheuermann, Martin: *Die Sorbenpolitik des Völkerbundes – ein bisher kaum bekanntes Nebenskapitel europäischer Geschichte*. In: *Lětopis* 43 (1996) 2, 33-54, here 45-46. – *Resoluzija shromadźiszy ſerbskeje studowazeje młodźiny* [Resolution at the Meeting of Studying Sorbian Youth]. In: *Serbske Nowiny* 77 (28 December 1918) no. 52, 415. The latter resolution was also reported in the Czech press via the Czech news agency ČTK, see *Národní listy, večerní vydání* (2 January 1919) 1.

¹⁵ Tschernik, Ernst: *Die Entwicklung der sorbischen Bevölkerung von 1832 bis 1945: eine demographische Untersuchung*. Berlin 1954, 21. – Kamusella, Tomasz: *Silesia and Central European Nationalisms. The Emergence of National and Ethnic Groups in Prussian Silesia and Austrian Silesia, 1848-1918*. West Lafayette 2007, 173.

¹⁶ Belzyt, Leszek: *Die Zahl der Sorben in der amtlichen Sprachenstatistik vor dem Ersten*

Yet while Sorbian speakers may have formed an absolute majority in a few districts, they were not a majority in Lusatia as a whole.¹⁷ Most Sorbs, furthermore, were bilingual,¹⁸ and many were nationally indifferent.¹⁹

Nevertheless, the weakness of ethnographic claims did not necessarily preclude their persuasiveness or effectiveness at the Paris Peace Conference. The great powers gathered in Paris rarely let ethnographic niceties stand in the way of national or imperial interests. Sorbian “liberation” from German rule offered the Great Powers a pretext to weaken Germany. Czech nationalists had the ear of the Great Powers, and they coveted Lusatia.

No Czech more passionately desired a Czechoslovak Lusatia than ethnographer and Slavist Adolf Černý. Černý first visited Lusatia in 1884, when he befriended Muka; after traveling together the two scholars arranged a museum exhibition of Sorbian folk costumes.²⁰ They ultimately corresponded for 47 years.²¹ Černý had taught the Sorbian language in Prague since 1901,²² and published several works on Sorbian folk culture and literature.²³ Černý ultimately contributed several literary articles to the Sorbian monthly “*Łužica*”, including translations of Czech poetry. He translated Sorbian literary works into Czech, and generally wrote widely on Sorbian affairs.²⁴ He also showed a certain capacity for organizational work: in the 1880s, he helped found a Sorbian library in Bautzen,²⁵ and in 1907, he founded the *Společnost přátel Lužice* (Society of the Friends of Lusatia) in Prague, facilitating contact between Sorbian university students and sympathetic Czechs.²⁶

Weltkrieg. In: *Kunze*, Peter (ed.): *Nationale Minderheiten und staatliche Minderheitenpolitik in Deutschland im 19. Jahrhundert*. Berlin 1999, 157-169, here 158. – On Sorbian population estimates, see *Glaser*, Konstanze: *Minority Languages and Cultural Diversity in Europe. Gaelic And Sorbian Perspectives*. Clevedon 1997 (Linguistic Diversity and Language Rights), 101-03.

¹⁷ *Belzyt*: Die Zahl der Sorben, see Tables 1-2, pp. 159-60 (cf. fn. 16).

¹⁸ *Glaser*: *Minority Languages and Cultural Diversity* 105 (cf. fn. 16).

¹⁹ On national indifference, see *Zabva*, Tara: *Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis*. In: *Slavic Review* 69 (Spring, 2010) no. 1, 93-119.

²⁰ *Nedo*, Paul: Arnošt Muka's Beitrag zur sorbischen Volkskunde. In: *Lětopis* 22 (1975) 163-173, here 166-167, 169.

²¹ *Valenta*, Zdeněk: Česká účast na výstavbě a vybavení Lužickosrbského domu v korespondenci mezi Adolfem Černým a Arnoštem Mukou [Czech Participation in Constructing and Furnishing the Lusatian-Sorbian House in the Correspondence between Adolf Černý and Arnošt Muka]. In: *Marvan*, Jiří (ed.): *Praha a Lužiči Srbové* [Prague and the Lusatian Sorbs]. Praha 2005, 75-81, here 75.

²² *Páta*, Josef: Vznik a vývoj našeho spolku [The Origin and Evolution of Our Society]. In: *Páta*, Josef / *Zmeškal*, Vladimír: *Naše styky s Lužicí* [Our Relations with Lusatia]. Praha 1934, 19-34, here 26.

²³ *Bahlcke*, Joachim: *Geschichte der Oberlausitz: Herrschaft, Gesellschaft und Kultur vom Mittelalter bis zum Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Leipzig 2001, 39. – For Černý's works, see *Cyž*, Jan (ed.): *Adolf Černý: Antologija jeho džěłow* [Adolf Černý: An Anthology of his Works]. Bautzen 1958.

²⁴ For an overview of Černý's Lusatian journalism, see *Černý*, Adolf: *Různé listy o Lužice* [Various Articles about Lusatia]. Praha 1894.

²⁵ *Slovanské Paběrky* [Slavic Gleanings]. In: *Lumír* 17 (1 July 1889) no. 19, 228.

²⁶ *Páta*, Josef / *Zmeškal*, Vladimír: *Naše styky s Lužicí: jubilejní sborník* [Our Relations with Lusatia: Jubilee Anthology]. Praha 1934, 44, 57-58.

Černý's enthusiasm for the Lusatian Sorbs arose from broader Pan-Slav sympathies. In 1899, Černý founded the journal "Slovansky přehled" (Slavonic Review) during an upsurge in Pan-Slavic enthusiasm; its remit considered the whole of the Slavic world, not just Lusatia. Depending on the political context, however, Černý would prioritize specifically Czechoslovak ties over nebulous Slavism. In a 1906 article on "Slavic reciprocity in the present age," for example, Černý criticized Slovak Russophile tendencies, advocating "Czechoslovak unity" instead.²⁷

On 13 October 1918, Adolf Černý propounded his vision of Czechoslovak Lusatia in "Národní listy" (National Pages), in an article published next to portraits of Masaryk and Wilson. Černý lamented Lusatia's partition between Saxony and Prussia, which had taken place "without anybody asking the Lusatian Serbs" and "precipitated Germanization". Victory over the Central Powers, however, would right historic wrongs: "Today, in the twelfth hour," he continued, "it is finally possible and even supremely necessary to speak firmly and clearly about the *Lusatian question*" (emphasis in original). The Sorbs, Černý argued,

[...] are the closest to us of all the Slavic family, and still have certain constitutional connections with the Czech crown. The Sorbian language is closer to ours than to Polish, and if they had not been cut off from us [...] we would be even closer; indeed we might perhaps have reached a common literary speech. Certainly their language is no further from ours than Slovene is from Croatian, and would undoubtedly belong to our Czechoslovak language territory, if they weren't cut off from us by German territory.²⁸

Černý noted that Wilson "spoke not only about the claims of great nations, but of all nations, large, small, and smallest," and alluded to a speech of 11 February in which Wilson had declared: "national self-determination is not a mere phrase, but an imperative principle of action".²⁹ The Sorbs also enjoyed the right to self-determination, and, Černý argued, wished to exercise that right by joining the new Czechoslovak Republic.

