

FEDERALIST POLITICS AND NOBLE IDENTITY IN BOHEMIA DURING THE EARLY CONSTITUTIONAL PERIOD

Ute Hofmann
University of Chemnitz (Germany)

Rezumat: Folosind exemplul aristocrației boemiene federaliste din cel de-al șaselea deceniu al secolului al XIX-lea, articolul încearcă să ilustreze impactul introducerii sistemului constituțional asupra identității nobilimii.

Cum aplicarea prevederilor constituționale a constituit o adevărată provocare pentru nobilime – ca și clasă conducătoare – aceasta a trebuit să găsească noi strategii pentru a-și asigura poziția de elită. Nobilimea boemiană a înțeles imperativul momentului și a acționat în consecință. Iată de ce, relația sa cu elita naționalistă cehă în ascensiune a dobândit o importanță particulară. Cu toate că nobilimea federalistă și naționaliștii cehi s-au aliat, ocazional, în lupta pentru dobândirea unei autonomii extinse a Boemiei în cadrul Imperiului Habsburgic, nobilii boemieni nu și-au dezvoltat propria identitate: identitatea națională. Strategia lor politică s-a axat pe aceleași coordonate conservatoare, specifice identității tradiționale corporative.

The 1860s depict a crucial time regarding the political and social development of the Habsburg monarchy which became a constitutional state during that period. This new order had an impact on the political activities of the nobility¹, as well as on their identity which still was traditional and corporative. A basis of noble identity was their self-perception and self-definition as the ruling estate. This self-definition was challenged by the introduction of a constitutional system which allowed non-nobles to acquire more political influence. Another important effect of creation of a modern diet was the formation of two political camps among the nobles who had been used to act as one corporation. Now there was a federalist and a centralist camp. The Federalists were also called Conservatives or Feudal-Conservatives², the Centralists were referred to as Constitutionally Loyal Large Landowners³. Those federalist and centralist currents already existed since the revolution of 1848, but at the beginning of the 1860s they emerged as parliamentary clubs which significantly affected politics in Austria. In Bohemia the federalist camp was considerably bigger and more influential than the centralist one. Therefore, in the following political ideas and strategies of the Bohemian federalists are going to be presented in the context of elite formation during the 19th century. In doing so it is asked if those strategies reflect a special noble identity.

Elite is considered as a dominant group of a society which is able to exert noticeable influence on decisions concerning the entire society or just sectors of it⁴. Within an estate system, the nobility and elite were not congruent, but the elite were predominantly recruited from the nobility. An inherited qualification to enter the elite was an important element of noble identity. However, in the course of the 19th

century non-noble inclusion in elite formation increased. This is closely connected to the process of nationalization. By the 1860s the Czech national efforts had reached the level of a mass movement which implied the development of the national elite with growing influence on the entire society. In Bohemia national elites were non-noble. Therefore the nobility had to find ways to deal with the growing power of competing elites⁵. This was of particular importance after the revolution of 1848, because the nobility had lost some of their major privileges which were essential regarding noble identity. Above all the abolition of the pre-modern organization of administration [*Patrimonialverwaltung*] was a turning point, because it meant the end of the direct exercise of personal power over dependent subjects⁶. As the nobility felt harassment of their elite status as well as of their self-concept they had to redefine their role in public life. Political engagement was one possible approach.

In the field of politics, the preconditions of conserving the elite position were auspicious. Although the traditional assembly of estates was replaced by a more or less modern parliament, the election regulations provided considerable capabilities of influence for the nobility. The constitutional laws implemented a provincial diet which was divided into three curies, i.e. the curia of towns, the curia of rural municipalities and the curia of large landowners. The curia of large landowners was dominated by nobles. Each curia elected about one third of the representatives, but as a high census limited the access to the curia of large landowners very restrictively only a small number of mainly noble persons was allowed to elect this third of deputies. Thus the nobility indirectly disposed of a privileged political position in its capacity of large landowners. As the proportion between federalists and centralists was relatively balanced in the curies of towns and rural municipalities, the results of elections in the curia of large landowners were of particular importance because they determined the majority within the diet⁷. Altogether the nobility was in a good position to exert influence in political life and to advocate their ideas.

