

# Negotiating National Equality in the Austrian Silesian Diet 1905-1914

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## Abstract

At the turn of the twentieth century, nationalized conflicts affected all levels of politics in the Habsburg monarchy. Since the 1890s, Polish and Czech members of the Austrian Silesian provincial diet demanded equality with Austria's German-speaking citizens, granting them the Basic Law as two of the crownlands' recognized nationalities. With the Moravian Compromise of 1905, which attempted to solve the national conflict between Czechs and Germans and ensured national equality on a provincial level, Czechs and Poles of Silesia called for electoral and language law reforms of a similar model. Despite many years of attempts, the Silesian diet found no national compromise. This article will provide an overview of the struggle for national equality and attempts at a national compromise in Silesia from the Moravian Compromise in 1905 until the closure of the provincial diet in 1914. By analyzing the stenographic minutes of the Silesian provincial diet, this article traces the attempts at national equalization and pacification, how members of the provincial parliament debated national equalization and pacification, and aims to identify the reasons for their failure of these attempts. Reforms of the administrative language laws and school politics to resolve national conflicts never concretized, although national conflicts heavily characterized these topics. The Viennese central government rejected two electoral reform drafts for their lack of measures to solve the national conflicts; further drafts never materialized. A Silesian Compromise never became realized in part due to the unwillingness and lack of interest to find a compromise on the side of the diet's German majority, which was easily able to outvote its Slavic minority and refused many of their demands out of fear of losing their hegemony.

## Introduction

The name Silesia is primarily connected with the historically Prussian or present-day Polish province, not with the region of Silesia that became part of the present-day Czech Republic. Until 1918, this small region was part of the Habsburg Monarchy and was an autonomous region in Bohemian Crownlands. The Bohemian Crown acquired the whole region of Silesia in 1331, and as such, the region came under Habsburg rule in 1526.<sup>1</sup> When Emperor Charles VI of the Holy Roman Empire died in 1740, leaving the throne to his daughter Maria Theresa, Frederick II of Prussia issued an ultimatum demanding Silesia in exchange for his approval of the Austrian succession. When Austria declined the ultimatum, Prussian troops invaded Silesia, starting a series of three wars during the years from 1740 to 1763. Eventually, the majority of Silesia became Prussian; only the duchy of Teschen (*Cieszyn/Tešín*), parts of the duchies of Troppau (*Opava*) and Jägerndorf (*Krnov*), and part of the principality of Neiße (*Nysa*) remained in the Habsburg monarchy.<sup>2</sup> These were districts of the Margravate of Moravia until 1850 when Austrian Silesia became a crownland of its own: the Duchy of Upper and Lower Silesia.<sup>3</sup> Silesia was the smallest crownland in the monarchy and one of its most densely populated. With industrialization came a decline in agriculture and an increase in coal mining.<sup>4</sup> The population of Austrian Silesia was diverse, consisting mainly of German, Polish, and Czech-speaking peoples.<sup>5</sup>

The national awakening and industrialization of the nineteenth century led to full national movements building their own networks and programs with their respective demands. Those demands differed within every national movement, but at their cores were similar interests: more autonomy for their nations or at least national and linguistic

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<sup>1</sup> Great Britain Foreign Office, ed., *Austrian Silesia*, vol. 4, Handbooks Prepared under the Direction of the Historical Section of the Foreign Office (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1920), 1-15.

<sup>2</sup> Brigitte Mazohl, "Vom Tod Karls VI. bis zum Wiener Kongress," in *Geschichte Österreichs*, ed. Thomas Winkelbauer (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2015), 293-305.

<sup>3</sup> Dan Gawrecki, "Der Schlesische Landtag," in *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848-1918. Band VII/2. Verfassung und Parlamentarismus. Die regionalen Repräsentativkörperschaften.*, ed. Adam Wandruszka, Peter Urbanitsch, and Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, vol. VII/2, *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848-1918* (Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000), 2105-7.

<sup>4</sup> Great Britain Foreign Office, ed., *Austrian Silesia*, vol. 4, Handbooks Prepared under the Direction of the Historical Section of the Foreign Office (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1920), 6, 26-32.

<sup>5</sup> While eastern Silesia was dominated by Poles and the west by Germans, the central region was dominated by Czechs except for the provincial capital Troppau. The Austrian census from 1900 shows that of the 663.470 people living in Silesia, 47 percent were German-speaking, 30 percent Polish-speaking and 22 percent Czech-speaking. Hence, the proportion of the Slavic-speaking population was slightly higher than 50 percent. This quota increased by three percent in the 1910 census. These numbers do not reflect personal national affiliation or heritage but the language of daily use, equated in Austrian censuses with nationality. The language of daily use indicated national assertiveness or hegemony rather than the population's actual national composition. Therefore, these categories remain contested as accurate representations of nationality. See Jiří Kořalka, *Tschechen im Habsburgerreich und in Europa 1815-1914: Sozialgeschichtliche Zusammenhänge der neuzeitlichen Nationsbildung und der Nationalitätenfrage in den Böhmischesen Ländern*, Schriftenreihe des Österreichischen Ost- und Südosteuropa-Instituts, Bd. 18 (Wien: München: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik; R. Oldenbourg, 1991), 126-30 and Emil Brix, *Die Umgangssprachen in Altösterreich zwischen Agitation und Assimilation: Die Sprachenstatistik in den Zisleithanischen Volkszählungen, 1880 Bis 1910*, Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Neuere Geschichte Österreichs, Bd. 72 (Wien: Böhlau, 1982), 401-3.