In December 1918, Černý further described putative Sorbian aspirations in a full-length book whose title, "Lužická otázka" (The Lusatian Question), evoked Masaryk's 1895 "Česká otázka" (The Czech Question).³⁰ Černý summarized Lusatian history for the Czech public. He particularly emphasized the Sorbian struggle against Germanization, thus linking Sorbian aspirations to those of Czech patriots. He then ended with a personal note:

The foregoing was written before the collapse of Austria-Hungary, that is, during the age of censorship. Today [...] we can decisively express the desire for the unification of Sorbian Lusatia with the Czechoslovak state, since this is the only assurance of placing Lusatian Sorbian national self-determination on a firm foundation.³¹

²⁷ Černý, Adolf: K poměru československé [On Czechoslovak Relations]. In: Slovanský přehled 6 (1903) 113-117, here 117.

²⁸ Černý, Adolf: Lužice a mírový kongres [Lusatia and the Peace Congress]. In: Národní listy 58 (27 October 1918) no. 116, 1.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 1.

³⁰ Meškank, Timo: Kultur besteht – Reich vergeht: Tschechen und Sorben (Wenden) 1914-1945. Berlin 2000, 36.

³¹ Černý, Adolf: Lužická otázka [The Lusatian Question]. Plzeň 1918, 103.

Černý's final chapter showed his personal contacts with leading Sorbian politicians: it described the acts of his friend Arnošt Bart since the November armistice, including his as-yet unpublished declaration of Sorbian independence.³²

Černý's tireless efforts to promote Czecho-Sorbian reciprocity bore fruit after the Entente victory, when several of his former students also agitated for a Czechoslovak Lusatia. In 1907, a mixed group of Czech and Sorbian students had founded a Czecho-Lusatian Society now known as the Společnost přátel Lužice (Society of the Friends of Lusatia), but originally founded as the Česko-lužický spolek „Adolf Černý“ (The Czecho-Lusatian Society “Adolf Černý”), and hereafter referred to as the Czecho-Lusatian Society. Its founding members included Bryl, who later became a prominent figure in the Serbski Narodny Wubjerk, and the Czech Slavist Josef Páta, chairman of the Czecho-Lusatian Society during the peace negotiations and on into the First Czechoslovak Republic.

In 1919, the Czecho-Lusatian Society organized a series of lectures, concerts, and similar public events. Páta later recalled that “our meetings and lectures filled the greatest meeting halls in Prague and in the Czechoslovak countryside.”³³ Some events attracted prominent guests. For example, President Masaryk and Agrarian leader Antonín Švehla, then interior minister, attended a concert in the Smetana Hall of Prague's Obecní dům (Civic House). Smetana Hall was not only the largest concert venue in Prague, but had hosted the Czech declaration of independence just a few months previously.³⁴

Páta, like Černý, wrote propaganda for the Lusatian cause. His 1919 history of Lusatia included an 18-page summary of Sorbian agitation since the war's end, helpfully providing a Czech translation of the Narodny Wubjerk's declaration of independence. Páta argued that

[...] it would be completely justified if Prague's ‘Czecho-Lusatian Society of Adolf Černý’ called for Lusatia to be attached to the Czechoslovak state, and if this annexation is not possible, then the Peace Conference should recognized Lusatia's independence, occupy the Lusatian-Sorbian region with Entente troops, protect Lusatian interests and enable free exchange between Lusatians and the Czechoslovak Republic.³⁵

Páta dared not hope for a Czechoslovak Lusatia: “It's a pity that it will not be possible to reclaim Lusatia, since this would truly save Sorbian national life.”³⁶ Nevertheless, his reasoning led instead to the optimistic conclusion that “Lusatian Sorbian independence is really possible!”³⁷

In 1919, Páta actively promoted the Czecho-Lusatian alliance out of the public eye. He helped arrange transportation for Sorbian leaders traveling from Bautzen to Paris.³⁸ On behalf of the Czecho-Lusatian Society, he also wrote several letters to

³² *Ibid.* 109.

³³ Páta: Vznik a vývoj našeho spolku 32-33 (cf. fn. 22).

³⁴ Słowjanska [Slavic Affairs]. In: Katolski Posoł 57 (5 April 1919) no. 14, 85.

³⁵ Páta, Josef: Lužice [Lusatia]. Praha 1919, 73 (cf. fn. 13).

³⁶ *Ibid.* 78.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 77.

³⁸ Archiv Ministerstva zahraničních věcí, Pařížský Archiv [Archive of the Ministry of Foreign

Czechoslovak diplomats at the Peace Conference.³⁹ On 2 February 1919, for example, he wrote Beneš on calling for “an independent Lusatian state, uniting Upper and Lower Lusatia.”⁴⁰ Another letter to Beneš urged the Conference “to support the self-emancipation efforts of our nearest Slavic brothers – the Lusatian Sorbs.”⁴¹

The Czech exile politicians who had won diplomatic recognition for Czechoslovakia during the war also took an interest in Lusatia. The Československá národní rada (Czechoslovak National Council) opened offices in several Entente cities during the war. In March 1915, Jiří Klecanda, secretary of its Kiev office, wrote a memorandum that Miloslav Brouček characterized as “the first clearly formulated program for an independent Czechoslovak state.”⁴² Klecanda hoped, among other things, “to remove Lusatia from Prussia, and attach it to Saxony, and then to create an autonomous status for Lusatia.”⁴³ In June that same year, “La Nation Tchèque”, a Francophone propaganda journal edited by Beneš, published an article on “The Czechoslovaks” which gave the nation’s total population as 8 million (4 million in Bohemia, and 2 million each in Moravia and Slovakia), but then added an additional half-million for “the Czechs of Silesia, Lusatia, and Southern Austria.”⁴⁴

Masaryk, Czechoslovakia’s most prominent exile politician, had taken a scholarly interest in Lusatia as early as 1876, during a visit to Leipzig,⁴⁵ but made only what David Kelly calls “fleeting references to the Sorbs in his wartime propaganda tracts.”⁴⁶ Masaryk may have wished, in the words of Karel Stloukal, “to save the remnant of the Lusatians from Germanization and push the Czech defensive front closer to Berlin,”⁴⁷ but he did not choose to make it a high priority. During the war he concentrated primarily on Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia. Speaking at the University of London in 1915, for example, he described Lusatian Sorbs only as one of many “nationalities” living in Germany.⁴⁸ In 1917, he published an article in

Affairs, Paris Archive, hereafter AMZV PA], book 51, no. 5074. Josef Páta, letter of 9 March 1919.

³⁹ In addition to the letters cited below, Páta wrote to the peace conference on 3 January and 18 April. See AMZV PA, book 51, no. 5079, 5081.

⁴⁰ AMZV PA, book 51, no. 5073. Letter from Páta to “Pane Ministře” [Mr. Minister] (presumably Beneš), 2 February 1919. On Beneš’s correspondence, see *Hadler*, Frank: “Peacemaking 1919 im Spiegel der Briefe Edvard Beneš’ von der Pariser Friedenskonferenz.” In: *Berliner Jahrbuch für Osteuropäische Geschichte* (1994) 1, 213–255 und (1994) 2, 225–257.

⁴¹ AMZV PA, book 51, no. 5078. Letter from Páta to Beneš, no date.

