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Editorial

Wendy Drozenová[1]

This special issue of *Ethics & Bioethics (in Central Europe)* originated as a result of the call for papers under the heading *Ethical issues of the nation and nationalism in Central Europe in historical contexts.*

The ongoing war in Ukraine was a natural impulse to ask ethical questions of the meaning of a nation today – questions that never can be answered judiciously without being acquainted with the specific historical and cultural background. The widely geographically understood area of Central Europe is a place of cultural intermingling and violent clashes of various influences and, with the emergence of modern nations, new ethical challenges are arising regarding how to solve relations between them. For these reasons, some specific topics concerning nation and nationalism, with regard to the region of Central Europe were suggested to be investigated, first of all the basic question of ethical justification of national revival in Central European nations, and the issues connected to it. The present collection of articles contains contributions by authors of Slavic origin – Czech, Slovak, Polish, and Ukrainian – to provide historical experience and ethical assessment of the meaning of nation for these peoples.

The introductory text of the internationally recognised Czech historian Miroslav Hroch brings a kind of prolegomena to any meaningful debate on nation and nationalism. To avoid prevalent confusion, the author provides his (today already classical) complex definition of nation and adds an explanation of the double plan of the nation's existence: as a large social group and as an abstraction and value – which can be called a "cultural construct". Nonetheless, we cannot understand the phenomena of modern European nations without knowledge of their roots, and these nations formed in different conditions. In the case of "small nations", the demand for linguistic and cultural emancipation of national movements was not just a romantic application of Herder's ideas but a prerequisite to socially and civically emancipatory efforts. On the levels of both cultural enrichment and social emancipation, we can consider these efforts a contribution to the common good.

The idea of the common good, in its relation to nation and language, is the topic of Vasil Gluchman's contribution. It is focused on Magyar and Slovak inhabitants of Hungary in the first half of the 19th century. While the Slovaks needed education and cultural development in their native language to pursue the common good as they understood it, Magyar nationalists required assimilation of all non-Magyar inhabitants of Hungary, as "Slavic is not a language of freedom or Protestantism", and in the interest of education, humanity, and civil freedom Magyar language was needed. The Magyar understanding of common good (and freedom) naturally was not acceptable for the Slovak intelligentsia and later brought about the downfall of the country.

Both Pavol Krištof and Marcel Martinkovič, in their contributions, also deal with the Slovaks in 19th century Hungary, writing about representatives of Slavic reciprocity: on Kollár and Štúr, and on Svetozár Hurban Vajanský, respectively. While Kollár's project of Slavism is based on the humanist concept of cultural reciprocity and preservation of the cultural, religious, and political diversity of the Slavs, his follower Štúr later changed his ideas to proclaim a common future for the Slavs in the Russian Empire and unity of religion in Russian Orthodoxy.

[1] Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Prague (Czech Republic); drozenova@flu.cas.cz; ORCID: 0000-0002-1479-7853.

Vajanský's pan-Slavism also identified the religious disunity of the Slavs as the greatest shortcoming: the Western form of Christianity makes the Slavs part of the West. In the Slovak national revival prevailed the idea of the mission of the Slavs to develop a more spiritual and culturally advanced civilisation.

Miloslav Bednář puts the Czech national movement in a broader historical and geopolitical context, explaining the crucial role of the belt of minor nations in Central Europe. The example of the Czech nation can illustrate the ethical and philosophical justification of the national revival of oppressed nations in this region. František Palacký, the main representative of the Czech national revival, creating a philosophy of Czech history based on values of the traditions of the Czech Reformation (which he states had already been started by the Hussite movement), was followed by the philosopher and politician Thomas Garrigue Masaryk, the founder of the Czechoslovak State. Masaryk pointed out the influence of Comenius on the German Enlightenment, namely, on Leibniz and Herder, from whom the idea of humanity was accepted and "this idea became the focal point of the Czech national revival mainstream since the beginning of the 19th century".

