

## Oszkár Jászi and the challenge of the idea of a democratic nation-state

Oszkár Jászi (1875-1957) was a well-known Hungarian political thinker, social scientist and one of the best experts on the problem of Central European nationalities. The first liberal nationalist period (ending in 1919), which he experienced, was full of events, polemics and challenges. He tried to react to these challenges and worked out his own theory of the Hungarian multinational state and joined the discussion on Central Europe. Jászi queried the different plans for the federalisation of the Habsburg Monarchy and the national myth of the French and the Russian Revolution. He was challenged by the great Utopian ideal of eliminating conquest and war by the idea of national self-determination of the nations. In what follows, we will survey his views on the phenomenon of the Western democratic nation-state and his ideas on the creation of a multinational state in the Hungarian Kingdom, based on common rights and duties and cultural (linguistic) freedom for all members. We will also present how Jászi gradually changed these ideas with the organization of a confederate multinational democratic state in Hungary and of a confederation of democratic states in Central Europe. We will present further his ideas on the organization of a federate democratic system of states in Central Europe after 1919, which he preferred over the small nationalist nation states.

### I. The liberal nationalist

#### 1. *Against the ethnic conception of the nation-state*

Oszkár Jászi,<sup>1</sup> in the first liberal nationalist period of his life, represented the most democratic form of liberal nationalism. He rejected the forcible

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<sup>1</sup> About Jászi see Holger Fischer: Oszkár Jászi und Mihályi Károlyi. Ein Beitrag zur Nationalitätenpolitik der bürgerlich-demokratischen Opposition in Ungarn von 1900 bis 1918 und ihre Verwirklichung in der bürgerlich-demokratischen Regierung von 1918 bis 1919. München 1978; Oszkár Jászi: Magyar kálvária – magyar feltámadás. München 1969, Budapest 1984 (Introductory by István Borsody, 1-11); István Borsody: The Tragedy of Central Europe. New Haven 1980. In Hungary György Litván and Péter Hanák published and analysed Jászi's life-work: Péter Hanák: A kelet-közép-európai nyomorúság okairól. Egy dunatáji hazafi testamentuma. In: Oszkár Jászi: A Habsburg Monarchia felbomlása. Budapest 1983, 5-61; Péter Hanák: Jászi Oszkár dunai patriotizmusa. Budapest 1985; György Litván: Egy régi könyv időszerűsége. In: Oszkár Jászi: A nemzeti államok kialakulása és a nemzetiségi kérdés. Válogatás. Ed. György Litván. Budapest 1986, 9-57.

assimilation policy and the nationalism of the Hungarian state. He was for the emancipation of the nationality languages and cultures as the precondition for the small language groups (nationalities) to be able to understand other languages and to contact people speaking other languages and representing other cultures. He rejected the ethnic principle and the ethnic conception of nation and state, dominating Central European society. He believed that the acceptance and the use of the notion »ethnic« by sociology in the case of the national movement was false because the human race was one race. Biologically, the different ethnics did not represent different races, unable to co-operate, but different languages which, however, were learnable. He believed that this false name deformed and confused the original goals of the national movement in Central Europe which was the democratisation of the existing states by fighting for the preconditions of a democratic association policy among different languages and cultures. The ethnic conception covered a completely false idea on nation and state from the historical point of view of the democratic state development. Jászi rejected organizing states or giving political rights on the basis of ethnic or linguistic curiosities. He rejected changing the place of law in the state by popular culture, language, customs, tradition or other curiosities. He thought that the rights belonged to the individual citizens. Thus Jászi was for the organization of democratic states in Central Europe. Therefore, to understand the phenomenon of the democratic Western nation-state, and to give ideas on how to implement it in the multinational, ununified, undemocratic and economically underdeveloped Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy, was a great challenge for him.

## *2. The phenomenon of nation-state*

For Jászi the nation was an indefinable historical and ideological phenomenon. In his view the idea of the nation was the product of a long-term development of states in Western Europe. He presented the Western nation-states as rational and associational territorial states based on citizens' common rights and duties. The economic and social development, the fight for interests among the different social groups and peoples speaking different languages lasted for centuries and resulted finally in balanced democratic political systems. To understand the secrets of their success and to repeat their examples was a real challenge for the Central European reformers after the French Revolution. Before the First World War this was one of the main subjects of Jászi, too. In his book, entitled "The origins of the national states and the nationality question" (1912)<sup>2</sup>, Jászi gives a large comparative view on the development of states in the course of history

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<sup>2</sup> Oszkár Jászi: *A nemzeti államok kialakulása és a nemzetiségi kérdés*. Budapest 1912.

from the Ancient World till his age. He analyses the emergence of the English and the French nation-states, and compares their development with the historical and social developments of the Habsburg Empire and the Hungarian Kingdom. Jászi actually sought for answers to the following questions:

1. What is a nation-state?
2. Why didn't the Habsburgs succeed in a field where Western states were so successful? Why was the Habsburg dynasty unable to create a political unity on the basis of a compact linguistic, and national unity? Why could a linguistic national unity not develop in Hungary?
3. How did the Western dynasties and the nation-states solve the problem of emancipation of the smaller incorporated language groups in the course of history?
4. In what sense was the Western democratic nation-state an example for the multinational, ununified Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy which took a different economic, social and state development in the age of the nation-states?