⁴² *Brouček*, Miloslav: *Československo* [Czechoslovakia]. Praha 1965, 15.

⁴³ See *Kelly*, David: *Lost Provinces: Czechs, Sorbs, and the Problem of Lusatia*. In: *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 14 (November 2001) 3, 13–30, 18. – *Zmeškal*, Vladimír: *T. G. Masaryk a Lužice* [T. G. Masaryk and Lusatia]. Praha 1930, 12.

⁴⁴ *Les Tchèque-Slovaques*. In: *La Nation Tchèque* 1 (1 June 1915) no. 3, 69.

⁴⁵ *Masaryk*, T. G./*Čapek*, Karel: *Hovory s T. G. Masarykem*. Praha 1947, 69–70; English translation “Talks with T. G. Masaryk”, North Haven 1995, 111–112.

⁴⁶ *Kelly*: *Czechs, Sorbs, and the Problem of Lusatia* 20 (cf. fn. 43). Kelly cites *Zmeškal*, Vladimír: *T. G. Masaryk a Lužice* [T. G. Masaryk and Lusatia]. Praha 1930, 11–13.

⁴⁷ *Stloukal*, Karel: *Československý stát v představách T. G. Masaryka za války* [The Czechoslovak State as T. G. Masaryk imagined it during the War]. Praha 1930, 30.

⁴⁸ Cited from a French translation, “Problème des petites nations dans la crise Européenne actuelle”. In: *La Nation Tchèque* 1 (1 November 1915) no. 13, 199–205, here 200.

Chicago's "Bohemian Review" contrasting "the Czech minorities in Lower Austria and Vienna" with "the large Sorb minority in Lusatia. Pangermans cannot, therefore, justly complain of the fate of the [German] minority in Bohemia."⁴⁹ In a November 1918 letter to Beneš, Masaryk made the same point more explicitly: "We leave them the Sorbs, ergo, they leave us the Germans."⁵⁰ Arriving in Paris on 8 December, Masaryk outlined Czechoslovak territorial aspirations as follows: "as regards the question of our frontiers," he told the London "Times", "our programme is the old Czech one of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. As to Slovakia, its limits are clearly defined in the north and northwest. To the south the solution depends on ethnographical circumstances."⁵¹ He made no reference to Lusatia.

Nevertheless, Masaryk toyed with the idea of a Czechoslovak Lusatia at least once. In 1916, meeting with the Russian ambassador in Rome, Masaryk argued that his plans for Czechoslovak independence "are not directed only by ethnography," and demanded instead "historic and strategic frontiers."⁵² Masaryk then drew by hand a map of Czechoslovakia's future borders, showing Lusatia as a "possible" acquisition. Masaryk shaded the core Czechoslovak territory with diagonal lines. He cross-hatched a narrow strip along what is now the Austrian federal state Burgenland, on the modern frontier between Austria and Hungary; the Burgenland corridor was meant to give Czechoslovakia a land border with Yugoslavia.⁵³ Finally, Masaryk colored solid black various additional territories as secondary ambitions, including Kłodzko (Glatz) to the north-east, Valtice (Feldsberg) along the southern frontier with Austria, and Lusatia.⁵⁴ (See Fig. 1)

Some Czech politicians who spent the war in Bohemia also advocated a Czechoslovak Lusatia, but did so in a similarly diffident and irresolute fashion. Consider František Sís, a Young Czech journalist who later edited the noted paper "Národní listy", and Jaroslav Kvapil, the director of the Czech national theatre who later served briefly in the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment.⁵⁵ On 15

⁴⁹ *Masaryk*, T. G.: The Future Status of Bohemia. In: *Bohemian Review* (later *Czechoslovak Review*) 1 (April 1917) no. 3, 7.

⁵⁰ Letter from Masaryk to Beneš, New York City (7 November 1918), cited from: *Šolle*, Zdeněk (ed.): *Masaryk a Beneš* [Masaryk and Beneš]. Vol. 2. Praha 1993, 134.

⁵¹ The Slav Barrier: Professor Masaryk Sketches his Policy. In: *Times* (9 December 1918) 7.

⁵² *Stloukal*: Československý stát v předstávách T. G. Masaryka 85 (cf. fn. 48); English text cited from *Krejčí*, Oskar: *Geopolitics of the Central European Region*. Bratislava 2005, 239.

⁵³ On the corridor, see *Romsics*, Ignác: *Szláv korridor, Burgenland, Lajtabánság: koncepciók Nyugat-Magyarországról, 1917-1921* [The Slavic Corridor, Burgenland, Leithenia: Conception of Western Hungary]. In: *Regio* 3 (1992) no. 1, 90-99.

⁵⁴ *Pánek*, Jaroslav/*Tůma*, Oldřich: *A History of the Czech Lands*. Prague 2009, 33. – For a copy of the map, see *Ádám*, Magda: *Csehszlovákia megalakulása* [The Founding of Czechoslovakia]. In: *História* (1982) no. 4-5, 44-46.

⁵⁵ On Sís, see *Orzoff*, Andrea: *The Literary Organ of Politics: Tomáš Masaryk and Political Journalism, 1925-1929*. In: *Slavic Review* 63 (Summer 2004) no. 2, 275-300, here 293-294. – *J. F.*: *František Sís: Ideje a význam jeho politické práce* [František Sís: The Ideas and Significance of his Political Work]. Olomouc n.d. – On Kvapil, see *Kárník*, Zdeněk: *České země v éře První republiky 1918-1938* [The Czech lands in the Era of the First Republic, 1918-1938]. Vol. 3: *O přežití a o život* [On Survival and Life]. Praha 2003, 328.



Figure 1: Masaryk's Territorial Aspirations (1916).

May 1919, Sís and Kvapil, then serving in the Czechoslovak provisional government, jointly called for Lusatian independence. They invoked both historical precedent and the rhetoric of national self-determination:

Lusatia had been integrated into the Czech state three centuries ago and had only been detached because of the Battle of White Mountain. Since then, the Czech and Lusatian nation [národ lužického a českého] have had firm and sincere relations, particularly from the beginning of the national revival and continuing up to the present.

After making their case for Czechoslovak Lusatia, however, Sís and Kvapil wavered. Since the Czech nation had achieved its independence, it should ensure that its “Slavic guard to the north which had most suffered from Germanization” could exercise national self-determination. “One of the war’s ideological aims was the liberation of small nations,” they wrote, and the Sorbs, “200 000 Slavic souls,” waited for “the word of liberation from the peace conference.”⁵⁶ On the same day, Kvapil and Sís also wrote directly to Beneš at the peace conference urging him not to forget the plight of Lusatian Sorbs.⁵⁷

Karel Kramář, member of the Austrian Reichsrat since 1891 and probably the most prominent Czech politician to spend the war in Bohemia, took a particularly strong interest in Lusatia. Nevertheless, his true sympathies lay with Slavdom. Kramář had served as president of the 1908 Slavic Congress in Prague, married a Muscovite divorcée, and frequently traveled to Russia.⁵⁸ In May 1914, on the eve of war, Kramář composed a draft constitution for a federal “Slavic Empire,” uniting the Russian Empire with Polish, Czech, and Bulgarian tsardoms (carství), and the Serbian and Montenegrin kingdoms (království).⁵⁹ He presented his plan to Russian journalist Vsevolod Svatkovski, who in turn passed it to Sergej Sazanov, Russian foreign minister, a man with little sympathy for Pan-Slav daydreams.⁶⁰ Kramář nevertheless believed so strongly in Russia that, when the war began, he remained in Prague hoping “to greet Russian forces upon their arrival.”⁶¹ The Habsburg government proved unable to tolerate such open disloyalty, arrested Kramář alongside fellow parliamentarian Václav Křofáč and economist Alois Rašín, and ultimately sentenced him to death.⁶² Kramář’s life was spared only because of dynastic chance.