equality. Many Germans<sup>6</sup> of the Habsburg Monarchy simultaneously feared losing their rights to other nations and advocated for a centralist unitarian state.<sup>7</sup> The contradiction of interests led to conflicts mainly carried out on a political level, but also in cultural and even everyday life, especially the conflicts of language, as many people could not communicate with the authorities in their native language or send their children to schools according to their language.<sup>8</sup> National conflicts could manifest themselves in actions such as obstruction in the parliament, protests, boycotts, and even the destruction of schools.<sup>9</sup> To comply with Hungarian demands for more independence, the Austrian Monarchy took a drastic measure, the *Ausgleich* (Compromise), by administratively dividing the country in two parts along the Leitha River in 1867 into two states. To the east, Hungary was now its own part of the monarchy, with its own parliament and authorities. The part west of the Leitha never received an official name; Austria and Cisleithania became commonly used synonyms, and it remained a multinational state under German hegemony.<sup>10</sup> While this compromise offered a solution or at least appeasement to the conflicts with Hungary, it created an even bigger demand in other national movements for similar compromises. Because Article 19 of the Basic Law on the General Rights of Citizens from 1867 proclaimed the equality of all peoples of Cisleithania, national movements demanded that the law be fulfilled. National conflicts were primarily a struggle for equality in a German-dominated multinational state.<sup>11</sup>

In 1905, an attempt to grant the Czech population of the Margravate Moravia more equality and accurate political representation on a provincial level succeeded. The solution was a national compromise providing personal autonomy to all people of Moravia since that autonomy could not be fixed territorially. The compromise worked through reforms in electoral laws and new language laws concerning schools and authorities. The new electoral laws drastically changed the national make-up of the Moravian Diet. By separating the electorates by nationality (except for the curia of landowners who considered themselves nationally indifferent), the electoral laws attempted to represent the national proportions of

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<sup>6</sup> In the Habsburg monarchy, “German” meant, first and foremost, German-speaking. As German was the hegemonial language of the monarchy, many spoke and assimilated to German. The Jewish population poses as a prominent example; the Jewish population was acknowledged as a religious group but could not declare a Jewish native language or nationality and, therefore, was mostly identified and counted as part of the German population. The original German movement of the Habsburg monarchy was historically founded and not ethnically. With the emergence and success of other ethnic national movements, the German movement became mostly defensive, fearing being disadvantaged by the equalization of other nationals. A growing part of the German movement started to found itself on German ethnicity only, excluding other groups such as the Jewish population. See Brix, *Die Umgangssprachen in Altösterreich zwischen Agitation und Assimilation*, 403-408 and Jeremy King, “Who Is Who? National Classification in Imperial Austria, 1867–1914,” *The Journal of Modern History* 96, no. 2 (June 1, 2024): 295–98, <https://doi.org/10.1086/730026> and Ernst Bruckmüller, *Österreichische Geschichte: von der Urgeschichte bis zur Gegenwart* (Wien Köln Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2019), 436-437.

<sup>7</sup> Ernst Bruckmüller, *Österreichische Geschichte: von der Urgeschichte bis zur Gegenwart* (Wien Köln Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2019), 418–21; Gerald Stourzh, *Die Gleichberechtigung Der Nationalitäten in Der Verfassung Und Verwaltung Österreichs, 1848-1918* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1985), 1–3.

<sup>8</sup> Bruckmüller, *Österreichische Geschichte*, 420-39.

<sup>9</sup> Pieter M. Judson, *Habsburg: Geschichte eines Imperiums: 1740 - 1918*, trans. Michael Müller, 3., durchgesehene Auflage (München: C.H. Beck, 2019), 347–53.

<sup>10</sup> Börries Kuzmany, “Habsburg Austria: Experiments in Non-Territorial Autonomy,” *Ethnopolitics* 15, no. 1 (January 2016): 43-44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2015.1101838>.

<sup>11</sup> Gerald Stourzh, *Die Gleichberechtigung der Nationalitäten in der Verfassung und Verwaltung Österreichs, 1848-1918* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1985), 53-60.

the crownland. The electoral laws determined the distribution of seats by nationality.<sup>12</sup> Czech and German became both official languages of the margravate; local authorities that could not provide their services in both languages now had a translation bureau at the provincial executive committee (provincial government) available free of charge. Children were to frequent schools according to their native language; thus, Czech children had to attend only Czech and German children only German schools.<sup>13</sup> The goal in all sectors was pacification through personal separation. This did not mean a territorial redistribution and separation of population, but rather the separation of institutions and administration such as school boards or the electorates of the provincial diets by nationality. To separate the electorates, local authorities compiled national cadasters (registries) based on their perception of which nation a voter belonged to. These claims could be challenged by the person in question but also by third parties. Nationalists set out to get as many people as possible on their respective registries. Further, nationalists tried to remove people they perceived as not belonging to their nationality and national ambivalent people from their registries. To achieve that, nationalists objected to those people being on their registries. In case of an objection, the authorities had to assess the nationality of the person in question by interrogation. If not satisfied with the authorities' assessments, people could challenge it up to the Imperial Court of Justice, which happened regularly and was solved through a combination of self-declaration and objectivized criteria, so the declarations were never determined only externally.<sup>14</sup> Although those measures seem to complicate the situation even more at first glance, the Moravian Compromise eased the national conflict in the crownland and provided more equality to the Czech population.<sup>15</sup>

Silesia was no exception to the national conflicts, as it contained at least three nationalities with even more different national and regional movements. The Polish and Czech national movements highly influenced and supported their respective counterparts in Silesia. The Silesian Polish and Czech national movements expanded and cooperated in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Though, in more diverse parts of eastern Silesia, they competed, especially as Czech agitation increased there. The German movement was liberal and moderately nationalist but started to radicalize as the other movements in the province grew.<sup>16</sup> With Silesia split between the German Empire and Austria-Hungary, both national and regional movements targeted the population. In eastern Silesia, which was (as already stated) more diverse in part due to immigration from neighboring Galicia, the group of so-called Slunzaks formed, who identified neither as Czech nor as Polish, and spoke their

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<sup>12</sup> Horst Glassl, *Der Mährische Ausgleich* (München: Fides-Verl.ges, 1967), 211-15; Kuzmany, "Habsburg Austria," 47-50.