Regarding the formation of the Western nation-states, Jászi was influenced by the nationalist historiography which presented a picture of European nations as slowly emerging and asserting themselves in territorial states.<sup>3</sup> At the same time he emphasized that England and France, in the early Middle Ages, were states of extreme racial and linguistic complication like the Habsburg Empire or the Hungarian Kingdom, and in the formation of the English and the French nation-states the role of the ruling dynasties was predominant. The kings, in the majority of cases, allied with the well-developed cities against the feudal nobility and successfully eliminated feudalism. The dynastic states, based on a well-developed bureaucratic apparatus and strong military power, gradually incorporated outlying regions into their power. In the course of history the Western ruling dynasties succeeded in making an economic and administrative unity out of the feudal particularism. Consequently, Jászi thought that it is more or less true that the states of complete national unity, as the starting points of the modern nation-states, were created by the dynasties fighting against feudalism. The bourgeoisie played an important role in this process and continued the modernization of the states by fighting for democratic reforms. The democratic political system of the Western states gradually emerged, and functioned as a tool for the peaceful coexistence of different languages and cultures within the state. Democracy and the system of democratic self-government which were great achievements of the Western state development were highly regarded by Jászi. However, he also remarked that although the process of »grouping in nation« was a natural historical process motivated by the developing capitalist economic forces,

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<sup>3</sup> Elie Kedourie: *Nationalism*. New York 1960, 77.

the ideology based on the bourgeois culture had taken its ambitious and resolute character from the military and bureaucratic elements of the dynastic political culture which had played an important role in the process of Western nation formation.<sup>4</sup>

Analysing the development of the nation-states Jászi did not forget some facts, which were in contrast with the nationalist point of view, namely

- the dynastic states were far from being nations;
- the European society of states has developed a great diversity of governments and constitutions in the course of history; it was not a society of nations composed of nation-states as presented by the nationalist ideology;
- the Western state development has actually proved that nations are hard to define, as a common scheme of national development never existed.

Jászi could see that in reality the Western democratic states were the products of a permanent and successful process of social modernization and the policy of rational association of the different social forces, motivated by individual interests. This process resulted in the following main characteristics of the Western model of nation-state: historic territory, legal-political community, legal-political equality of members, common economy, common civic culture, and common language and ideology.<sup>5</sup> On the basis of these characteristics, Jászi concluded that the phenomenon of Western nation-states contained two strongly connected parts: a political and a cultural one. The political part belonged to the state's civil organization, based on the system of democracy. On the other hand, the cultural part of the nation-states, and its relationship to the state, was always the subject of debates in multilingual and multicultural Western states; indeed, it was also the starting point for the phenomenon of undemocratic nationalism. In other words, the Western nation-states represented democracy and nationalism at the same time. The confusion between state and nation was possible. Everything depended on the democratic forces' balancing power.

Jászi, comparing the Western and the Central European development, searched for the above-mentioned basic components of the democratic nation-states in the Habsburg Empire and in the Hungarian Kingdom. As the most important difference between the development of the Western nation-states and the Habsburg Empire, Jászi emphasized that the Habsburg Empire was territorially and linguistically not unified and its society remained more feudal and conservative. Although the enlightened emperors began to modernize the empire, they did not really succeed in eliminating feudalism because feudal particularism was too strong and the towns' and

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<sup>4</sup> Jászi: *A nemzeti államok* (1912) 93.

<sup>5</sup> Anthony D. Smith: *National identity*. London 1991, 11.

the bourgeoisie's development too weak. They could not create a linguistic, economic, legal, administrative, and jurisdictional unity from the empire.<sup>6</sup> Jászi believed that the Habsburg society was retarded by almost 150-200 years behind the Western economic and social development because of different reasons: for example, the more mixed ethnographical and cultural basis, the influence of the Byzantine culture, the backward development of the towns, the continuous feudal anarchy, the long Spanish orientation, the Turkish occupation which, for more than two hundred years, kept an important part of the monarchy under a foreign cultural structure. Further, the Habsburg dynasty could not defeat the conservative and strong Hungarian feudal aristocracy. Consequently the Hungarian Kingdom could save its constitutional independence under the rule of the Habsburg emperors, too, who became the kings of the Hungarian Kingdom.

In Jászi's view the Hungarian Kingdom was a feudal society administered by an ancient county system as a result of the weakness of the centralization and incorporation policy of the Hungarian and later of the Habsburg kings. Because of the general economic backwardness of the country, dominated by serfdom, the towns remained weak and they could not represent enough support for the kings in their fights against the feudal forces. The feudal anarchy and particularism finally resulted in the collapse of the Hungarian Kingdom in 1526 and the Ottoman occupation. In Jászi's view it was the Habsburg dynasty which, after an almost two centuries long wartime period, succeeded in liberating Hungary from the Ottoman rule and unified the territory of the country. Jászi believed that the centralization policy of the Habsburg dynasty played a progressive role in the fight against feudalism and in the modernization of the economic and administrative life in the Hungarian Kingdom. He emphasized that the enlightened Habsburg rulers played an important role in laying the foundations of the Western characteristics of a modern state (modern economy, administration, education, and legal system) in the whole empire including Hungary.<sup>7</sup> But they did not succeed to create the frameworks of a nation-state. The Hungarian Kingdom also could not become a unified state during history. On the contrary, the population of Hungary became more multinational and mixed as a result of the necessary settlement policy in the wasted territories in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the whole ethnical map of the country was changed. It caused extra difficulties regarding the future chances of a democratic national state-type development after the French Revolution which opened a process of long disintegration driving the Monarchy from crisis to crisis.

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<sup>6</sup> *Jászi: A nemzeti államok* (1912) 11-13, 24.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, 289.

