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Enlightenment as the Origin of Modern Nation? Case 'Bohemia'

Dissertation project called 'Enlightenment as the Origin of Modern Nation?' is part of long lasting discussions about formation of modern European nations, which has been carried out since the end of 19th century. In the area of Central Europe, very influential concept of Miroslav Hroch has enforced. Almost fifty years ago, his notion of modern nation brought a productive periodization of its history, which was based on comparative studies of so called 'small nations' (Norwegians, Estonians, Czechs etc.). He divided the process of modern nation's creation into three phases, that he called A, B and C. Phase A took place in the second half of 18th century and was connected with enlighten efforts to maximize human knowledge. So the scholars studied history, culture and language of their fatherland, just to know them. Next generation, during phase B, was not satisfied with these efforts and started to agitate and influence other people so they take the values of fatherland not only as a subject of notion but as a goal of revival and revitalization. Final phase C started there, where masses of people accepted their own language, culture and history as signs of membership of a nation. Signs, which differed them from other people, respectively other nations. A modern nation was born. And the main question of following thesis is: what was actually the so called phase A, or in what sense can we treat 'the' Enlightenment as the origin of modern nations?

Miroslav Hroch himself adds to his ideas of the phase A, that further research must be undertaken in this field. And here comes the following thesis. There has been much written on case of Enlightenment, about whether it was just one 'the Enlightenment' or many regional 'Enlightenments'. It is very hard to add something productive to it. However, this thesis is not a contribution to enlightenment-discussions themselves, it is rather one to formation of modern European nations. Therefore it does not assume a priori a notion of what Enlightenment is, on the contrary, it starts at the end. The starting point is situated to the present times and widely spread representations of the beginning of 'National Revival'

in the Czech Republic as an illustrative case. Miroslav Hroch is the tip of an iceberg, intellectually very sophisticated one, but the structural background of Hroch's concept can be 'archaeologically' traced back to the final phase of Czech National Revival in the second half of 19th century. This structure can be described like this: the end of 18th century, due to enlighten scholars as Josef Dobrovský, František Martin Pelcl or Nicolas Adaukt Voigt, prepared the later national movement, because they created the roots from which Czech modern nation could grow. Whether historians of this epoch in the two following centuries were conservative and put emphasis on continuities between previous Baroque times and nascent nation, or whether they were Marxists and could not accept such an idea, all of them more or less agreed that in those times 'something had happened'. And the meaning of this 'something' is the subject of presented project.

The upper described idea cannot be followed in its vast extension. Therefore there have been chosen three phenomena as concrete examples to be analysed – historiography, language and aesthetics.

1) Historiography. If we examine the notion of history in the second half of 18th century, which is sometimes concisely called 'Historiography of Enlightenment', we can easily see that there was a great claim on totality of world's history (Weltgeschichte). The greatest of those thinkers – Kant, Herder, Hegel, Voltaire, Montesquieu, etc. – always argued that a single history of a person or a nation is part of a whole and this whole cannot be reduced as a product of some uncertain future progress, but it is a core of understanding of history itself. This sense for totality was accepted by many scholars even in Bohemia. But 50 years later, looking at work of František Palacký as the most influential Czech historian, we cannot overlook a strong particularity which stands in the middle of his conception of nation's history. The shift between 1750-1850, which is obvious, must be taken seriously not only as some by-product but as a founding ground of new-coming nation. To be created, the new nation had to forget the thinking of totality.

2) Language. Language was a central problem of National Revival, because it was one of the most important signs of any living national group. Still, at the end of 18th century it was not so simple and obvious. There were many people, who felt to be 'Czech' and lovers of their fatherland, but simultaneously they were speaking and writing in German or Latin (Josef Dobrovský, Nicolas Adaukt Voigt). Czech language was only a subject of study for them, not a signal of belonging. However, in 1806, Josef Jungmann (a leading teacher of Czech language) wrote a fictional dialogue of two persons, defending Czech language as a

key manifestation of person's Czechhood. This text became one of the keystones of Czech national argumentation for a long time. This change must be understood along with the European debates about 'origins of language' (Rousseau, Hammann, Herder, etc.).

3) Aesthetics. Art, Taste, Beauty. These categories influenced shifts of modern European society more than we usually think today. Immanuel Kant or Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel wrote a special book on this topic and debates about art and its role in changing society were on the agenda. Two great historians, mentioned František Palacký and his German colleague Heinrich Luden, were strongly influenced by aesthetic theories and both of them expressed their ideas in special contributions. The question 'what was the role of aesthetics in concepts of mankind history' is still hardly answered, even though philosopher Jan Patočka tried to answer it in former Czechoslovakia many years ago. It must be explored how the general and abstract theories of art determined the historical 'stories' of a national art and of a national spirit printed in it.

Methodologically, the project comes from a tradition of *Begriffsgeschichte* as formulated by Reinhart Koselleck or Michel Foucault. The aim is to be put on the 'change of content and meaning' of chosen phenomena: history, fatherland, art, nation, language, etc. This methodology offers possibilities to grasp both continuities and discontinuities on strictly descriptive level without being ideological.

Even though this project looks as a particular contribution to Czech history, its ambition is higher. The case of Bohemia is only a mean to grip of wider view of national and nationalistic issues at least in the space of Central Europe. The questions, which should be answered, will lead up to rethinking of process of modern (Central-) European nations' formation with accent on its origins as expressed mainly by Miroslav Hroch. The project is to bridge the debates about whether so called Enlightenment was or was not the main origin of modern nationality and nationalism. It is rather to be confronted with idea that modern nations were 'born' from changes of the 18th century's end and from their betrayal at the same time. Classics would probably call it 'Dialectic of Enlightenment'.

There are more questions and problems than their solutions but this is the beauty of science. It is the way of cognition, was a never ending trying.