<sup>13</sup> Glassl, *Der Mährische Ausgleich*, 217-26.

<sup>14</sup> Börries Kuzmany, "Objectivising National Identity: The Introduction of National Registers in the Late Habsburg Empire," *Nations and Nationalism* 29, no. 3 (July 2023): 978–80, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12950>.

<sup>15</sup> The success of the Moravian compromise posed as an example for other crownlands. In 1909, the diet of the crownland of Bukovina achieved a national compromise. A similar electoral law was established in Bosnia in 1910. However, the defining criteria for the electoral cadasters was not nationality but rather religion, with separate Orthodox, Muslim, Catholic, and Jewish electorates. A Galician Compromise between Poles and Ukrainians was signed in 1914, though it never came to fruition because of the breakout of World War I. See Kuzmany, "Habsburg Austria," 59-61.

<sup>16</sup> Tomasz Kamusella, *Silesia and Central European Nationalisms: The Emergence of National and Ethnic Groups in Silesia, 1848-1918*, Central European Studies (West Lafayette, Ind: Purdue University Press, 2007), 213-23.

own Slavic idiom.<sup>17</sup> Especially from the perspective of local politics, it is hard to tell on which scale the national conflicts affected the population and to which extent people were leaning into national indifference.

Internal conflicts of national movements, regionalist movements, national indifference, or other perspectives of nationality did not really come up for discussion in the Silesian provincial diet. However, the three “main nationalities” (Germans, Poles, Czechs) were represented in the diet, and their conflicts were also carried out there. Mainly, the diet’s underrepresented Slavic minority, consisting of Polish and Czech deputies, struggled for their representation in attempted electoral reforms that should have become the cornerstone for a national compromise in Silesia.

### **Attempted Reforms of Electoral Laws**

The provincial diets of the Cisleithanian crownlands were established in 1861 as a means of self-government in the sectors of agriculture, schools, infrastructure, and the provincial economy.<sup>18</sup> The diets were organized in electoral classes (*curias*): at least one curia representing the great landowners, one for towns and the chambers of commerce, and one curia for the rural municipalities. Further, the diets held *ex officio* seats for provincial dignitaries like the rector of the university and the archbishops and bishops of the crownland. From 1902 on, many crownlands established a general curia that included all men who did not meet the minimum taxation rate (*Steuerleistung*) required to obtain suffrage in the other curias. However, Silesia never implemented a general curia. The ratio of people represented was uneven to their representatives. While one-third of the members represented a minority of landowners, the chambers of commerce, and the clergy, the other two-thirds represented the majority of the province’s population. The total number of members depended on the size of the crownland. By law, suffrage was not restricted to men, as women from the curia of great landowners were allowed to vote. Furthermore, the right to vote depended on a minimum taxation rate that voters had to meet.<sup>19</sup>

To settle national conflicts in elections, many crownlands reassigned communal borders to achieve more linguistically homogeneous voting districts. However, ethnic or national belonging did not necessarily coincide with physical borders. Therefore, granting personal autonomy everywhere through separated electorates and more realistic representation of national proportions became one of the main objectives of national compromises negotiated in the provincial diets.<sup>20</sup>

Silesia’s provincial diet met once or twice each year for sessions of varying durations. It consisted of 31 members, 17 of which were representatives of the towns and the rural population. Due to the rigid curia system, the deputies of those two classes were not very

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<sup>17</sup> Kamusella, *Silesia and Central European Nationalisms*, 119-21.

<sup>18</sup> Jana Osterkamp, “Vielfalt ordnen: das föderale Europa der Habsburgermonarchie (Vormärz bis 1918),” *Veröffentlichungen des Collegium Carolinum* 141 (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck et Ruprecht, 2020), 193-203.

<sup>19</sup> Vasilij Melik, “Zusammensetzung und Wahlrecht der Cisleithanischen Landtage,” in *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848-1918. Band VII/2. Verfassung und Parlamentarismus. Die regionalen Repräsentativkörperschaften.*, ed. Adam Wandruszka, Peter Urbanitsch, and Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, vol. VII/2, *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848-1918* (Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000), 1313-31.

<sup>20</sup> Melik, “Zusammensetzung und Wahlrecht der Cisleithanischen Landtage,” 1334-36.

socially diverse and consisted mainly of lawyers, teachers, engineers, medical doctors, or journalists.<sup>21</sup> Until 1890, when three Polish and three Czech representatives were elected, the diet had almost no Slavic members. Those six Slavic seats remained unchanged until 1914 and represented more than 50 percent of the population according to the national proportion.<sup>22</sup> For these reasons, Slavic demands often failed, as they had few supporters, while the majority did not depend on Slavic votes.

The main source for analyzing the attempts and negotiations of a reform of Silesian electoral laws are the minutes of the forty-second to the forty-fifth legislative periods of the Silesian Diet from October 1905 to March 1914. In this time span, the diet debated and sanctioned two reform drafts that never took effect, as the central government in Vienna did not approve of both drafts. The diet negotiated and prepared a third draft of a new electoral law, which never materialized before the outbreak of World War I in July 1914.