⁵⁶ Zasedání Národního shromáždění československého roku 1919 [The National Assembly of Czechoslovakia in 1919], Tisk 1002, (15 May 1919), URL: http://www.psp.cz/cgi-bin/eng/eknih/1918ns/ps/tisky/t1002_00.htm (accessed 29 February 2012).

⁵⁷ AMZV PA, book 51, document 5064. Letter to Beneš, 15 May 1919.

⁵⁸ On the relationship between Kramář and Khulodova-Abriskova, see Čechurová, Jana/ Stehlíková, Dana/ Vandrovcová, Miroslava: Karel a Naděžda Kramářovi doma [Karel and Naděžda Kramář at Home]. Praha 2007, 33-66.

⁵⁹ Paulová, Milada: Dějiny Maffie: Odboj Čechů a Jihoslovanů za světové války 1914-1918 [The History of the Maffie: The Resistance of Czechs and Yugoslavs in the World War 1914-1918]. Vol. 1 Praha 1937, 638. – Winkler, Martina. Karel Kramář (1860-1937): Selbstbild, Fremdwahrnehmungen und Modernisierungsverständnis eines tschechischen Politikers. München 2002, 210.

⁶⁰ Meškank: Kultur besteht – Reich vergeht 22 (cf. fn. 30).

⁶¹ Maobney, William: The History of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Santa Barbara 2011, 133.

⁶² Soukup, František: 28. říjen 1918 [The 28th of October 1918]. Vol. 1, Praha 1928, 169-184.

Presented with Kramář's death warrant on 20 November 1916, the dying Emperor Franz-Joseph was too ill to sign his name, and died the following day. The Emperor Karl, upon his accession, commuted the death sentences to lengthy prison terms.⁶³ Kramář ultimately became Czechoslovakia's first Prime Minister.⁶⁴

Kramář's Slavic Empire foresaw a Czechoslovak Lusatia. The Czech tsardom within his Slavic Empire was to include "Lusatian-Sorbian land in Eastern Saxony and adjacent Prussian districts to the north."⁶⁵ In 1915, Kramář and Rašín further imagined the future Czechoslovakia encompassing not only Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia, but also Prussian Silesia (now in Poland), the Burgenland corridor to Yugoslavia, and Lusatia.⁶⁶ Josef Novotný described the Kramář-Rašín border proposals as the "maximal program";⁶⁷ its frontiers, as Perman observed, extended "almost to Berlin."⁶⁸ Kramář wanted to claim the historic Bohemian Crown Lands in their entirety: his declaration of Czechoslovak independence invoked "our historic rights" and promised that "we will never allow our Czech lands to be ripped asunder."⁶⁹

That said, Kramář's dedication to a Czechoslovak Lusatia should not be overstated. As a member of the Czechoslovak delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, Kramář merely proposed various "rectifications of the historic German-Bohemian boundary."⁷⁰ In practice, however, other questions dominated his attention. In a lengthy letter to Beneš on 15 November 1918, Kramář discussed the future Czechoslovakia's border disputes at length without mentioning Lusatia.⁷¹ A similar letter from 6 April 1919 discussed Těšín/Cieszyn, a free trade zone in Hamburg, the internationalization of river traffic on the Elbe and the Oder rivers, and the Yugoslav corridor.⁷² As 1919 unfolded, furthermore, Kramář became increasingly preoccupied with the Russian civil war, and began, in Martina Lustigová's words, "to dream of himself as the great liberator of Russia."⁷³ Indeed, in a letter to Masaryk on 6 April

⁶³ *Hlaváč*, Miroslav: *Čestí Mafiáni 1914-1918* [The Czech Mafia 1914-1918]. Praha 2008, 38.

⁶⁴ *Bradley*, John: Czechoslovakia: External Crisis and Internal Compromise. In: *Berg-Schlosser*, Dirk / *Mitchell*, Jeremy (eds.): *Conditions of Democracy in Europe, 1919-1939: Systematic Case Studies*. London 2000, 85-105, here 87-89.

⁶⁵ *Paulová*: *Dějiny Maffie*, vol. 1, 638-638 (cf. fn. 59). For the complete Slavonic constitution see 635-640. – See also *Hlaváč*: *Čestí Mafiáni* 33-42 (cf. fn. 63).

⁶⁶ *Novotný*: *Vzkříšení samostatnosti československé. Kronika let 1914-1918* [The Resurrection of Czechoslovak Independence. Chronicle of the Years 1914-1918]. Vol. 1, Praha 1932, 601, see map on p. 554. – See also *Perman*, Dagmar: *The Shaping of the Czechoslovak State. Diplomatic History of the Boundaries of Czechoslovakia, 1914-1920*. Leiden 1962, 23.

⁶⁷ *Novotný*: *Vzkříšení samostatnosti československé*, vol. 1, 601 (cf. fn. 66).

⁶⁸ *Perman*: *The Shaping of the Czechoslovak State* 23 (cf. fn. 66).

⁶⁹ *Die Proklamierung der tschechischen Republik*. In: *Pilsner Tagblatt* (15 November 1918) 2.

⁷⁰ *Perman*: *The Shaping of the Czechoslovak State* 127 (cf. fn. 66).

⁷¹ "Document 12," letter from Kramář to Beneš (5 December 1918). In: *Dejmeš*, Jindřich / *Kolář*, František (eds.): *Československo na pařížské mírové konferenci 1918-1920* [Czechoslovakia at the Paris Peace Conference 1918-1920]. Vol. 1. Praha 2001, 68-72.

⁷² "Letter 215," Kramář to Masaryk, 6 April 1919, cited from: *Hlaváčka*, Milan / *Kárník*, Zdeněk (eds.): *Korespondence T. G. Masaryk – Karel Kramář* [The Correspondence of T. G. Masaryk and Karel Kramář]. Praha 2005, 346.

⁷³ *Lustigová*, Martina: *Karel Kramář*. Praha 2007, 168.

he argued primarily for Czechoslovak intervention in Russia: “we must have a democratic Slavic federation, else we are simply lost.”⁷⁴ Masaryk remained unpersuaded; as early as 19 February, he had complained confidentially to Beneš that Kramář “has fantasies of Russia and nothing else interests him.”⁷⁵ Kramář’s growing obsession with Russia meant that he neglected Lusatia and the Sorbs during his sojourn in Paris.