Federalist concepts already emerged among the Bohemian nobility in the pre-March time when the estates opposition began to resist centralist attempts of the government in Vienna. By patronizing economical and cultural enterprises families like Czernin, Kolowrat, Lobkowitz, Schwarzenberg, Sternberg or Thun-Hohenstein underlined a specific Bohemian identity⁸. This identity was not considered as a national one in an ethnic sense, but as supra-national provincial patriotism referring to the territorial and state right entity of the Kingdom of Bohemia. Nobles who were involved in the estates opposition established contacts to the Czech national leaders, but unlike the Hungarian or Polish nobility they did not identify themselves with the national movement⁹. During the revolution in 1848 and the neoabsolutist period, federalist ideas continued to develop, but there was no systematic program or organization, which emerged until 1860. The formal date of the foundation of the party of the conservative large landowners – as the federalists were called since that time – is presumed to be 1st January 1860, which was the day of the programmatic proclamation of the political journal „Vaterland“ [*Fatherland*]. It appeared since 1st August 1860 and became the most important medium of disseminating the federalist

position to a greater audience. Although the journal addressed the entire Habsburgian nobility, the Bohemian federalists were the most dedicated and influential group¹⁰.

The political positions of the federalist Bohemian nobility reflect their perception of the state of society, which they consider to be alarming - especially in reference to France. Firstly, France represented absolutism and centralisation that were both rejected by the federalists. Secondly, France was the country of the revolution in 1789. The federalist program pointed out the fact that centralization and destruction of historical institutions were responsible for the disastrous revolutionary process. Hence it is concluded that the Habsburg monarchy could be prevented from similar events only by the realization of federalist reforms which would restore the historical territorial rights of the Kingdom of Bohemia and ensured provincial autonomy and self-government within the Habsburg Empire¹¹. For this reason, the state right was the most prominent political issue of that time.

The October Diploma, which was released on 20th October 1860, codified the state right situation and turned the Habsburg monarchy into a constitutional state¹². Numerous comments of Bohemian federalist nobles articulate clearly that they were not very pleased about that fact, because they preferred the conservation of the traditional corporate political and social order. Some associate constitutionalism with bureaucratism and centralism, which were symbols of the hated neoabsolutist regime¹³. In matters of territorial autonomy, the *October Diploma* was designed rather generous. Although an Imperial Council [*Reichsrath*] was introduced, its rights were limited to affairs that concerned the entire realm. Any other issues were given over to the provincial parliaments. However there are many grievances by Bohemian federalists about a preferential treatment of Hungary in comparison with Bohemia¹⁴. These grievances applied to the introduction of two sections of the Imperial Council. The entire Council was responsible for issues concerning the Austrian as well as the Hungarian provinces. But if certain things concerned only the Austrian lands and the Imperial Council was authorized to regulate them without involving the Hungarian deputies. This reduced version of the Imperial Council (the so called *Engerer Reichsrath*) was the main reason of rejection by federalist Bohemian nobility, because they considered it as a degradation of the provincial diets of the Austrian lands. However, only four months later the *October Diploma* was revised by the *February Patent* (26th February 1861), which minimized any federalist approaches of the *October Diploma* and restored a much more centralized order. The *February Patent* extended the rights of the Imperial Council substantially, because now any affair should be given over to the Imperial Council unless a special regulation explicitly assigns the competence to the provincial diet. Therefore, restoring the order of the *October Diploma* became a political goal of Bohemian federalists¹⁵. The Bohemian resistance against the *February Patent* was also caused by the fact that its order did not seem to work, because the Hungarian provinces refused to enter the Imperial Court. Although Hungary enjoyed much more autonomous rights than the western provinces, it tried to achieve an even more independent position. Bohemian nobles considered that attempts as harassment of the unity of the realm and obstacle for their own desires regarding self-government¹⁶.

As the Bohemian federalists were in fundamental doubts about the legality of the political system of the *February Patent*, their participation in the political life could not be taken for granted. There were intensive discussions about the question if it is appropriate to get involved into constitutional politics, because it could be considered as an indirect acceptance of the *February Patent*.¹⁷ But, a considerable number of nobles decided in favor for active participation. Prominent members of the federalist club were for example Count Leo Thun-Hohenstein¹⁸, Count Heinrich Jaroslav Clam-Martinic¹⁹, Prince Georg Christian Lobkovitz²⁰, Prince Karl III. Schwarzenberg²¹, Count Eugen Czernin and Count Georg Buquoy.