Thomas Garrigue Masaryk's thinking is also the focus of the contribution by Jan Svoboda, who deals with the relation of Masaryk's concept of the crisis of modern man to Czech national philosophy. Masaryk believed that this deep existential crisis was linked to the loss of religiosity: while he was a proponent of positive sciences, he did not deny the important role of religion on both the individual and social levels: "his conception of humanism and democracy, which consistently referred to the specific spiritual tradition of the Czech Reformation, cannot be perceived as a mere objective political theory", it has a metaphysical dimension.

Kateřina Šolcová continues reflections on the Czech contexts but, starting a block of texts on attitudes of Christian churches to the nation, she turns to earlier times to explain the premodern forms of national identity in the 17th century. She demonstrates how the concept of nationality was gradually moralized through ethical categories (vice of nationality and virtue of patriotism) in monastic orders and how some elements of the later formulated doctrine of the natural law of nations, which theoretically justified the demands of the Czech national revival and formed the basis of the concept of Czech history, were anticipated in it. Comparison of Comenius's and the Jesuit Bohuslav Balbín's respect for native language and interest in Czech history provide similarities, while the differences in the assessment of historical events lead to different traditions of patriotism and explanations of the meaning of Czech history.

In accordance with the ethical categories related to nation in the Catholic tradition mentioned above the role of nation is assessed by the Pope John Paul II and by Polish philosopher Tischner inspired by him, as described in contribution by Inocent-Mária V. Szaniszló. While appreciating patriotism, John Paul II also warns against nationalism, which can become an ideological justification for violence of one nation against another. Natural law is the foundation of human rights, as well as rights of nations. The first right of the nation is the right to exist, which includes the right to one's own language and culture. Every nation has the right to build its own future.

The war in Ukraine started by the Russian Federation in February 2022 gives rise to questions on many levels, including the religious level. The authors Dmytro Shevchuk, Kateryna Shevchuk, and Kateryna Khudoba inquire into issues concerning national identity and the Orthodox Church. The universal character of Christian principles does not prevent individual nations from developing national cultures, including specific religious traditions. The national traditions of Christianity in Ukraine following the period of Kyiv Christianity were disrupted by the absorption of the Church by the Moscow Patriarchate in the 17th century. It was only in the 1990s, after independence was reached, that the autocephaly Orthodox Church of Ukraine could be founded. The authors explain that the meaning of it is not just religious but cultural-national, political, and ethical as well: The Russian Orthodoxy represents a political

religion, proclaiming “Russkij mir” (Russian world/peace), it promotes Russian imperial interests and denies Ukrainians the right to be a nation. “Moral responsibility rests not only on the direct perpetrators of war crimes but also on those who inspire them”; therefore, all the proponents of the ideology of the “Russian world” are also accountable for it.

The last paper, by Krzysztof Piotr Skowroński, is of a rather different character – a philosophical essay inspired by John Lachs’ “stoic pragmatism”. This stance advocates for humanism, circles of concern, and agency (individualism with the elevated role of inner life) and proclaims a “cultural relativism” in the sense of understanding that all our ethical evaluations are made with reference to the culture to which one belongs. Skowroński elucidates the Central and Eastern European perspective of some topical narratives that totally ignore the diverse history of different realms, e.g., about “white privilege”, reminding that even the English term “slave” comes from a term meaning Slavic people taken as slaves. People in these regions were, for centuries, exploited “by the Turks (in the Balkans), the Russians (in the East), by Germans (in the west), and, even further back, by the Swedes (in the north)”. They have been colonised, oppressed, exploited, and deprived of privileges for centuries. Therefore, the author “may insist on the specificity of the situation of the region as a whole, and the current war in Ukraine only makes this specificity much more articulated”.

The contributions of this issue of Ethics & Bioethics (in Central Europe) should help readers understand the specific historical experience of the Slavic nations whose destiny is to dwell between the West and the East, between the two traditional menaces to them: Germany and Russia. These Slavic nations have common historical experience resulting in awareness that freedom and equality of rights are to be unceasingly fought for or lost. Many years of listening to totalitarian *Newspeak* made them sensitive to distinguishing between hypocritical proclamations and real deeds.