Kramář’s greatest service to the Lusatian cause was to get Adolf Černý appointed as Lusatian specialist for the Czechoslovak delegation at the Peace Conference. On 22 November 1918, Černý officially joined the department for geographic, ethnographic, and statistical questions, which Zdeněk Vácha characterized as “the most important” of the expert committees.⁷⁶ The Sorbian national council in Bautzen, furthermore, granted Černý plenipotenary powers to represent Lusatia at the Paris Peace Conference.⁷⁷ Černý was not idle during his time in Paris: he composed a flurry of memoranda about the Lusatian question. A letter of 26 December described the Sorbs as “a distinct Slavic nation,” yet called for a Czech protectorate over Lower and Upper Lusatia. He also demanded the release of Sorbian prisoners, attaching the Narodny Wubjerke’s appeal to the prisoners themselves.⁷⁸ In January, he wrote several documents describing German attempts to obstruct the Lusatian movement.⁷⁹ Černý also composed a booklet on Lusatian history whose narrative, beginning in the Middle Ages, emphasized “Germanization” and “denationalization,” and concluded that “the Peace Conference should ensure that the Lusatian-Sorbian ethnographic territory forms an independent state entity, connected to the Czechoslovak state.”⁸⁰ Černý’s dedication to Lusatia was exceptional; the Sorbian leadership rightly saw in him a tenacious and stalwart ally.

When the Czechoslovak specialists arrived in Paris, Beneš charged them with producing documents and maps to bolster Czechoslovak claims. His instructions of 15 January 1919 specifically called for a map of Lusatia and four memoranda on the Lusatian question. One would consider Lusatia as a “strategic problem,” another its

⁷⁴ “Letter 215,” Kramář to Masaryk, 6 April 1919, cited from: *Hlavačka/Kárník* (eds.): *Korespondence 346-347* (cf. fn. 72).

⁷⁵ Masaryk to Beneš, 19 February 1919, cited from *Lustigová*: Karel Kramář 168 (cf. fn. 73).

⁷⁶ Vácha, Zdeněk: *Žádám vás jako vynikajícího odborníka ... Organizace odborných prací pro československou delegaci na mírové konferenci v Paříži v letech 1918-1919* [I ask you as an Outstanding Expert ... The Organization of Experts for the Czechoslovak Delegation at the Peace Conference in Paris in the Years 1918-1919]. Praha 2012, 119, 71. Vácha also provides a photograph of Černý’s credentials, see pp. 238, 302-04. Originals in Masarykův ústav a Archiv Akademie České Republiky [Masaryk Foundation and the Archive of the Academy of the Czech Republic], f. [fund] Černý, Adolf.

⁷⁷ AMZV PA, book 51, document 5083. “Wulcysławnemu českosłowenskemu Narodnemu Wubjerkej w Prazy” [On the Czechoslovak Accreditation of the National Council in Paris].

⁷⁸ AMZV PA, book 51, no. 5034. Letter from Černý to Beneš (26 December 1918).

⁷⁹ MAZV, Pařížský Archiv, book 51 respectively documents 5045 and 5047. Černý, Adolf: *Německý hlasy o lužické otázce* [German Voices on the Lusatian Question] (27 January 1919). – “Němci a lužická otázka II” [The Germans and the Lusatian Question II].

⁸⁰ MAZV Pařížský Archiv, book 51, no. 5048. Černý: *Lužice* 3, 4, 11 (cf. fn. 28).

economic situation “in the case of liberation and unification with Bohemia,” a third its railway connections to Bohemia, and the fourth its demographic character, estimating the German population in both a “maximum and minimum program.”⁸¹ Černý, still in Prague, did not contribute to the initial discussions that Czechoslovak specialists held on Czechoslovakia’s borders.⁸² Nevertheless, Czechoslovak officer Rudolf Kalhous, for example, wrote a report on “the borders of the Czechoslovak state from a strategic point of view,” concluding that a Czechoslovak Lusatia would offer some “protection against a German attack on the northern front.” Kalhous also noted that a Czechoslovak Lusatia would “cut or at least hinder communications between Saxony and Upper Silesia,” and also “improve the Czechoslovak strategic position at least in the first days of mobilization.”⁸³ The Czechoslovak delegation thus worked for a Czechoslovak Lusatia even in Černý’s absence.

When Černý finally arrived in Paris on 24 February, he devoted his time almost exclusively to Lusatia. Indeed, of the 25 members of the Czechoslovak delegation, Černý proved the third most prolific, publishing 41 different works while the conference was in session.⁸⁴ He prepared newspaper editorials in Czech, Sorbian, and French.⁸⁵ Černý also served as liaison between the Czechoslovak leadership and the Serbski Narodny Wubjerk, in other words, between Beneš and Bart.⁸⁶ Bart, meanwhile, had attached himself to the Czechoslovak delegation. He received logistical support, though apparently not the daily allowance paid to other Czechoslovak experts.⁸⁷

In general, however, Czech enthusiasm for Lusatia generally remained confined within certain limits. The same Jaroslav Kvapil who wrote to Beneš about the Lusatian question in April 1919 had, for example, explicitly renounced Lusatia less than a year previously. Kvapil’s “Manifesto of the Czech intellectuals” of May 1917 provoked German accusations of hypocrisy, since Kvapil declared Bohemia’s historic frontiers inviolable while simultaneously claiming Slovakia from Hungary on ethnographic grounds.⁸⁸ In a rebuttal, Kvapil argued that that there was “only an apparent contradiction.” He declared the modesty of Czech demands by somewhat inaccurately suggesting that “it would not occur to anybody in today’s Bohemia to reclaim Prussian Silesia and Lusatia, even though both regions were part of the

⁸¹ “Document 71,” Beneš’s instructions of 15 January, in *Dejmek/Kolář: Československo na pařížské mírové konferenci* 159 (cf. fn. 71).

⁸² *Vácha: Organizace odborných prací* 104 (cf. fn. 76).

⁸³ *Kalhous, Rudolf: Hranice československého státu ze stanoviska strategických* [The Frontiers of the Czechoslovak State from a Strategic Perspective]. In: *Dejmek/Kolář: Československo na pařížské mírové konferenci* 174 (cf. fn. 71).

⁸⁴ *Vácha: Organizace odborných prací* 248, 38, 166 (cf. fn. 76).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 184.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 168.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 228. – On Bart’s activities in Paris, see *Remes, Friedrich: Die Sorbenfrage 1918/1919: Untersuchung einer gescheiterten Autonomiebewegung*, Bautzen 1993, 160-170.

⁸⁸ *Berman, Richard: Brief an Jaroslav Kvapil*. In: *Der Friede 1* (1918) no. 5, 101-102; cited from *Iřkovitz, Kurt* (ed.): *Hermann Bahr – Jaroslav Kvapil. Briefe, Texte, Dokumente*. Bern 2007 (Wechselwirkungen 11) 629-633.

Bohemian state for centuries.” Kvapil had concluded that Czech aspirations to Lusatia “would be laughable, unwise, and even immoral.”⁸⁹

Czech popular cartography also showed little interest in Lusatia. In late November 1918, Prague bookstores began selling maps of the future Czechoslovak state, anticipating what future frontiers the Entente might determine. The maps, as described in the “Prager Tagblatt”, claimed some territory from the German Empire: they shifted the Bohemian frontier north into Silesia, claiming Kłodzko, Kamienna Góra (Landeshut), and Szklarska Poręba (Schreiberhau), all now in Poland. The bookstore maps did not, however, extend the Czechoslovak frontier to Lusatia.⁹⁰ Not all Czech patriots, it seems, dreamed of a Czechoslovak Lusatia.