Within the constitutional system active involvement in politics required the participation in elections. For nobles it was a very unfamiliar thing, as in the provincial assembly of estates their seat was entitled to them because of their quality as nobles. They did not have to compete against each other or against non-nobles for a mandate like in a constitutional parliament, but in a way they inherited access to an influential political position. Some of them also remembered the elections for the revolutionary Imperial Council in 1848, which had been a very unpleasant experience and still influenced the noble relation towards constitutionalism and elections in the 1860s.²² For example, Leo Thun complained in a letter to his wife about the “almost disgusting business” of candidature and the “ignorant people”, who he had to make believe that he would help them with their profane concerns, because they did not care about the important political questions²³. Thun clearly doubts the competence of his peasant voters to be involved in the political process. Some years later, Eugen Czernin questioned the qualification of a non-noble public servant to be elected as deputy of the curia of large landowners. This was particularly inapprehensible for him as a Prince Schwarzenberg was the rival candidate²⁴. In both utterances, the conviction of a superior suitability of nobles for political activities could be assumed. Eugen Czernin himself ran for elections at the beginning of the 1860s and became a deputy, but he did not become accustomed with the constitutional order and he soon retreated. In a letter to Leo Thun, he stated as a reason, that he would join the diet as recently as he is allowed to appear there, as the ruler of the dominions of *Neuhaus* and *Chudenitz*, but he would keep away as long as he had to be elected first.²⁵ Again, he expressed a qualification for politics which was deduced from nobility.

Not only the federalist nobility used the boycott of parliamentary sessions as a means of expressing their political position, but the Czech National Party acted in this way, too. Federalist nobles and a group of Czech nationalists became allies for some time, because they agreed on the desire for strengthening the territorial rights of Bohemia. After first steps of collaboration, during the first half of the 19th century and the break after the revolution 1848, they started to approach again in 1860, when the conservative Czech historian Wáclaw Władiwoj Tomek arranged a meeting with the leader of the federalist club Heinrich Clam-Martinic and with the leader of the Czech national club František Ladislaus Rieger, who came to an agreement about a moderate cooperation²⁶. But the consensus on the state right efforts did not imply congruence of Czech and noble motivations. The vast majority of nobles had not developed any pronounced national consciousness in a modern sense – definitely it did not happen

until or during the 1860s, although the nationalizing society began to call for positioning²⁷. They could not avoid getting involved in national political conflicts, but in fact they opposed a national determination in favor of a corporative identity and argued for a supra-national policy. This position can be found in the official program of the federalist parliamentary club, where it was explicitly declared that their endeavors concern the state rather than the nation²⁸, and in private documents. For instance, Heinrich Clam-Martinić reported in a letter to Karl III. Schwarzenberg about a conversation with Tomek and described Tomek's discreet attempts of conducting their conversation in order to achieve a statement about the nobles' relation to the national movement as well as his reserved reactions²⁹. The same rejection applies for German national challenges, like Leo Thun articulated in a letter to Count Anton Auersperg about German national politics much more explicitly: "I respect German culture, but in politics I can not accept it as a source of wisdom, and the effort of giving politics in Austria a German national character seems completely unwarranted, arrogant and unpatriotic to me. The possibility of the future existence of Austria is dependent on the question, if the political men are able to soar above national positions"³⁰.

The correspondence between Anton Auersperg, who was a supporter of centralist politics, and Leo Thun gives an example of the dilemma, which meant the formation of two political camps for the nobles. With regard to their contrary political opinions, Leo Thun pointed out a typical element of noble argumentation in this context. He wrote: "I worry that we are not going to accompany very soon – the point from where our convictions were drifting apart must date back a very long time [...], but we meet in our Austrian patriotism [...]"³¹. It is symptomatic that many nobles emphasize a common Austrian patriotism in order to make relative the cleavages and thereby apply to a shared identity which is closely connected to a traditional corporative consciousness. In a letter to his brother, Leo Thun directly connected this corporative identity with political strategies: "The only desirable thing would have been that the nobility would have stood up united for all truly conservative concerns in the Bohemian diet [...] and thus would have taken an impressive position towards everybody"³². During the early constitutional period it was a noble conviction that acting as one unified estate would live up with the natural order much better than being divided into different political camps. This position of an estate unity was also reflected in their successful efforts to maintain common social intercourse, but the fact, that this issue became a topic in noble correspondences indicates that they were worried about negative effects of political tension on their traditional social life³³.