Jászi highly regarded the movement of the Hungarian liberal nationalist nobility for the modernization and democratization of the Hungarian Kingdom and the whole Habsburg Empire in the Reform period from 1830 to 1848. Influenced by the ideas of the French Revolution, on basis of the constitutional independence of the Hungarian state, they fought for the creation of a Hungarian democratic nation-state based on equal rights and duties for everybody. Their social programme emphasized the necessity of the elimination of feudalism and serfdom. History proved that the programme of a democratic Hungarian nation-state was too idealistic because the necessary components of a democratic nation-state could not develop in the course of history. Even in the period of Jászi, the most important difference from the Western development manifested in the lack of a significant development of towns and bourgeoisie and the phenomenon of *latifundia* which represented the second appearance of serfdom. Jászi, for example, believed that the Hungarian Kingdom politically, culturally and economically was less developed than England and France in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. To give a chance for the Hungarian democratic nation-state it had to make up for about 200 years lost time.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, it needed to pursue a democratic assimilation policy as following the French Revolution when the national idea became dominant and people no longer accepted the feudal forcible assimilation policy or undemocratic nationalism in the multinational Hungarian Kingdom.

### *3. The problem of a liberal assimilation policy*

The birth of the nationality problem which appeared in language conflicts and the totally unreasonable phenomenon of »language war« in the Hungarian Kingdom was the result of the economic and social backwardness of the multinational country where toleration and democracy could not be developed as organising principles of the association policy among people. In Hungary, the nationalities were not assimilated and they lived in isolated and uneducated language groups all over the country. The example of the Western democratic nation-states suggested to the liberal nationalists the necessity of unifying the country's territory under the domination of one common language and of achieving the system of common rights and duties for everybody. Consequently, the question of how to assimilate democratically the non-Magyar speaking people soon emerged. The Hungarian French oriented reform nobility, following the French example, emphasised the creation of a democratic Hungarian state based on equal political rights and duties for everybody. They did not really deal with the other language groups because they believed that democracy would

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, 313-315.

automatically solve this problem. As an example, Jászi mentioned that Kosuth, the most influential Magyar national leader, thought that the Hungarian state language on basis of democratic rights and institutions would overshadow without problems every other languages in the Hungarian Kingdom.<sup>9</sup>

History did not prove this belief. Jászi explains this by saying that in the case of bigger isolated settled language groups the mother tongue served as the mediator between the different languages and cultures.<sup>10</sup> It meant that the isolated language groups living in Hungary could learn Magyar or other languages and could communicate only by means of their mother tongue. At the same time, the demands of the nationality groups showed that the nationalities continued to represent the old type of territorial particularism. They wanted constitutional independence and aimed to become a nation with territorial autonomy. Consequently, the unassimilated nationalities of the Hungarian Kingdom represented a significant force against the democratic national state-type development based on the domination of the Magyar culture. The consequence was, that the democratic solution of the free use and development of the nationality languages became the precondition for unity and democracy in Hungary.

How to deal with the unassimilated nationalities and have their support for a democratic Hungarian multinational state? - this was the most important question for Jászi in this period. Studying the assimilation practice of the Western nation-states, Jászi concluded that the solution of the nationality problem automatically followed from the above mentioned phases of democratic nation-state development in the course of history. The dynastic incorporation policy, which was a forced assimilation policy, resulted in unified territories and linguistically unified societies. The process of democratisation of the Western states in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century ensured, in most cases, the nationalities' free cultural development. Also because of the expansive and forcible character of the dynastic assimilation policy Jászi believed that the Western democratic nation-states had to correct the undemocratic assimilation policy of the former dynastic period and they had to develop in the future in a federate and multicultural direction in spite of their linguistically unified character. Great Britain and France would become real democratic states only if every local and linguistic culture could develop in freedom.

From the assimilation practice of the Western dynasties and the democratic nation-states Jászi drew the following conclusions:

– because of historical reasons, the concept of democratic assimilation policy was not developed in the Western states before the French Revolution. The dynasties represented the feudal type forcible assimilation. So it

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<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, 321.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, 531.

could happen, for example, that the national idea appeared in Central Europe after the French Revolution as a centralization policy.

– the example of the Western democratic nation-states showed that democracy as their great historical achievement worked as the neutralizer of national conflicts in those Western states where two or more languages had to live together without a common language.

Therefore, Jászi believed that the only remedy against language conflicts was the democratisation of political life: equal political and cultural rights and duties for everybody and a democratic assimilation policy based on the personal autonomy principle. Because there was no development of a nation-state in Central Europe in the Western sense, the only progressive policy was to emphasise the creation of democratic constitutional states on the basis of the historical status quo and not on the basis of the linguistic (ethnic) principle. In his view the solution of the nationality problem which appeared in language conflicts became the most important question of the democratic state organization in Central Europe.

#### *4. Jászi's nationality programme*

During his democratic nationalist period Jászi believed that the Hungarian Kingdom had to become a democratic multinational state under domination of Magyar language and culture. At the same time he wanted to ensure the freedom of every nationality language and culture by pursuing a democratic assimilation policy. He thought that if people could not understand each other they could not cooperate. Without cooperation modern economic and political life was unimaginable. Moreover, the phenomenon of language conflicts could be used by the conservative forces to create national stereotypes covering their goals which were to keep their social status. The socio-psychological mechanism of national stereotypes based on the »friend-enemy images« could deform the whole political life of an undemocratic state and produce the phenomenon of nationalism. The different language groups as a defence began to demand territorial autonomy which was the means of the former tolerant (but not democratic) state organization. Therefore, Jászi believed that in the age of nation-states the nationalities instead of the old-type territorial autonomy which resulted in isolation had to demand and accept modern democratic minority rights and self-government. In a democratic state, this was the way to safeguard their mother tongue and culture and, at the same time, by studying another language, to be involved in the regional or country-wide cooperation if they wanted.