Creating a new electoral law was already on the Silesian diet's agenda for the forty-second legislative period in the autumn of 1905. Right from the start, Slavic members criticized their underrepresentation in the parliamentary electoral reform commission, but their objections were not heard except for assigning one German and one Slavic substitute for the commission.<sup>23</sup> During the following session, the reform plans were elaborated by the electoral commission and were not discussed in the provincial parliament. Municipalities handed petitions to the commission requesting a "change of the electoral law reform," mainly by Slavic deputies; only one was handed in by a German, pleading for a separate curia of industries.<sup>24</sup> Those petitions are a revealing source to evaluate national activists' interest in electoral reforms. With every attempt almost exclusively Slavic diet members handed over countless petitions for the "change of the electoral law reform" or the "quick execution of the electoral law reform." These petitions imply the interest of municipalities, people, and the Slavic deputies' efforts to show their prioritization of electoral reforms.<sup>25</sup> Throughout all negotiations, the main arguments on both sides remained similar. The Slavic deputies referred to Article 19 of the Basic Law, demanding equal rights as it proclaimed. The Slavic deputy Johann Michejda insisted that their equalization could no longer be prevented<sup>26</sup>: "Gentlemen, do you believe that these people, once their national idea has awakened, will allow themselves to be held back in any state – least of all in the state of Austria, where equal rights are at least still on paper in the Basic Law?"<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile, German petitioners had other interests. German members were mostly defensive, indicating their fears of losing their privileges. The main argument was based on the status quo. Silesia flourished under German hegemony culturally and economically;

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<sup>21</sup> Gawrecki, "Der Schlesische Landtag," 2107-14.

<sup>22</sup> Kořalka, *Tschechen im Habsburgerreich und in Europa 1815-1914*, 164-65.

<sup>23</sup> Stenographic Minutes of the Silesian Diet (further cited as SMSD) 42d Legislative Period (1905), 6-8; 42d Period (1905), 28-30.

<sup>24</sup> SMSD, 42d Period (1905), 49; 42d Period (1905), 28-30; 42d Period (1905) 80- 81; 42d Period (1905), 113; 42d Period (1905), 467.

<sup>25</sup> SMSD, 44th Period (1909-1910), 654-655.

<sup>26</sup> SMSD, 42d Period (1905), 515-520.

<sup>27</sup> SMSD, 42d Period (1905), 519. This translation and all the following ones are by the author from the original German.

hence, nothing should be changed in the current state of affairs.<sup>28</sup> German deputies also argued Silesia's financial success under German hegemony and claimed that the German population contributed more taxes, thus justifying their privilege.<sup>29</sup> German diet members rated Slavic requests for consideration of their concerns or persistence on the legally granted equality as attempts to impose their will on the diet's majority. Generally, many German deputies claimed quite paternalistically that the diet's majority always included its Slavic minority and that they acted on their behalf as well. Simultaneously, many German deputies depicted Slavic protests and complaints as ungrateful and impertinent.<sup>30</sup>

In November 1905, the provincial diet negotiated the final draft of the new electoral law. The Slavic deputies contested the draft because it contained no measures against national inequality. To guarantee realistic national proportions in the provincial diet, Slavic deputies proposed an electoral law similar to the Moravian one or even demanded the introduction of universal suffrage in the crownland.<sup>31</sup> Slavic diet members saw general, direct, and equal suffrage introduced in 1907 for the Imperial Council, the central parliament in Vienna, as a solution to all national and social conflicts in Silesia. However, the negotiations over the reforms never even approached such a drastic change. Many Slavic deputies saw the struggles for national and social equality as closely intertwined and thus advocated such matters.<sup>32</sup> This viewpoint is visible in their acceptance of the 1908 draft, which did not include national measures. However, all Slavic members supported this draft because it would have at least introduced suffrage for a larger social group.<sup>33</sup>

Slavic deputies also criticized two planned new seats in eastern Silesian districts, fearing they would become two more German seats. The diet's German majority refused the request from the Slavic minority to nationally regulate those seats. Although all Slavic deputies voted against the 1905 draft of the electoral law and requested its revision before the next legislative period, the concerns of a minority of six representatives were easily outvoted by a majority of 22 votes, and the draft passed.<sup>34</sup> The Viennese central government did not sanction the reform and disclosed that new laws should ameliorate the crownland's national conflicts based on an agreement of all national parties.<sup>35</sup>

The next reform of electoral law was proposed in 1908 after the failure of the previous one. Likewise, the new draft did not attempt any national compromise. This new attempt at reform sought to expand the Silesian diet to fifty seats, rename the curia of rural municipalities to include new industrial towns, and introduce compulsory voting.<sup>36</sup> Despite criticism, the diet accepted this draft of the new electoral law unanimously. The Slavic deputies acknowledged, again showing their concern for social issues, that additional seats would represent people who had not been represented up to that point. Both sides were not really satisfied with this reform and perceived it as a temporary agreement to appease

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<sup>28</sup> SMSD, 42d Period (1905), 525-530.

<sup>29</sup> SMSD, 42d Period (1905), 525-533; 44th Period (1909-1910), 131-132.

<sup>30</sup> SMSD, 42d Period (1905), 525-530; 45th Period (1912), 808-815.

<sup>31</sup> SMSD, 42d Period (1905), 514-520.

<sup>32</sup> SMSD, 42d Period (1905), 514-519.

<sup>33</sup> SMSD, 43d Period (1908), 1354-1356; 44th Period (1909-1910), 6.

<sup>34</sup> SMSD, 42d Period (1905), 537-557.

<sup>35</sup> Gawrecki, "Der Schlesische Landtag," 2110.