Yet while the notion of a Czechoslovak Lusatia failed to inspire universal enthusiasm, a vacillating yet persistent desire for a Czechoslovak Lusatia persevered in both the public sphere and in official circles. Influential figures, including Klecanda, Sís, Kvapil, Kramář, Rašín, and Masaryk, all took some interest in Lusatia. At the same time, however, Lusatia remained a secondary objective, a lesser priority which might be tactically abandoned, or even traded away as a bargaining chip.

When Beneš actually presented Czechoslovak demands to the Entente, however, he made a restrained case for Czechoslovak annexation. On 5 February 1919, Beneš spoke to Wilson, Lloyd George, Clemenceau, and Orlando for three and a half hours. As Czechoslovakia’s second representative to the Peace Conference, Kramář also attended, but Beneš did all the talking. Charles Seymour, a Yale historian and chief of the American committee on Austro-Hungarian questions, wrote that

[...] poor Kramář [sic], who wanted to speak, was not allowed to. When he asked for half an hour, Clemenceau said “O, we’ll appoint a special commission and you can talk to them for a couple of hours. Now we had better have a cup of tea.”⁹¹

Seymour’s British colleague Harold Nicolson found Clemenceau’s rudeness embarrassing, and also observed Kramář’s “indignation at being treated as of no importance.”⁹²

Beneš probably sought to dominate the meeting because he feared Kramář might say something rash; he succeeded because he then enjoyed the general esteem of Entente diplomats. Clemenceau recalled Beneš as “one of the best of them all,” as a man “who won general esteem and confidence by the high rectitude of his speech and by his lofty intellect.”⁹³ Seymour, who lunched with Beneš and Kramář just before the 5 February meeting, thought Beneš “a delightful little chap, just as friend-

⁸⁹ *Kvapil*, Jaroslav: Eine Antwort. In: *Der Friede* 1 (1918) no. 6, 178-79, cited from *Iřkovitz* (ed.): Hermann Bahr – Jaroslav Kvapil 638 (cf. fn. 88).

⁹⁰ Die Grenzen des neuen tschecho-slowakischen Staates. In: *Prager Tagblatt* (23 November 1918) 2. – Tschechische Ansprüche auf Teile Preußisch-Schlesiens. In: *Fremden-Blatt* (4 December 1918) 3.

⁹¹ Letter of Sunday, February 8, 1919. In: *Whiteman*, Harold (ed.): *Letters from the Paris Peace Conference* by Charles Seymour. New Haven 1965, 155-156. – Clemenceau afterward complained to Kramář: “But he was very long, your Beneš!” See *Nicolson*, Harold: *Peacemaking, 1919*. London 1943 [1933] 258.

⁹² *Ibid.* 210.

⁹³ *Clemenceau*, Georges: *Grandeur and Misery of Victory*. London 1930, 140.

ly and as moderate as one could wish,” wondering only “whether he will be able to last, because he is caught at home between the extreme chauvinists who want to grab everything in sight.”⁹⁴ Seymour did not list any “extreme chauvinists” by name, but Nicholson thought that Czechs who “had remained in Prague during the whole war,” such as Kramář, “thought only in terms of extreme Czech nationalism.” Nicholson also professed his personal “dislike of Kramarsh [sic], who is behind everything nasty that Benes does.”⁹⁵ Kramář may have aroused some pity since he was still recovering from a botched assassination on 11 January,⁹⁶ but Entente diplomats probably prevented him from speaking on 5 February at least in part from personal dislike.

Beneš’s audience was sympathetic. The Czechoslovak Legion’s adventures in revolutionary Russia had captured the public imagination: former American president Theodore Roosevelt, for example, donated a thousand dollars from his Nobel Peace Prize to “the Czechoslovaks, the extraordinary nation of whose great and heroic feat is literally unparalleled, so far as I know, in ancient or modern warfare.”⁹⁷ The presence of an organized army inside Russia also gave the Czechoslovaks unexpected political leverage when the Entente decided to intervene in the Russian Civil War on the side of the Whites.⁹⁸ Should Germany decide not to sign the treaty, furthermore, the Entente counted on Czech forces to break German resistance. When the Council of Four pondered possible military action on 16 June, for example, Clemenceau suggested that the Entente seek “junction with the Czech army, which has ten divisions of first-rate soldiers. It lacks matériel; we will give it to them.”⁹⁹ The Entente, anxious to maintain good relations with the Czechoslovaks, treated them with indulgence. When Beneš, in response to American concerns about Czechoslovakia’s large German minority, offered to cede predominantly German territories near Cheb (Eger) and Frydlant (Friedland), the French, British, and Italian delegates urged the Czechoslovaks to remain firm.¹⁰⁰ Australian delegate Joseph Cook frankly advocated a policy of letting “our friends the Czechs have what they want.”¹⁰¹

Given this uniquely favorable opportunity to articulate Czechoslovakia’s ambitions, Beneš conspicuously refrained from claiming Lusatia directly. According to

⁹⁴ Letter of Sunday, February 8, 1919. In *Whiteman: Letters from the Paris Peace Conference* 155 (cf. fn. 91).

⁹⁵ *Nicolson: Peacemaking*, 1919, 266 (cf. fn. 91).

⁹⁶ On the attempted assassination, see *Borovička, Václav Pavel: Vražda měšťáckého revolucionáře. Atentáty, které měly změnit svět* [The Murder of a Bourgeois Revolutionary: Assassinations which have Changed the World]. Praha 2007, 192-195.

⁹⁷ *Mamatey, Victor S.: The United States and East-Central Europe, 1914-1918. A Study in Wilsonian Diplomacy and Propaganda*. Princeton 1957, 301.

⁹⁸ *Kenman, George: Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1920. Vol. 2: The Decision to Intervene*. Princeton 1989, 144-149. – *Kalvoda, Josef: Masaryk in America in 1918*. In: *Jahrbücher für die Geschichte Osteuropas* 27 (1979) no. 1, 85-99, here particularly 90-99.

⁹⁹ *Mantoux, Paul: The Deliberations of the Council of Four (March 24-June 28, 1919. Vol. 1*. Princeton 1992, 465.

¹⁰⁰ *Wandycz, Piotr: France and Her Eastern Allies, 1919-1925: French-Czechoslovak-Polish Relations from the Paris Peace Conference in Locarno*. Minneapolis 1962, 58.