The introduction of the new constitutional order was a challenge for Bohemian federal nobles in many respects. Despite of their fundamental rejection of the system of the *February Patent*, some of them used involvement in politics in order to participate in elite formation. The curia organization of the provincial diet was a comfortable starting point, because it offered privileges to large landowners and thus to a considerable part of nobility who can be regarded as members of the political elite. But it does not seem that the federalist nobility used their political involvement to get access to national elite formation. They established contacts to

Czech national leaders who occasionally became their allies, but it did not result in any noble identification with national politics. In this respect, it is hardly possible to speak about amalgamation of elites, because the nobility showed the tendency to preserve a corporative identity. For instance this becomes apparent in reference to their problems with accepting the development of political camps.

¹ For an overview about political involvement of Austrian/Bohemian nobility in the second half of 19th century see for example Georgiev, Jiří, *Der böhmische Adel und Anfänge des österreichischen Parlamentarismus*, in Georgiev, Jiří/Kysela, Jan (ed.), *Kapitoly z dějin stavovského a parlamentního zřízení. Sborník příspěvků z 54. konference Mezinárodní komise pro dějiny stavovství a parlamentarismu v Praze/Chapters from the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions. Collections of Contributions from the 54th Conference of the International Commission for History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions in Prague*, Prague, 2004, pp. 63-71; Glassheim, Eagle, *Noble Nationalists. The Transformations of the Bohemian Aristocracy*. Cambridge 2005; Höbelt, Lothar, „Verfassungstreue“ und „Feudale“: *Die beiden österreichischen Adelsparteien 1861-1918* [„Constitutionally Loyalists“ and „Feudalists“. The two Austrian noble parties 1861-1918], in „Etudes Danubiennes“, 1991, 7, pp. 103-114; Höbelt, Lothar, *Adel und Politik*, [Nobles and politics], in „Eltz, Erwein/Strohmeyer, Arno (Hg.), *Die Fürstenberger. 800 Jahre Herrschaft und Kultur im Mitteleuropa*, [The Fürstenberg. 800 years lordship and culture in Central Europe], Korneuburg, 1994, pp. 365-377.

² Georgiev, Jiří, *Strana konzervativního velkostatku* [The party of the conservative large landowners], in Malíř, Jiří u. a. (Hg.), *Politické strany. Vývoj politických stran a hnutí v českých zemích a Československu 1861-2004* [Political parties. Development of political parties and movements in the Bohemian lands and in Czechoslovakia 1861-2004], Brno, 2005, pp. 59-86.

³ Velek, Luboš, *Strana ústavověrného velkostatku* [The party of constitutionally loyal large landowners], in Malíř, Jiří u. a. (Hg.), *Politické strany. Vývoj politických stran a hnutí v českých zemích a Československu 1861-2004* [Political parties. Development of political parties and movements in the Bohemian lands and in Czechoslovakia], Brno, 2005, pp.87-108.

⁴ Hartmann, Michael, *Der Mythos von den Leistungseliten. Spitzenkarrieren und soziale Herkunft in Wirtschaft, Politik, Justiz und Wissenschaft*, [The myth of elite by accomplishment. Outstanding carriers and social background in economy, politics, judiciary and science], Frankfurt/New York, 2002, p. 25.

⁵ Řezník, Miloš, *Elitenwandel, tschechische Nationsbildung und der böhmische Adel*, [Elite transformation, the formation of the Czech nation and the Bohemian nobility], in „Historical Social Research – Historische Sozialforschung“, 2008, 33, pp. 63-81.

⁶ See Melville, Ralph, *Adel und Revolution in Böhmen. Strukturwandel von Herrschaft und Gesellschaft in Österreich um die Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, [Nobility and revolution in Bohemia. Structural transformation of mastery and society around the middle of the 19th century], Mainz, 1998.