<sup>36</sup> SMSD, 43d Period (1908), 1337-1341.

conflicts in the crownland that should be solved later by the next reform.<sup>37</sup> Again, the central government rejected the new electoral law, anticipating an extensive compromise in Silesia.<sup>38</sup>

In 1909, a new Silesian diet was elected based on the old electoral law; this, its national structure remained similar. This diet negotiated a new electoral law reform between 1909 and 1914, reaching an agreement to prepare a draft of the new law only in 1913. Debates around the electoral reform became even harsher and more polemic than before, as Slavic deputies pressed for their equality while the German majority again wanted to maintain the status quo. The Slavic side accused the Germans of not being interested in any compromise and of intentionally delaying the electoral reform. The legislative period already started with dispute when the diet's Slavic minority requested the election of a parliamentary electoral reform commission, unaware or uninformed that the German majority already submitted such a request. The German deputies perceived the Slavic request and its justification as allegations of disinterest toward the German side. In the twenty-second session, a Polish member of the electoral reform commission claimed that he was not invited to a meeting of the electoral reform commission. Instances like these indicate that miscommunication between the majority and minority exacerbated the conflicts around the reform.<sup>39</sup>

The German deputy Karl Ott proposed a new approach: national electoral cadasters should be established, but their power should depend on the amount of taxes contributed by each electorate. Thus, the nationality contributing the most in taxes should have the most power. This idea was especially well received by German members, who claimed that only with such a system would they not be disadvantaged. Both sides agreed on further surveys on the tax output (*Steuerleistung*) of each Silesian national group by the provincial government.<sup>40</sup>

For the following years, Slavic deputies listed those surveys as the reason for delay in electoral reform. Inquiries about the long duration and the database of the surveys sparked new conflict.<sup>41</sup> The Slavic side criticized the data the surveys were based on; the two previous censuses (1900, 1910) defined nationality by a person's proclaimed language of daily use.<sup>42</sup> As mentioned before, this category was hardly congruent with personal national affiliation, especially since Silesia's Slavic population was commonly bilingual, switching between languages constantly as needed, rendering the category of the "language of daily use" inapplicable,<sup>43</sup> or as the Slavic deputy Rudolf Gudrich put it simply: "I speak two languages, but one a little weaker."<sup>44</sup>

Slavic diet members criticized exactly this issue and questioned the entire concept of tax-bound representation for this reason. Slavic requests for new surveys determining

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<sup>37</sup> SMSD, 43d Period (1908), 1341-1356.

<sup>38</sup> Kořalka, *Tschechen im Habsburgerreich und in Europa 1815-1914*, 164-65.

<sup>39</sup> SMSD, 44th Period (1909-1910), 5-8; 44th Period (1909-1910), 653-657.

<sup>40</sup> SMSD, 44th Period (1909-1910), 131-132.

<sup>41</sup> SMSD, 44th Period (1910), 834-835; 45th Period (1911-1912), 242-243; 45th Period (1912), 808-815.

<sup>42</sup> SMSD, 45th Period (1912), 1019-1022.

<sup>43</sup> Brix, *Die Umgangssprachen in Altösterreich zwischen Agitation und Assimilation*, 336-52.

<sup>44</sup> SMSD, 44th Period (1910), 858.

nationality by other criteria (preferably self-identification) and a permanent parliamentary commission to conduct the surveys were denied. German deputies defended using census data for nationality purposes, claiming that if the central government saw the language of daily use as an adequate criterion to assess nationality, it had to be reliable. In 1912, the diet's majority refused Slavic requests to abort the ongoing surveys and elect a new electoral commission to accelerate the reform.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, Slavic deputies handed over dozens of municipalities' petitions, urging for a rapid completion of the electoral reform.<sup>46</sup>

Both sides accused each other of being responsible for delaying the electoral reform. The Slavic side argued that the majority would use the surveys to slow down the reform. Meanwhile, the German side denied their responsibility for causing the delays, depicting the implementation of the tax cadaster as their reaction to Slavic provocation:

It would have been very easy for you to prevent this! If you had stopped complaining that the German majority is putting the Slavic population at a disadvantage and not treating them fairly with regard to their various claims, it would never have occurred to us to try to exonerate ourselves from this accusation and it would never have been necessary to exonerate us.<sup>47</sup>

In 1913, the German side suddenly prioritized electoral reform and accepted all requests to that effect. The diet's unanimous resolution declared the preparation of the reform draft up to the start of the next legislative period.<sup>48</sup> In March 1914, the diet elected a parliamentary commission to create those drafts.<sup>49</sup> With the outbreak of the war in July 1914, all Cisleithanian provincial diets were shut down and never reopened, impeding any remaining efforts for a national compromise.<sup>50</sup>

Putting both parties' claims aside, the number of requests indicates the different prioritizations of the electoral reform. Slightly more than 80 percent of requests or inquiries between 1905 and 1914 regarding the reform came from the Slavic side. Petitions for electoral reform, its swift execution, or the consideration of certain groups in the reform drafts were almost exclusively initiated by Slavic municipalities and submitted by Slavic deputies.

Through the years, various Slavic deputies insisted not only on a national compromise akin to the Moravian compromise but on universal equal suffrage as a comprehensive solution for national and social inequality, implying universal equal suffrage would represent all national proportions accurately without further measures.<sup>51</sup> Such a position went beyond the Moravian compromise or any attempted compromise. It was also

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<sup>45</sup> SMSD, 45th Period (1912), 1019-1022.

<sup>46</sup> SMSD, 45th Period (1912), 777-780; 45th Period (1912), 833; 45th Period (1912), 854.

<sup>47</sup> SMSD, 44th Period (1910), 857-864.

<sup>48</sup> SMSD, 45th Period (1913), 1038; 45th Period (1913), 1129-1133.

<sup>49</sup> SMSD, 45th Period (1914), 1367-1368.

<sup>50</sup> SMSD, 45th Period (1914), 1897-1899.