This was also Eötvös' conclusion, when he, after rejecting the French example of centralised nation-state in multinational states, consulted the ideas of the tolerant Protestant religious state organization and finally de-

veloped his conception on the personal principle. Regarding the reconstruction of the Hungarian state structure with satisfying the demands of nationalities, Jászi continued the ideas of Eötvös' state-philosophy of self-government and free cultural associations of people as nationalities.<sup>11</sup> Like Eötvös, he emphasised that the Hungarian Kingdom had to develop into a multinational state based on democratic principles. He also rejected the country's division by creating independent autonomous national territories because it would be no longer suitable for democratic states based on equal political rights and duties for all members. Further, he emphasized the necessity to insure the nationalities' free cultural development and free use of the mother tongue as basic human rights. He also fought against every kind of forcible assimilation. As the first step of the solution of nationality problems, Jászi emphasized the necessary implementation of the Nationality Law of 1868 in Hungary, which he considered to be a liberal and human law ensuring the development of cultural and national life of nationalities.<sup>12</sup> He demanded as a minimum programme good schools, self-government, good administration in the mother tongue for everybody and the freedom to develop the nationality languages and cultures in a constitutional state.<sup>13</sup>

##### *5. The national movement as the movement of integration*

His minimum programme was the starting point of his great plan for mankind's process of integration. Jászi actually believed that the national movement was the movement of the organic economic and cultural association among people based on the principles of democracy. It was the movement of gradual involvement of everybody in the increasingly developed economic life of larger and larger territories. Education in mother tongue made it possible for the minorities to join the larger national culture and the national culture was the means of joining the international sphere. In fact, it meant that everybody had to be bilingual or multilingual.

In Jászi's conception, the whole human history was the history of a process of integration by creating always increasing communities. It was not the movement of fragmentation but of integration – the movement of economic and cultural unity. He spoke about world history as a vast process of assimilation and of creating larger and larger united states.<sup>14</sup> He emphasized that the aim of people to organise themselves according to their nationality originated in human nature. Democratic nationalism was a

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<sup>11</sup> Oszkár Jászi: Eötvös állambölcselete és politikája. In: Huszadik század 28 (1913) 337-345.

<sup>12</sup> Jászi: A nemzeti államok (1912) 511-512; Oszkár Jászi: The dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy. London 1929, 316.

<sup>13</sup> Jászi: A nemzeti államok (1912) 524.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, 228.

necessary period in the bourgeois capitalist development and it was present where ever capitalism changed feudal particularism. Its task was to eliminate the isolation and to integrate the countries' territories into one economic and cultural unity. Consequently, the different nations and nationalities did not want to isolate themselves. On the contrary, they wanted to associate with the developing economic life around them.

Jászi's conception on the national movement as the movement of integration is naturally a question of faith. Nothing and nobody can prove it, furthermore reality proved the opposite working of the national principle. As a liberal nationalist he participated in the classical idea of the world's future integration, the national principle aiming to prove his programme this way, which was to safeguard the integrity of the Hungarian Kingdom as a democratic multinational state and to solve the nationality problem with general democracy. Thus Jászi created a theory which made it possible for him to regard Hungary as a historically developed unity. At the same time, he proved for himself that the nationalities did not want to secede.<sup>15</sup> A few years later, in 1919, he could see that this belief was false.

#### 6. Jászi's discussions on Central Europe

From his belief in history as a process of integration which starts with the association of the small linguistic communities into bigger nation-states and ends with larger international confederate or federate unities, was a logical consequence that Jászi was for the Central Europe plan of Naumann (1915).<sup>16</sup> He hoped to save and to develop the Hungarian Kingdom in the framework of this imagined democratic Central European Union. Naumann's project was based on the historical status quo, on the confederation of the historical states in Central Europe, on personal autonomy and local self-government. All this was in harmony with Jászi's ideas which actually visualised a kind of Central Europe as the pattern for peaceful, democratic development of the Central-European people, a bulwark against Russia and a step towards the European Union. Hungary would become a bridge to the Balkans and a major factor in Central-European economies and politics.<sup>17</sup> Jászi's conception aiming to defend the unity of the Hungarian Kingdom was in harmony with the general trend of the imperialistic culture of his age.

Jászi, who was in favour of the Hungarian Kingdom's integrity and the Magyar cultural domination in Hungary's territory, definitely rejected the »Groß-Österreich« plan of Bauer and Renner, both Austrian social democ-

<sup>15</sup> Hanák: Jászi, 54-55.

<sup>16</sup> Friedrich Naumann: Central Europe. London 1916.

<sup>17</sup> The speech of Jászi: *Huszadik század* 33 (1916) 450, 459-461. The material of the discussion on Central Europe: *Huszadik század* 33 (1916) 409-533.

matic leaders. He believed that they, in the framework of a centralised German »Staatenstaat« wanted to realize the national autonomy of all people living in the empire.<sup>18</sup> Jászi's main objection was that Renner and Bauer ignored the national consciousness of Germans, Magyars, Czechs and Polish in this period when the national idea was not only a simple cultural and ethnographic connection but an effort to unite the national settlements to an independent nation-state. The imagination of Renner on a super-state could not be acceptable for the warring nations while he completely ignored the historically developed nations and their states. These nations would have perhaps been inclined to combine their independent nation-states with the others in a confederation but not in a federation of linguistic (ethnic) communities.<sup>19</sup> Thus the first step could only be a »Bundesstaat« and not a »Nationalitätenbundesstaat«.