⁷ See Rottenbacher, Bernd, *Das Februarpatent in der Praxis. Wahlpolitik, Wahlkämpfe und Wahlentscheidungen in den böhmischen Ländern der Habsburgermonarchie 1861-1871*, [The

February Patent in practice. Election policy, election campaigns and election decisions in the Bohemian Lands of the Habsburg monarchy 1861-1871], Frankfurt am Main, 2000.

⁸ Thienen-Adlerflycht, Christoph, *Feudale Konservative als Vorkämpfer einer postfeudalen civil society*, [Feudal conservatives as pioneers of a post-feudal civil society], in „Etudes danubiennes“, 2003, 19, pp. 9-30.

⁹ Kořalka, Jiří, *Tschechen im Habsburgerreich und in Europa 1815-1914. Sozialgeschichtliche Zusammenhänge der neuzeitlichen Nationsbildung und der Nationalitätenfrage in den böhmischen Ländern*, [Czechs in the Habsburgian realm and in Europe 1815-1914. Social historical interrelations of the modern formation of nation and the problem of nationality in the Bohemian lands], München, 1991, p. 51.

¹⁰ Okáč, Antonín, *Rakouský problém a list Vaterland 1860-1871* [The Austrian problem and the journal Vaterland 1860-1871], Brno, 1970; Georgiev, *Strana konzervativního velkostatku...*, pp. 70-71.

¹¹ For example the complete text of the programme can be found in the remains of Camille Rohan (Státní oblastní archiv v Litoměřicích, branch Děčín, Rohan family archive, n. 217). Besides, see for example the programme of the conservative club of the Bohemian diet (Státní oblastní archiv v Litoměřicích, branch Děčín, Thun family archive, A3 XX1, E 156).

¹² See for example Schelle, Karel, Veselá, Renata, *On the traditions of Czech state right thinking (parliamentarianism and the struggle for Czech state right during the second half of 19th century)*, in Georgiev, Jiří/Kysela, Jan (ed.), *Kapitoly z dějin stavovského a parlamentního zřízení. Sborník příspěvků z 54. konference Mezinárodní komise pro dějiny stavovství a parlamentarismu v Praze* [Chapters from the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions. Collections of Contributions from the 54th Conference of the International Commission for History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions in Prague], Prague, 2004, pp. 53-63.

¹³ See for example a memorandum of Count Friedrich Thun about the October Diploma, November 1860 (Státní oblastní archiv v Litoměřicích, branch Děčín, Thun family archive, A3XIX C87-2).

¹⁴ See for example the draft of petition to the Emperor by Eugen Czernin (Státní oblastní archiv v Třeboni, branch Jindřichův Hradec, Czernin family archive, n. 433, sign. VII Fa, 278-285) or his records in his diary (Státní oblastní archiv v Třeboni, branch Jindřichův Hradec, Czernin family archive Czerninu, diary of Eugen Czernin, for example 29. October, 1860).

¹⁵ See for example Thun, Leo, *Unsere Aufgabe im Herrenhaus des Reichsrathes, 1861 Reichsrathes* [Our mission in the House of Lords in the Imperial Council], (Státní oblastní archiv v Litoměřicích, branch Děčín, Thun family archive, A 3 XXI, E 59)

¹⁶ See for example *Die staatsrechtliche Zweispaltung Österreichs. Rede des Grafen Leo Thun gehalten im Herrenhause den 5. Juni 1867*, [The state right dualism of Austria. Speech of Count Leo Thun delivered in the House of Lords on 5th June 1867] Wien, 1867.

¹⁷ See for example „Erwägungen des Grafen Leo Thun über die Frage der Mitarbeit im Herrenhause seitens der Conservativen“, [Reflections of Count Leo Thun about the question of collaboration in the House of Lords by the conservatives], October, 1863 (Státní oblastní archiv v Litoměřicích, branch Děčín, Thun family archive, A3 XXI E145)

¹⁸ Thienen-Adlerflycht, Christoph, *Graf Leo Thun als nachjosephinischer Vorkämpfer eines aufgeklärten Konservativismus*, [Count Leo Thun as post-josephinian pioneer of a enlightened conservatism], in Zellenberg, Ulrich (Hg.), *Konservative Profile. Ideen & Praxis in der Politik zwischen FM Radetzky, Karl Kraus und Alois Mock*, [Conservative characters. Ideas

and practice in politics between FM Radetzky, Karl Kraus and Alois Mock], Graz/Stuttgart, 2003, pp. 103-168; Valenta, Aleš, *Leo Thun [Leo Thun]*, in „Střední Evropa. Revue pro středoevropskou kulturu a politiku“ [Central Europe. Revue for central european culture and politics], 1993, 31, pp. 71-81.