<sup>51</sup> SMSD, 42d Period (1905), 514-520; 43d Period (1907), 494-495; 45th Period (1912), 777-779; 45th Period (1912), 1022.

not supported by the Viennese government, which aimed for a national compromise in Silesia but not for universal equal suffrage in provincial elections.<sup>52</sup>

One of the few active inputs from the diet's German side to achieve a national compromise through a new electoral law was requests for a tax-bound national representation. On both sides, the height of taxes contributed by different nationalities had always been a recurring theme in the debates, though the German side especially insisted on their higher contributions to the provincial budget, claiming the majority by contributed taxes should be decisive, not the majority by population numbers.<sup>53</sup> With their request to create a tax cadaster, the German deputies agreed to nationally divided electoral cadasters, but only if the electorates' power was determined by their tax output.<sup>54</sup>

The surveys to compile those tax-bound cadasters were a major factor in the constant delay of the reform. In particular, the majority pressed for implementing a tax cadaster, while the minority pleaded to abort the surveys to accelerate and complete the reform.<sup>55</sup> German efforts to accelerate the reform never appear in the diet's minutes and seem evanescent in contrast to the Slavic requests. This is particularly evident from 1910 to 1912, when a high number of requests and inquiries were submitted. While those numbers alone do not prove that the German majority intentionally delayed the reforms as Slavic deputies accused them in 1912,<sup>56</sup> they imply a lower prioritization of electoral reform on the German side or at least a lack of interest in changing the existing conditions.

## Language Politics

Another important issue in the negotiations to find a national compromise was questions of language usage in administration and schooling. While Slavic national activists demanded equalization of their native languages in public administration and accessible schooling for every child, German nationalists feared these equalizing measures. By law, Cisleithania never had an official language or any regulations concerning the use of languages, and Article 19 only proclaimed their equality. Further attempts to regulate the official language(s) failed. German, however, remained the dominating language in administration, courts, and parliaments out of the empire's unwritten national and linguistic hierarchies.<sup>57</sup> In 1897, a reform by Austrian Minister-president Kasimir Badeni obligated all civil servants in Bohemia to be proficient in the crownland's two languages within two years, which applied primarily to German civil servants as most Czech civil servants were proficient in German already. The reform failed as protests in Prague and Vienna escalated violently; Badeni had to resign, the reform was put on the shelf, and the population seemed even more divided.<sup>58</sup> The Moravian Compromise intended to solve this problem by granting every citizen the possibility to communicate in their native languages

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<sup>52</sup> SMSD, 43d Period (1907), 615-617.

<sup>53</sup> SMSD, 42d Period (1905), 529.

<sup>54</sup> SMSD, 44th Period (1909-1910), 131-132.

<sup>55</sup> SMSD, 44th Period (1910), 834-835; 45th Period (1911-1912), 162; 45th Period (1911-1912), 242-243; 45th Period (1912), 808-815; 45th Period (1912), 1019-1022.

<sup>56</sup> SMSD, 45th Period (1912), 1019-1022.

<sup>57</sup> Stourzh, *Die Gleichberechtigung der Nationalitäten in der Verfassung und Verwaltung Österreichs, 1848-1918*, 88-90.

<sup>58</sup> Bruckmüller, *Österreichische Geschichte*, 428-29.

with the authorities either locally or through translation services provided by the provincial government.<sup>59</sup>

Silesia's official language was German, though Polish and Czech were acknowledged as languages customary to the crownland. Unlike all other multinational provinces in Cisleithania, the Silesian Diet kept German as its only language of negotiation and the stenographic minutes.<sup>60</sup> As the minutes prove, all Slavic deputies were fluent in German. However, they protested the unequal treatment of their native languages in the diet. With the start of every new legislative period, Slavic members challenged the fact that even greetings and opening speeches were held only in German. The majority's response was constant stressing, that German is the diet's official language, and therefore the welcoming speech must only be in German. The majority ignored requests to change the status quo of the diet's language. Considering these arguments from the German side, the opening of the new legislative period in December 1909 seems especially striking. After the Slavic deputies' protests, the provincial governor reminded them that only German was the diet's language. When all deputies took their oath just minutes later, the Slavic deputies were allowed to take theirs in Czech or Polish, pointing out the inconsistencies of the majority's statement.<sup>61</sup>

A debate concerning the language of correspondence between municipalities and the provincial government escalated, and the debate had to be stopped by the provincial governor when national polemics got too agitated. Slavic deputies criticized the provincial governments' decisions to use languages at their own discretion, thus foremost German. The Slavic deputies argued that while the government had the means to correspond in all languages, municipalities did not have them in all cases. Further, they claimed that the public civil service in Silesia was thoroughly germanized. To solve those issues, they proposed to draft a language law (akin to the Moravian Compromise's language law) that would equalize all languages and establish translation services. They claimed that such a regulation would be even easier in Silesia than in Moravia because here the distribution of nationalities followed stronger territorial patterns. The German majority rejected the Slavic minority's request to grant the execution of Article 19, which the Slavic side considered transgressed regarding the crownland's languages. On the other side of the debate, German deputies claimed that the main requests to communicate in Slavic languages came from highly organized municipalities able to correspond multilingually and drew comparison to the United States where all people would agree on one language, which then escalated to a German member agitating against the Czech population using hostile stereotypes, depicting Czechs as either vagrant musicians or thieves. Subsequently, the diet dismissed the Slavic request while accepting the executive committee's request, allowing the committee to use languages discretionarily and, thus, to respond to letters exclusively in German.<sup>62</sup> However, in 1908, the Imperial Court of Justice ruled this practice violated of Article 19, confirming the Slavic deputies' previous claims that municipalities had the right to communicate with the provincial government in languages other than German.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Kuzmany, "Habsburg Austria," 51.

<sup>60</sup> Gawrecki, "Der Schlesische Landtag," 2114-15.

<sup>61</sup> SMSD, 42d Period (1905), 4; 43d Period (1906-1907), 4-5; 44th Period (1909-1910), 3-5.

<sup>62</sup> SMSD, 42d Period (1905), 496-514.

<sup>63</sup> Stourzh, *Die Gleichberechtigung der Nationalitäten in der Verfassung und Verwaltung Österreichs, 1848-1918*, 123-24.

A parliamentary inquiry by two Slavic deputies shows a more practical example of the effects of the language conflict. A matter of concern was the German-only inscriptions on train station signs and tickets along many Silesian railway lines, which they claimed should have been at least bilingual because the lines and stations were located in bilingual or non-German regions of Silesia. What Slavic deputies took issue with was met with laughter by their German counterparts.<sup>64</sup> This seemingly minor inquiry again shows two sides of the conflict: the highly different perception of equality and the indifference on the German side towards the concerns of the Slavic population.