Considering this, it is understandable why Naumann's plan was more attractive to Jászi. Naumann stressed that the reconstruction of the Monarchy could be based, in the beginning, only on the historical status quo. The first step would be a confederation of Germany, Austria and Hungary as independent nation-states based on the system of personal autonomy and local self-government. This was more acceptable to Jászi than the federalism of Renner.

Jászi criticized the linguistic (ethnic) principle, too. In this way all the old historical and economical organisms of the area would be destroyed and people would be rearranged in nationally homogeneous territories made by rule inside of a united Great-Austria. For him this meant a new variant of the old »Groß-Österreich« conception aiming to preserve the German hegemony.

Jászi believed that the centuries' old historical and economical development and social traditions could not be ignored by reconstructing the Habsburg Monarchy.<sup>20</sup> He stressed that it would be necessary to proceed from the real historical situation of the Dual-Monarchy and build up the new democratic reforms on this basis step by step.

### 7. Jászi's confederation period

After the Bolshevik revolution, Jászi did not continue to support Naumann's plan. He understood well that the Russian revolution and the Bolshevik-proposed national model would be an attractive model for the oppressed nations in the Habsburg Monarchy. Jászi also realized that the most important propagandist and distributor of Bolshevism in the Habs-

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<sup>18</sup> Oszkár Jászi: *Der Zusammenbruch des Dualismus und die Zukunft der Donaustaaten*. Wien 1918, 118-119.

<sup>19</sup> Jászi: *Zusammenbruch*, 117; *Jászi: Dissolution*, 180.

<sup>20</sup> Jászi: *Dissolution*, 31-34.

burg Monarchy would be the declaration of the principle of national self-determination in the form of secession by the Bolsheviks. This is why the idea of national self-determination became the main point of the ideological war among the politicians of the great powers.<sup>21</sup> Jászi began to search for new ways and new orientations.

When Wilson, as the representative of the prototype of the modern democratic civilisation, appeared on Europe's political scene, Jászi stood before the strongest challenge of his life. Actually, he always regarded the democratic federal state structure of the United States of America as an example. Wilson gave general ideas for the Central European politicians emphasizing that the solution of the linguistic (ethnic) problems was their task. In the framework of this new orientation, Jászi summarized his meaning on the nationality question and its importance from the point of view of the social and individual development in the review 'Twentieth Century' (*Huszadik század*, 1918).<sup>22</sup> He repeated his unbroken faith in the assimilation process of history, in which the period of the nation-states was a necessary step. Naturally, it was not the last period in history. The process of association continued. The last phase had to be the world-state based on rational autonomy of every state. Concerning the nationality groups he emphasized that the aim of every nationality group was to create their independent national life. While the situations of the nationality groups were different, there was no general rule, only guiding principles leading in the direction of humanisation of the national principle as the precondition of the further world integration process.

In Jászi's theory these general basic principles are the following:

1. It is desirable, even indispensable, to create new nation-states everywhere where it is possible, – where there are the conditions of an independent life.

2. Where the conditions of independent state-making are not present, for example, in the case of a mixed population or if a nationality group is already integrated into a state etc. the interest of a progressive policy is to stop the creation of independent states incapable of survival and to maintain the economically, geographically and culturally co-operating old states.

Jászi mentioned three further criteria for the creation of a new state:

1. 1. Is the state economically and culturally capable of an independent national life, i. e. is the state capable of resisting becoming a »Pufferstaat« among the rival great powers.

1. 2. Is it really the solution of the nationality problem and is it not the cause of a new conflict.

<sup>21</sup> Jászi: Zusammenbruch, 14-15.

<sup>22</sup> Oszkár Jászi: A nemzetiségi kérdés a társadalmi és az egyéni fejlődés szempontjából. In: *Huszadik század* 38 (1918) 91-111.

1. 3. The new state should not destroy functioning old states which work together better than the new one.

From this programme it is clear that Jászi continued to represent the idea of integration of Hungary (point 2 and 3) but there was a concrete step in the direction of the confederation of independent states (point 1). Regarding those nationalities which could not create a new state, he emphasized that, in their case, it was necessary to enable their life economically and culturally as an independent state (autonomy). Jászi's minimal programme included the possibility for great masses of people to use their mother tongue. At the same time he realized that there was not a general method for solving the »nationality question«. The solution always depended on the local situation. As maximum programme he accepted the personal autonomy plan of Renner, which he thought to be brilliant from the national point of view in multinational territories with mixed population, while it organized every nationality in the state as legal units after the example of the system of church autonomy. Thus it was possible to associate and to organize schools, to develop the national culture and defend the people. But he continued to reject Renner's views on a centralized federal structure in the future. Jászi emphasized that the solution of the nationality problem had to be a permanently developed process in the democratic state organisation.