¹⁰¹ *Seymour, Charles: Czechoslovak Frontiers*. In: *The Yale Review* 28 (December 1938) 273-291, here 277, 284.

the American diplomatic record of his remarks, Beneš asserted that “the Czechs made no claim on this subject, and even thought it might be dangerous for them to undertake this mission.”¹⁰² Beneš then made a legal case for a Czechoslovak Lusatia, noting accurately that “the country had once belonged to Bohemia” and describing its location as “only 6 kilometers from the Bohemian frontier.” He implied that Lusatia’s German history was brief and transient, falsely claiming that “it had become German only in 1867.”¹⁰³ He argued that the Sorbs themselves “desire to be autonomous under Czech protection.” Should the Entente press Czechoslovakia to annex Lusatia, Beneš implied, Czechoslovak leaders would reluctantly acquiesce. After making both legal and ethnographic arguments for a Czechoslovak Lusatia, however, Beneš concluded by claiming that he raised the Sorbian question as “a moral rather than a political matter.” The Sorbs, he said, “were nearest to the Czechs, and had begged him to present their problem to the Conference.” In his capacity as Czechoslovak representative, however, Beneš merely asked the Entente to “examine the problem.”¹⁰⁴

Why did Beneš play so coy? By abstaining from claiming Lusatia directly, he presented himself as moderate and reasonable, which proved effective psychology. While the Great Powers liked to pose as liberators in the former Habsburg Empire, they also found that, “policies of ‘self-determination,’ ‘independence’ and related ideas,” had kindled, in the words of Herbert Hoover,

[...] a fire of extreme nationalism in the newly created states of Eastern Europe, fully evident at the Peace conference by exaggerated demands for territory based not only on racial justifications but on economic or defense motives, and sometimes also on purely historical boundaries of the dim past.¹⁰⁵

Hoover’s words accurately characterize the Czechoslovak position, yet Beneš successfully posed as a moderate exception to the rule of East European extremism, and thus a good partner for the Entente. Unlike other suppliants, Beneš was happy to promise equal treatment for future minorities within Czechoslovakia.¹⁰⁶ Where others were passionate and outspoken, Beneš depicted himself as moderate and conciliatory.

Beneš reaped concrete rewards from his moderate reputation. In June 1919, when the Entente officially notified the Czech and Romanian delegations of Central Europe’s new borders, Beneš found himself in a position similar to that of Romania’s

¹⁰² Secretary’s Notes of a Conversation. In: Foreign Relations of the United States. The Paris Peace Conference. Vol. 3. Washington 1942, 886.

¹⁰³ If the American notes are accurate, the reference to 1867 suggests that Beneš adopted an intriguing political strategy. By evoking the relatively recent year of Bismarck’s successful war against Austria, Beneš implicitly characterized Lusatia, like Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia, as a former territory of the Habsburg Empire. He also raised the specter of Prussian militarism, perhaps to influence the French commission. It seems unlikely that Beneš would have made this mistake from ignorance; considered that Černý’s history of Lusatia correctly gave 1815 as the date of Lusatia’s final partition between Saxony and Prussia. See Černý: Lužice 11 (cf. fn. 28); MAZV PA, book 51, no. 5048.

¹⁰⁴ Secretary’s Notes of a Conversation 886 (cf. fn. 102).

¹⁰⁵ Hoover, Herbert: The Ordeal of Woodrow Wilson. Baltimore 1992 [1958] 76.

¹⁰⁶ See e.g. Fink, Carole: Defending the Rights of Others: The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878–1938. Cambridge 2006, 144.

Prime Minister and conference delegate Ion I.C.Brătianu. Yet Brătianu, unlike Beneš, had antagonized Entente diplomats: British diplomat James Headlam-Morley found him “very difficult,”¹⁰⁷ and Nicholson thought him as “a bearded woman, a forceful humbug, [...] a most unpleasing man.”¹⁰⁸ Contrasting Beneš and Brătianu’s performance at the negotiating table, Seymour thought “it was interesting to see the difference.”

Brătianu was very sulky and belligerent in his dissatisfaction with the proposed frontier; said that he could not possibly accept it without consultation with his people in Bucharest. Beneš, although he pretended to be bitterly disappointed, was as usual very smiling and said he and the Czechs would do everything to help. The result was that in today’s meeting of the Five, the small additions that Beneš asked for were granted; while in answer to Brătianu’s complaint the Five recommended that the suggested frontier be maintained.¹⁰⁹

Beneš, perhaps due to his wartime experiences in exile, understood the psychology of Entente diplomats, and benefitted accordingly.

Indeed, Beneš’s restrained tactics arguably won for Czechoslovakia Transcarpathian Ruthenia. Beneš characterized both Lusatia and Ruthenia as questions “not be considered claims made on behalf of Czecho-Slovakia.” He suggested merely that the Ruthenes “did not wish to remain under Hungarian control and proposed to form an autonomous state in close federation with Czecho-Slovakia.” He argued that “it would be unjust to leave them to the tender mercies of the Magyars” and concluded that if the Great Powers, in their wisdom, assigned the region to Czechoslovakia, “this would impose a burden [...] but would afford the advantage of a common frontier with the Roumanians.”¹¹⁰ The Entente assigned the territory to Czechoslovakia.

Beneš asked for the Entente to consider the Lusatian question as a “moral issue.” To the surprise and delight of Czechoslovak diplomats, the Entente actually agreed to consider the prospect of a Czechoslovak Lusatia.¹¹¹ They delegated the question to the Commission on Czechoslovak Affairs. While Wilson’s apologists would subsequently claim that border questions were to be decided by “dispassionate scientists – geographers, ethnologists, economists,”¹¹² the experts appointed to the Czechoslovak commission were anything but dispassionate. One French expert, the historian Ernest Denis, had spent much of the war publishing the francophone propaganda journal “La Nation Tchèque” with Beneš himself!¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ *Headlam-Morley*, James: A Memoir of the Paris Peace Conference. London 1971, 19.

¹⁰⁸ *Nicholson*: Peacemaking, 1919, 202 (cf. fn. 91).

¹⁰⁹ Letter of Wednesday, June 12, 1919. In *Whiteman*: Letters from the Paris Peace Conference 268 (cf. fn. 91).

¹¹⁰ Secretary’s Notes of a Conversation 886 (cf. fn. 102).

¹¹¹ AMZV PA, book 43, no. 4725. Zpráva československé delegace na pařížské mírové konferenci o jednání ... [Report of the Czechoslovak Delegation at the Paris Peace Conference about Negotiations ...].

¹¹² *Baker*, Ray: Woodrow Wilson and World Settlement Vol. 1. London 1923, 112; for Entente discussions of specialists, see 186-188.

¹¹³ *Ferenčuhová*, Bohumila: Les slavissants français et le mouvement tchécoslovaque à l’étranger au cours de la Première Guerre Mondiale. In: *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 169 (January 1993) 27-36.

The Commission on Czechoslovak Affairs nevertheless rejected a Czechoslovak Lusatia. Leading British expert R. W. Seton-Watson, Masaryk's personal friend, considered a Czechoslovak Lusatia "quite impracticable," concluding that the Sorbs "should be assured a local autonomy of their own within the German Federal Republic, and that they should all be [...] no longer partitioned between Saxony and Prussian Silesia."¹¹⁴ Nicholson less diplomatically declared the idea "mere rubbish."¹¹⁵ The French commissioners, the most strongly Germanophobe and perhaps therefore the most strongly Czechophile, also opposed a Czechoslovak Lusatia;¹¹⁶ their final report concluded "it is impossible to consider the solution of this question by any territorial adjustment."¹¹⁷ The Commission on Czechoslovak Affairs proposed only minor adjustments to the Czech-German frontier.

When the committee's report went before the Council of Four on 4 April, however, even its minor recommendations found an unsympathetic hearing. Wilson was absent from the crucial meeting, but Clemenceau articulated the Council's collective feeling when discussing the Czech-German frontier with Lloyd-George and Wilson's confidant Edward House:

I have just studied the report of the competent commission of experts on the boundary between Bohemia and Germany. The settlement is very complicated and makes all sorts of changes, some of which include cessions of territory to the Germans; that seems very useless to me. The simplest thing is to maintain the border as it was before the war and to leave to Bohemia and Germany the task of making territorial exchanges between themselves as they seem appropriate.