A main topic of the diet's debates about language politics was school politics. Schools became one of the nationalist movements' most important battlegrounds to "gain" children for their nation, powered by the fear of "losing" them to another nation. By founding national school associations, schooling in native languages became available in theory.<sup>65</sup> As those schools were only funded by public money if they had enough students, they enforced the fears of "losing" children. Losing students could lead to losing an entire school.<sup>66</sup> The nationalist movements of the nineteenth century enforced monolingualism in their insistence on teaching children in their native language, as they no longer saw bilingualism as worthwhile. Language became a national asset; therefore, children had to be taught only in their native language to flourish under national education. Also, the later acquisition of the second language(s) of the own home province was no longer enforced or encouraged, and the right to native language schooling granted.<sup>67</sup> Many children still frequented German schools by necessity or their parents' choice. Parents chose to send their children to German schools for diverse reasons. Many parents preferred German schools, which were more prestigious, hoping to improve their children's opportunities.<sup>68</sup> Some parents were urged to send their children to schools according to their employer's or landlord's will. Their decision was often determined by additional benefits that schools provided, such as food, shoes, clothing, and presents. Sending children to a specific school was thus less related to the question of nationality and native language but rather to necessity, advantages, and benefits.<sup>69</sup>

The Moravian Compromise also tried to solve the issue of children not being sent to schools according to their nationality. It divided the local school boards between nationalities so both groups could develop unhindered.<sup>70</sup> This separation gave every national school board the autonomy to choose their own staff and teaching materials, thus providing their national education. To attend a school, children had to be proficient in the language of instruction. The school boards also had the power to claim children from other schools if they seemed to be in a school not in line with their father's proclaimed national affiliation.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> SMSD, 44th Period (1909-1910), 687-688.

<sup>65</sup> Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca, N.Y., Bristol: Cornell University Press: University Presses Marketing [distributor], 2011), 16-19.

<sup>66</sup> Pieter M. Judson, *Habsburg: Geschichte eines Imperiums: 1740 - 1918*, trans. Michael Müller, 3., durchgesehene Auflage (München: C.H. Beck, 2019), 388-92.

<sup>67</sup> Hannelore Burger, *Sprachenrecht und Sprachgerechtigkeit im österreichischen Unterrichtswesen 1867-1918*, Studien zur Geschichte der Österreichisch-Ungarischen Monarchie 26 (Wien: Verl. d. Österr. Akad. d. Wiss, 1995), 25-31.

<sup>68</sup> Burger, *Sprachenrecht und Sprachgerechtigkeit im österreichischen Unterrichtswesen 1867-1918*, 193-94.

<sup>69</sup> Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*, 27-31.

<sup>70</sup> Burger, *Sprachenrecht und Sprachgerechtigkeit im österreichischen Unterrichtswesen 1867-1918*, 191.

<sup>71</sup> Kuzmany, "Habsburg Austria," 51.

In the Silesian diet, debates about school politics expressed concern about national education, indoctrination, and the quality of instruction and supplies. Yet the diet never planned major school reforms as they did with the electoral reforms. Attempts to divide the Silesian school boards nationally in multilingual municipalities most closely resembled measures of the Moravian Compromise. Although the diet's majority avoided a division, in 1913 Slavic deputies could implement that the provincial committee of national minority schools had to nominate teachers whose nationality was in line with the language of the school in question.<sup>72</sup>

1908 saw the most requests concerning schools due to a ministerial inquiry of secondary schools in addition to school reforms taking place.<sup>73</sup> Two parliamentary inquiries in the diet in November 1908 concerning Polish schools show an interest in instructional supplies and perceived pressure from German authorities. The first inquiry challenged the currently used elementary school readers, accusing them of being outdated, and demanded both an updated version as well as textbooks teaching German as a foreign language. The second inquiry criticized that the administrative forms for Polish teachers were only in German and that the school headmasters and inspectors pressured Polish speakers to use those; the inquiry underscored that teachers could not cultivate the Polish language to their students if they were obligated to use German forms. In addition, a third inquiry denounced the "utraquization" (bilingualization) of Slavic schools as attempted germanization.<sup>74</sup> Utraquist schools were schools with two languages of instruction.<sup>75</sup> This form of bilingual instruction had been mandatory in Silesia since 1873; only in Slavic schools, however, not German ones. The inquiry accused German nationalist headmasters, teachers, and agitators of increasingly replacing the Czech or Polish lessons with German instruction with the purpose of turning the respective schools into German schools and to indoctrinating Polish and Czech children, rating this as a violation of Article 19. At the same time, Slavic deputies claimed that German agitation would only nurture resentment against everything German in the children, thus destroying any ambitions to learn the German language properly. While the German diet members calmly accepted the first two inquiries, they denounced the third as a lie and fraudulent.<sup>76</sup>

Only two days later, German deputies submitted an inquiry by several eastern Silesian German and Polish teachers organizations that included several letters. They described situations in schools and made accusations from the opposing perspective. The letters heavily condemned the "foreign" (i.e., imported and influenced from neighboring Galicia) Polish nationalism that impacted Silesian schools, alleging nationalist teachers were trying to replace German in utraquist schools, introducing the Polish textbooks into the curriculum and pressuring teachers to conform to Polish nationalist wishes. The enclosed letters were clearly pro-German and loyal to the monarchy and appealed to regional Silesian patriotism. One of the letters' authors, Josef Koźdon,<sup>77</sup> was a known activist, agitating for eastern Silesian (Slunzak) regionalism in the Habsburg monarchy and against any

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<sup>72</sup> Gawrecki, "Der Schlesische Landtag," 2126.