Under the influence of Wilson's ideas in his Danubian Confederation Plan published in October 1918, Jászi gave a programme for the reconstruction of the Habsburg Empire. He actually renewed (with some modifications) the famous programme of the Danubian Confederation of Kossuth<sup>23</sup> and regarded it as a basic idea of his plan.<sup>24</sup> Agreeing with Károlyi,<sup>25</sup> Jászi proposed creating a new balance among the nations of the Monarchy and the Balkan within the framework of a Danubian Confederation. He proposed creating a confederation of the five historical states (Austrians, Magyars, Czechs, Poles, and Serb-Croats [Illyria]). He wanted to ensure the full autonomy of every nation: where it was possible by territorial autonomy, where not by means of personal cadastrals as in the idea of Renner.

<sup>23</sup> *Le projet de Kossuth concernant la question des nationalités 1851*. In: *Études d'Histoire Comparée*, Nouvelle Série 1 (1943) 1-9.

<sup>24</sup> Jászi: *Zusammenbruch*, VI.

<sup>25</sup> From the beginning of the First World War Károlyi attacked the policy of war of the German, Austrian and Hungarian government and politicians. He disliked the »Mittel-Europa« plan. His national democratic program aimed at achieving independence and democracy for Hungary. His international program represented a new orientation: instead of the German alliance he proposed the Danubian Confederation (based on Kossuth's Danubian Confederation plan), i. e., a democratic alliance among the Danubian people. Concerning Hungary he wanted to safeguard the integrity of »historical Hungary«. *Károlyi Mihály levelezése 1905-1920*. I. Ed. György Litván. Budapest 1978, 64, 119, 157-158, 160, 162, 267, 268, 444; Michael Graf *Károlyi: Gegen eine ganze Welt. Mein Kampf um den Frieden*. München 1924, 385-386.

He searched for a way of avoiding the tragic dead-lock of the independent nation-states and their nationalism in a democratic confederation of the historical nations. He wanted to present this plan as a step towards the League of Nations. Jászi's Danubian Confederation plan was in accordance with the west European ideas on the League of Nations and it intended to maintain the framework of the Habsburg Empire and save the territorial integrity of Hungary. The problem was that it was proposed too late.

In Hungary Jászi wanted to pursue the reforms within the framework of the historical frontiers of the country without federalisation of Hungary. This would give in the future too, the nationalities vast cultural and administrative autonomy on the basis of personal autonomy. Thus, concerning Hungary he maintained further his preconception regarding it as a historically united state and thinking that the Hungarian nationalities were not able and did not want to create independent states. Therefore, he rejected the federalisation of Hungary. At that time, regarding the Austrian part of the Monarchy, he preferred the federalisation. This was a miscalculation. Furthermore, all this made his whole conception clearly contradictory.

In political practice the Károlyi government, in which Jászi was the nationality minister, basically accepted Wilson's ideas on freedom and unity. They wanted a »Wilson-peace«. »Wilson-peace« meant at that time: a League of Nations instead of the old balance of power; open diplomacy instead of secret treaties; self-determination by plebiscite instead of theocracy of monarch and monarchical ambitions; a peace without victory instead of expansion.

Under the influence of the rapidly changing events, Jászi, as minister of nationality affairs, also changed his position step by step regarding the myth of Hungary's integrity: In October 1918 Jászi accepted the people's right of national self-determination, but only for the Czechs, Poles and South-Slaves (Croats, Serbs, Slovans). For the nationalities in Hungary he rejected it. Thus Jászi stopped halfway and this was an evident contradiction in his conception.<sup>26</sup>

At the end of November 1918, Jászi emphasized the necessity of reorganising Austria-Hungary based on cantons, following the Swiss model but without changing his conception on the territorial integrity of the Hungarian Kingdom.

Only at the end of 1918 Jászi accepted Hungary's federalisation following the example of the USA or Switzerland. In this republican Hungary the Magyars, Slovaks, Ruthens, Transylvanians, Serbs and Germans had to build their cantons or states with independent governments. This Hungarian Confederation would be a catalyst of a Danubian Confederation, first in the economic sense. He also recognized the nationalities' right to secede. In the middle of December Jászi and Károlyi proposed openly to Wilson

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<sup>26</sup> Fischer: Jászi, 67.

the Danubian Confederation plan which was based on the example of Switzerland, an economic and foreign political unity amongst politically independent nations.<sup>27</sup>

It was impossible to save Hungary as a democratic multinational state by Jászi's policy of democratic assimilation. History did not justify him. Later he recognized himself this fault.<sup>28</sup>

### 8. *The assessment of Jászi's liberal nationalist period*

Jászi, in his liberal nationalist period, was a contradictory thinker. It was not easy for him to find the balance between democracy and nationalism regarding the unity of the Hungarian Kingdom because he accepted the national principle in its most democratic form as a political force. He stressed that the triumph of the principle of nationality was a historical necessity and it was the reality of his age. At the same time, he believed that it was possible to deal with the principle of nationality in a democratic way. It was possible to organize the peaceful coexistence of the different nationalities in Hungary with the maintenance of the territorial integrity of the Hungarian Kingdom by the rightful implementation of the 1868's nationality law. The most important contradiction of Jászi was to continue believing in the necessity of the safeguarding Hungary's territorial integrity (historical principle) till the last moment of the Habsburg Monarchy and, at the same time, to stress the importance of the nationality principle, too. When he openly drew the necessary consequences for the Hungarian state organisation from the importance of the principle of nationality it was already too late. This contradiction was the result of his liberal nationalist approach and showed the antagonism between democracy and nationalism.