Lloyd George replied: "I agree with you that the old frontier between Bohemia and Germany should be respected." House concurred: "that solution seems best to me." There the discussion ended, pending objections from Wilson.¹¹⁸

As it happened, Wilson objected, so in May the Powers then referred the question of Lusatia to the Council of Foreign ministers. The Council of Foreign Ministers in turn referred the question to the Commission on New States, which concluded that "practical difficulties [...] make any special provision for the Lusatian Slavs impossible."¹¹⁹ And so the Peace Conference definitively rejected both a Czechoslovak Lusatia and an independent Lusatian state.

¹¹⁴ *Seton-Watson: Czecho-Slovak Claims*. In: *Rychlík, Jan / Marzik, Thomas / Bielik, Miroslav Bielik: Seton-Watson and His Relations with the Czechs and Slovaks*. Bratislava 1995, 291-292.

¹¹⁵ Nicholson also felt the Burgenland corridor "completely unjustified" and even told Kramář to his face "this is foolishness". *Nicolson: Peacemaking*, 1919, 92, 206, 222 (cf. fn. 91).

¹¹⁶ See *Ferenčuhová, Bohumila: Francúzsko a slovenská otázka 1789-1989* [France and the Slovak Question 1789-1989]. Bratislava 2008, 211-212.

¹¹⁷ Report Presented to the Supreme Council of the Allied and Associated Governments by the Committee on Tchecho-Slovak Claims (12 March 1919); cited from *Bourne, Kenneth D. / Watts, Cameron* (eds.): *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*. Part 2, series 1, vol. 10. Maryland 1991, 60.

¹¹⁸ *Mantoux: The Deliberations of the Council of Four*, vol. 1, 144-145 (cf. fn. 99).

¹¹⁹ Grew to Close, letter of 14 June 1919, *Wilson Papers*, Series VIII, cited from *Perman: The Shaping of the Czechoslovak State* 176 (cf. fn. 66).

Most Czech leaders accepted the loss of Lusatia with resignation. Both Beneš and Kramář had other priorities. Indeed, as early as 7 March, Beneš had written to the Czech parliament that “there is not a large chance for success” in the Lusatian question.¹²⁰ Of the Czechoslovak delegation, Černý alone remained active on behalf of Sorbian interests. When the Treaty of Versailles made no provision for Sorbian independence or autonomy and Bart began petitioning for Lusatian autonomy within Germany,¹²¹ Černý wrote articles calling for Saxony to acquire Prussian Lusatia, or alternatively for what Piotr Pałys called a “quasi-plebiscite” over Lusatia’s future status.¹²² Nothing came of such arguments: the Sorbian independence movement utterly failed to achieve any of its aspirations.

Czech desires for a Czechoslovak Lusatia, however lackadaisical, were genuine. Understanding the decisive negotiations at the Paris Peace conference requires us to recreate the heady atmosphere of late 1918 and early 1919. The end of the old empires, experienced as liberation, filled Czech patriots with a sense of boundless possibility. Wartime Germanophobia, mixed with the swagger of victory, may have been infectious and intoxicating. In late 1918, therefore, Czech patriots articulated aspirations that could never have been entertained under the old regime, aspirations that ultimately went unfulfilled and that, perhaps, seem unwise in retrospect.¹²³

The diplomacy surrounding Lusatia sheds light on Beneš’s moderation as a diplomat, which perhaps deserves emphasis. Lloyd-George’s 1938 memoirs, published as storm clouds of war gathered over Czechoslovakia, condemned Beneš as a “short-sighted politician who did not foresee that the more he grasped, the less he could retain.”¹²⁴ Considering how much more influence Lloyd-George had wielded during the actual decision-making process than Beneš, such comments speak most loudly to Lloyd-George’s unwillingness to confront his own failings as a peacemaker. Czechoslovakia’s restrained approach toward Lusatia can be read as a cynical negotiating tactic, but the fact that Beneš readily abandoned hopes for a Czechoslovak Lusatia suggests that Beneš, whatever his other faults, could resist temptation and choose his battles. Kramář, at any rate, failed to display such qualities.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Czechoslovakia’s Lusatian aspirations, however, concerns the seeming irrelevance of nationalism. Eric Hobsbawm has spoken of the “overwhelming triumph of the ‘principle of nationality’ in the post-1918 peace settlements,”¹²⁵ yet the nationality principle played little role in resolving the Lusatian question. The great powers never consulted Lusatia’s inhabitants via

¹²⁰ Beneš, Edvard: Report to the Czechoslovak National Assembly, given as “Document 140”. *DejmeK / Kolář* (eds.): *Československo na pařížské mírové konferenci* 247 (cf. fn. 71).

¹²¹ See *Scheuermann*: *Die Sorbenpolitik des Völkerbundes* 33-54 (cf. fn. 14).

¹²² *Pałys*, Piotr: *ProLužycka publicystika Adolfa Černého na łamach tygodnika Česká stráž w latach 1918-1920* [The Pro-Lusatian Journalism of Adolf Černý in the Weekly Česká stráž during the years 1918-1920]. In: *Marvan* (ed.): *Praha a Lužiči Srbové* 43-53, here 47, 49 (cf. fn. 21).

¹²³ Perhaps the most optimistic description from a modern scholar declares Sorbian ambitions “thoroughly conceivable.” *Hadler*, Frank: *Die sorbische Frage auf der Pariser Friedenskonferenz von 1919*. In: *Lětopis* 41 (1994) no. 1, 90-98 here 93-94.

¹²⁴ *Lloyd-George*, David: *Memoirs of the Peace Conference*. Vol. 2. New Haven 1939, 612.

¹²⁵ *Hobsbawm*, Eric: *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*. Cambridge 1992, 123.

plebiscite; and more significantly never considered organizing one. The Lusatian question thus offers more evidence of the gap between Wilsonian rhetoric and diplomatic practice. Further evidence of Entente hypocrisy, of course, has long been surplus to requirements; even before the treaty of Versailles was signed, disillusioned idealists had begun compiling what William Keylor has called “the demonology of Versailles.”¹²⁶ Even neglecting the sordid realities of diplomacy and restricting our attention solely to the rhetoric of suppliants, however, Czechoslovakia’s Lusatian diplomacy reveals a surprising lack of nationalist idealism. For Masaryk, Kvapil, Kramář and Beneš, the historic rights of the Czech crown played a role as large if not larger than the much-vaunted ideal of national self-determination. While the push for Czechoslovak Lusatia may at first glance appear a quintessentially Wilsonian phenomenon, it rested on legal rights and historical precedents which recall pre-nationalist European diplomatic traditions.

Abbildungsnachweis

Illustration: Masaryk’s Territorial Aspirations (1916). In: Commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ceskoslovensko_Masarykuv_navrh_hranic.jpg (accessed 01 October 2014).

¹²⁶ Keylor, William: Versailles and International Diplomacy. In: *Boemeke, Manfred / Feldman, Gerald / Gläser, Elisabeth* (eds.): *The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment After 75 Years*. Cambridge 1998, 469-505, here 489.