¹⁹ Georgiev, Jiří, *Heinrich Jaroslav Clam-Martinić und „Selfgovernment“ Österreich*, [Heinrich Jaroslav Clam-Martinić and „Selfgovernment“ in Austria], in „Etudes danubiennes“, 2003, 19, pp. 75-86; Höbelt, Lothar/Georgiev, Jiří, *Graf Heinrich Clam-Martinić und Kaiser Franz Joseph: Mißverständnisse unter Konservativen*, [Count Heirich Clam-Martinić and Emperor Francis Joseph: Misunderstandings among conservatives], in Zellenberg, Ulrich (Hg.), *Konservative Profile. Ideen & Praxis in der Politik zwischen FM Radetzky, Karl Kraus und Alois Mock*, [Conservative characters. Ideas and practice in politics between FM Radetzky, Karl Kraus and Alois Mock], Graz/Stuttgart, 2003, pp. 169-197.

²⁰ Hlavačka, Milan, *Sketch of a Political Biography of Jiří Kristian Prince of Lobkowitz*, in Havránek, Jan/Svatoš, Michal (Hg.), *Magister Noster*, Prague, 2005, pp. 343-351.

²¹ Tomášek, Libor, *Karel III. Schwarzenberg. K politické činnosti české šlechty v šedesátých letech 19. století [Karl III. Schwarzenberg. About the political activities of Bohemian nobility in the 1860s]*, in „Jihočeský sborník historický“ [South Bohemian compilation], 1994, 63, pp. 101-113.

²² Melville, *Adel und Revolution...*, pp. 221-222.

²³ Leo Thun to Caroline Thun, 10th and 14th December 1848, quoted from Melville, *Adel und Revolution in Böhmen...*, p. 222.

²⁴ Státní oblastní archiv v Třeboni, branch Jindřichův Hradec, Czernin family archive, diary of Eugen Czernin, 2nd June 1862.

²⁵ Státní oblastní archiv v Litoměřicích, branch Děčín, Thun family archive, A3 XXI E219, Eugen Czernin to Leo Thun, 11th October 1865.

²⁶ Tomek, Wáclaw Wladiwoj, *Paměti z mého života. Díl I [Memories from my life. Part I]*, Prague, 1904, p. 470; Tobolka, Zdeněk V., *Jak došlo k sblížení Dra. F. L. Riegera s Hr. J. J. Clamem-Martinićem [How it came to the acquaintance of doctor F. L. Rieger and Count J. J. Clam-Martinić]*, in „Nová Česká Revue“ [New Czech Revue], 1994, 2, pp. 496-516.

²⁷ Řezník, *Elitenwandel...*, p. 76. Wanks assumption, „that the Bohemian nobility turned ‚national‘ after the introduction of constitutional government in Austria in 1861“, seems too extensively. (Wank, Solomon, *History of European Ideas*, 1992, 15, pp. 589-596, here p. 589.)

²⁸ Programme of the conservative club in the Bohemina diet, 1863 (Státní oblastní archiv v Litoměřicích, branch Děčín, Thun family archive, A3 XXI, E 156).

²⁹ Státní oblastní archiv v Třeboni, Schwarzenberg family archive, n. 191, N-d 74-77.

³⁰ Státní oblastní archiv v Litoměřicích, branch Děčín, Thun family archive, A3 XXI, E 248, Leo Thun to Anton Auersperg, 28th September 1866.

³¹ Státní oblastní archiv v Litoměřicích, branch Děčín, Thun family archive, A3 XXI E 264, Leo Thun to Anton Auersperg, 24th January 1867.

³² Leo Thun to Friedrich Thun, 23rd March 1861, quoted from Melville, *Adel und Revolution in Böhmen...*, p. 35.

³³ See for example Státní oblastní archiv v Litoměřicích, branch Děčín, Clary-Aldringen family archive, n. 350, Leo Thun to Edmund Clary-Aldringen, 4. 3. 1864.