History did not prove Jászi's theory on the reconstruction of the Hungarian Kingdom into a democratic multinational state because the preconditions of a democratic nationality policy were not present. At the same time, Jászi's greatest merit was to realize that in Hungary the solution of the nationality problem was the most important problem of democracy. He

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<sup>27</sup> Basically, the government of Károlyi (in power from 31<sup>st</sup> October, 1918) wanted a peaceful agreement on the basis of the Wilsonian 14 points. They wanted to maintain Hungary till the peace conference and to solve there the nationality question on the basis of the Wilsonian principles by plebiscite. See *Duna-völgyi barátságok és viták. Jászi Oszkár Közép-Európai dossziéja*. Eds. György Litván, László Szarka. Budapest 1991, 90-103.) Today, it seems to be a mistake that the Károlyi government, including Jászi, maintained the idea of the territorial integrity of Hungary. Jászi began only under the pressure of the revolutionary circumstances to think about a confederate solution for Hungary. When he accepted national self-determination for the Hungarian nationalities it was already too late.

<sup>28</sup> Oszkár Jászi – Imre Csécsy, Oberlin, 20. November 1938. In: *Jászi Oszkár válogatott levelei*. Eds. György Litván, János J. Varga. Budapest 1991, 420-421.

emphasized that the first step to change Hungary from a feudal country into a democratic one had to be the solving of the nationality problem and the reconstruction of the country's unity. Jászi always bitterly opposed the official policy of Magyarization. He presented the horrors and dreads of Hungarian nationalism. He tried to organize Hungarian democracy against nationalism because he thought that democracy and the nationality problem could be solved in Hungary and in Eastern Europe only together. As a consequence, he stressed that, for the democratic development of Hungary, it would be necessary to solve the nationality problem by the personal principle, i.e. by ensuring national cultural autonomy, and to pave the way for the bourgeois democratic transformation of the agrarian feudalism. He was convinced that a political and social reform, especially the introduction of genuine universal suffrage and the replacement of the great Magyar landed estates by peasant property and agricultural co-operatives, was the precondition for solving the national conflicts in Hungary.

## II. The federalist

### 1. *The Utopia of Danubian patriotism*

Only after 1919, in the new situation created by the Trianon treaty, Jászi discredited his idea on the integrity of the Hungarian state and gave up his Magyar chauvinism. Reality convinced him that in Central Europe only confederate multinational states were imaginable as democratic on the basis of the status quo because of the multinational and mixed population. Breaking with the idea of nation-state, he imagined and developed the idea of a higher community consciousness in the form of the idea of Danubian patriotism.<sup>29</sup> In his exile he further developed this idea based on the necessity of regional co-operation and regional community of interest of the small nations living there.<sup>30</sup> He continued to emphasize that the only means against nationalism was the democratisation of the social life in every nation-state created after the First World War.

In the second period of his life, during the years of his exile, Jászi continued to meditate on the chances of the organization of democratic constitutional states in Central Europe. In his best-known book entitled "The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy" he summed up the causes which led to the failure of the experience of the state's federal organization in the Habsburg Monarchy. At the same time, he analysed the phenomenon of nationalism in the new age of popular sovereignty after the French revolu-

<sup>29</sup> Hanák: Jászi, 95-108.

<sup>30</sup> Jászi: Dissolution, VI.

tion. He acknowledged that the »national question« in the Habsburg Monarchy appeared as a force of mass psychosis. Often, the struggle was carried on for slogans and sentimental symbols which belonged more to the sphere of a religious creed than to the normal party and class struggle. The national aspirations were always surrounded by something mystical, something religious. Jászi believed that the main cause of this nationalistic mysticism was the Hungarian ruling circles' disregard of the nationalities' problems. The reigning nations, the so-called »state-sustaining nations« regarded only themselves as true nations, whereas those under their rule were only second-rate nations. They saw the nationalities' fight for independence through the spectacles of their ideology of supremacy. The national minorities lived mostly in an almost ghetto-like seclusion, isolated by language, customs and religion from the ruling society. This prejudiced thinking became more and more dangerous as a consequence of an absolute theoretical blindness regarding the nature and origin of national movements. The leading circles did not try to solve the problem but rather to maintain their former national privileges which they simply identified with the very interest of the state.<sup>31</sup>

Referring to the failure of the federalist ideas in the Habsburg Empire, Jászi acknowledged that the Habsburg dynasty could triumph against feudal nationalism. At the same time it did not succeed in organizing the empire's political unity on the basis of a compact linguistic and national unity, like happened in the Western nation-states. He continued to believe that the Turkish occupation, the very mixed ethnical situation, the racial, religious and national conflicts had retarded the evolution of the monarchy about two hundred years. Whereas the unifying function of the royal power in the West was carried out at a time when the racial, linguistic, and national consciousness of the great masses was not yet developed, in the Habsburg Monarchy the process of political and administrative unification went on after the French Revolution, i. e., in a period when nationalism became a conscious force.<sup>32</sup> The Habsburg rulers could not deal with the forces of the new popular and democratic nationalism which tried to reconstruct the old empire on the basis of popular sovereignty. Popular sovereignty and national self-determination signified a higher principle of political organization than the nationless absolutism and feudal assimilation policy of the Habsburgs. In the lack of democratic political and social development, a supra-national Habsburg state could not serve as a solution for the reconstruction of the multinational Habsburg Empire. Only a well-balanced federalism which could have satisfied the national aspirations of the various peoples in the monarchy based on the system of self-government could have been a solution. Finally, Jászi drew the following

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<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, 215-216.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, 31-32.