<sup>73</sup> Burger, *Sprachenrecht und Sprachgerechtigkeit im österreichischen Unterrichtswesen 1867-1918*, 222-23.

<sup>74</sup> SMSD, 43d Period (1908), 1440.

<sup>75</sup> Burger, *Sprachenrecht und Sprachgerechtigkeit im österreichischen Unterrichtswesen 1867-1918*, 29.

<sup>76</sup> SMSD, 43d Period (1908), 1440-1443.

<sup>77</sup> SMSD, 43d Period (1908), 1535-1546.

nationalism but clearly sympathizing with Germandom as he was elected to the diet through German support in 1907.<sup>78</sup> In this rare instance, Silesian Regionalism is visible in the diet and siding with the German majority.

Considering these debates about Germanization or Slavicization through utraquist schools, the negotiations on the following day concerning a proposed law on language classes proceeded in a surprisingly concordant and peaceful fashion. This law would have obliged pupils of secondary schools to learn at least one other of the crownland's languages.<sup>79</sup> The idea was also well received on the German side, acknowledging that language was a root of but also a solution to national conflicts:

The knowledge of a country's second language is an absolute necessity for all of us, in fact I firmly maintain that the fact that our parliamentary conditions are so unfavorable is primarily due to the fact that a large part of the population does not know the country's second language. [...] It is my firm belief that not we, but perhaps our children and grandchildren, will have national peace when people will know more languages.<sup>80</sup>

The diet accepted this proposal, but similar to the last electoral reform attempt, the draft of the law was not finalized soon enough.<sup>81</sup> A discourse among German nationalist teachers in the Bohemian lands that unfolded in the following years put German approval in a different light. They surmised that they could no longer sustain their position without knowledge of the province's other language(s). Thus, they had to learn the "opponent's" language to compete against them. Their acquiescence to learn the second language was also motivated by economic competition and the fear of being replaced by bilingual Czech civil servants in public administration.<sup>82</sup>

National questions and conflicts manifested in peoples' everyday life primarily through language. The Silesian diet's debates concerning language topics illustrate those conflicts and show the different interests. However, the diet never discussed major language reforms. The number of Slavic requests concerning language is higher than that of German requests, and a large part of the Slavic requests concerned equalization of the parliamentary or administrative languages. Meanwhile, the German majority showed no interest in such measures, claiming that German linguistic dominance functioned well enough in the past.

The requests about school politics are more evenly balanced by nationality, indicating the priority of schooling on both sides of the national conflict and fears of "losing" their children. Even though debates about language politics would, in some instances, inspire fierce national polemics in the Silesian diet, they also showed in other instances, such as both sides agreeing on instruction in a second language of the crownland, that reconciliation was possible.

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<sup>78</sup> Kamusella, *Silesia and Central European Nationalisms*, 234-35.

<sup>79</sup> SMSD, 43d Period (1908), 1491-1493.

<sup>80</sup> SMSD, 43d Period (1908), 1492.

<sup>81</sup> SMSD, 44th Period (1909-1910), 646; 45th Period (1911-1912), 682.

<sup>82</sup> Burger, *Sprachenrecht und Sprachgerechtigkeit im österreichischen Unterrichtswesen 1867-1918*, 225-27.

## Conclusions

Between 1905 and 1914, the crownland of Silesia saw several attempts at electoral reform that sought to solve (or at least pacify) national conflicts. This resulted in two drafts of electoral laws that only proposed marginal changes and not a solution to the national conflicts; the Viennese central government did not sanction those drafts, as the central government aimed for a national compromise in Silesia. A further electoral reform that attempted to establish tax-bound national cadasters as a means of national compromise was subject to many delays and could not be presented before the closure of the Silesian Diet in July 1914.

While Slavic deputies of the Silesian Diet advocated for equalization through universal, equal, direct, and secret suffrage, the German majority promoted tax-bound equalization through national cadasters, which sought to base the right to representation and participation on each national population's tax output (*Steuerleistung*). The equality of nationalities would, therefore, still not have been a fundamental right, but one dependent on the amount of taxes paid by each nationality.

During this period, the Silesian parliament repeatedly discussed language issues, but reforms akin to the language reforms of the Moravian Compromise never materialized. Measures in this vein were especially considered and demanded by Slavic diet members. Official use of Slavic languages continued to be rejected. German remained the only language of parliamentary proceedings and the language of correspondence of the provincial government, even as the Imperial Court of Justice ruled the latter as a violation of Article 19. The German side only received laws on the compulsory teaching of a second national language in schools positively. School politics reflected the fears both sides of the national conflict voiced of "losing" children to the other nation.

The reasons why the Silesian diet did not achieve a national compromise are a combination of many diverse factors and circumstances. Different priorities, strong Slavic under-representation in parliament, and fears of Slavicization and Germanization were decisive factors, although not the only ones. The different priorities of a national compromise are visible through the processes in parliament. Although both sides considered a national compromise necessary, the efforts to achieve it differed immensely. While the Slavic members prioritized electoral reforms more strongly and constantly addressed them through interpellations, requests, and petitions, the German majority remained more reactive. This is reflected both in the numbers and the content of interventions and debates. In addition to the lack of interest on the German side, Jiří Kořalka considers the absence of mediation between the two sides as the decisive factor for the failure to achieve a Silesian Compromise; Moravian great landowners spurred the Moravian Compromise, but the great landowners of Silesia did not take the initiative.<sup>83</sup>

Despite years of discussions and preparations, an equalizing electoral and language reform could never be implemented. Judging by its timeline, it appears that the Silesian Diet was shut down right on the verge of a promising draft of a new electoral law. Whether this

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<sup>83</sup> Kořalka, *Tschechen im Habsburgerreich und in Europa 1815-1914*, 165.

reform really would have been a breakthrough to a Silesian Compromise or another discarded draft remains an open question.

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