lesson from the experience of the dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy for the future Central European federative experiences: »In a period of acute nationalism the struggling nations aspired not only toward a linguistic and cultural autonomy but also toward the establishment of their nation-states on a traditional basis. The Magyars fought for the Hungarian state, the Czechs for the Czech state, the Yugoslavs for their own state, and they were not willing to abandon these ideals in the interest of a bloodless supra-national state. On the other hand it is true that the historical territories of the various nations included large national minorities and the danger was near that these new nation states would oppress their national minorities in the same manner as the dominant nations did in the dual monarchy. But the real remedy for this danger would have been, not the Utopia of a nationless supra-state (which would mean as a matter of fact a centralised German state), but a statesmanship which would have combined the new national organisms in a confederation. The sovereign power of such a confederation could have efficiently defended the national minorities by appropriately uniting them in national districts and in broader organizations on the whole territory of the confederate state.«<sup>33</sup>

## *2. Insistence on the Utopia of a federate democratic Central Europe*

After the First World War the small nation states became very nationalist. The phenomenon of undemocratic nationalism affected the whole social and political life in Central Europe. After 1918 the language conflicts continued and culminated in ethnic cleansing as the logical consequence of the working of the idea of national self-determination in undemocratic multinational nation states with mixed population. Consequently, the chances of a democratic development and co-operation were eliminated for a long time in Central Europe. Jászi mentioned that the Danubian independent nation state system created after the First World War would not be capable of surviving while the economic, political and cultural co-operation could not begin amongst them. It would be necessary to stop the national hostility. The Danubian people had to harmonise the striving for independence with the necessity of the economic and cultural co-operation among them. In order to be able to create free associations of free nations and their democratic federate states, the Danubian people had to renew themselves ideologically and morally. He stressed that in Europe peace depends on this.<sup>34</sup>

At the time of his emigration Jászi continued to organize the political forces for the creation of a peaceful and democratic Danubian system of

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, 247.

<sup>34</sup> Oszkár Jászi: A Dunai Szövetség jövője. In: *Duna-völgyi barátságok és viták* 137-144.

multinational democratic states, organized on a confederate or federate basis preserving the status quo. He believed that only the confederate or federate types of democratic states were capable of developing democratically in multinational territories with mixed population. In Central Europe the preconditions of a Western-type democratic nation-state development did not develop in the course of history. This is why they had to choose other ways of democratic state organization. The system of nation-state directed by the interest of the state caused only nationalism manifested in permanent hostilities and conflicts. Nationalism significantly diminished the chances of democracy.

Jászi, throughout his whole life, maintained his belief in the classical idea of world peace and peaceful process of world-wide integration among the people. Regarding the Western European national state-system he believed that, although democracy in Western Europe neutralized the causes of national conflicts, democratic regionalism and federalism were more suitable for the multinational character of a democratic Europe, too. Especially as it was the precondition of a better cooperation among people there. Jászi believed that in the future World Union a European Union would be necessary and in its framework a Danubian-Balcanic Union.<sup>35</sup> Jászi's ideas on a confederate multinational democratic system of states based on the status quo proved to be a Utopia but with an alternative content for the future generations to begin to associate in a democratic way in Central Europe.

### III. Conclusions

During his whole life Jászi meditated on the chances of the democratic state organisation in Central Europe in the age of nationalism because he believed that the solution of the national problem there was the question of democracy. His life can be divided into two periods: the first one was his liberal nationalist period in Hungary and the second one his federalist (regionalist) period during his long exile. In his first period Jászi was for the establishment of a democratic Hungarian multinational state with the domination of the Magyar culture. At the same time he gradually realized that the idea of nationality was a matter of domination and expansion and defence of the social status in the reality of the undemocratic Hungarian Kingdom. Democratic nationalism was deformed into undemocratic nationalism producing permanent language (ethnic) conflicts, covering social problems. He represented the idea of nationality in its most democratic form. At that time this idea did not work even in this form because in

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<sup>35</sup> The program of Jászi on the Hungarian policy in 1945: *Jászi Oszkár válogatott levelei* 475-476.

Hungary the preconditions for a Western-type nation-state did not develop. His ideas on association, co-operation and confederation among the nations of the Habsburg Empire and, at the same time, his insistence on Hungarian Kingdom's territorial integrity remained a self-justification and an escape to the classical idea on mankind's process of peaceful integration. At the same time, Jászi's ideas on making the principle of nationality more human by means of a democratic state organisation were progressive ideas in the general nationalist environment of his age.

In the second period Jászi had completely broken with his earlier liberal nationalist ideas, and with his belief in the nation-states, representing the interest of the nation as the frameworks of democratic coexistence of different language groups. He emphasized the necessity of eliminating the idea of a nation-state and banishing all conceptions which regarded it as a force organizing a political state. Nation in Central Europe appeared as a cultural phenomenon. Consequently, its role in a democratic state could only be cultural and not political. He believed that democratic organization of the state in Central Europe must be based on the idea of free association and regionalism. To begin the regional cooperation there every state had to become a confederate/federate state based on equal political and cultural rights and duties for all members. Every state had to reconstruct its structure of state following the idea of a decentralised system based on the local autonomy. There should be as much local autonomy and freedom as possible inside the non-national states in which nation and state were divided. The general democratisation of social life in every existing state was the only way to solve the national conflicts there. It was the precondition of a policy of free association. Self-determination (including national self-determination) was only in this sense understandable. This was the conclusion of a long life beginning with liberal nationalism and ending with a plan on world peace in the spirit of Immanuel Kant.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Oszkár Jászi: *World Organization for Durable Peace*. In: *Homage to Danubia*. Ed. György Litván. Boston 1995, 149-171.