

# Statecraft and Leadership in Europe: The Case of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Born to Slovak-German-Czech servants, with no burning interest in politics until adult age, Tomáš Masaryk managed to introduce the first Czechoslovak state on to the world map in 1918, through tireless advocacy carried out (literally) all around the world during the Great War, and subsequent guidance in the newly formed republic. He was unanimously elected President four times and served in this function for eighteen years (1918-1935). Tomáš Masaryk was not a product of circumstances, but their producer and skillful employer. He showed himself particularly adroit in overcoming against-all-odds situations, as well as 'regular' crises. Initially isolated, resourceless, and repudiated by his own people, he managed to unite them and to make them join his idea and struggle for a project aiming for common good. Such a curriculum seems remarkably appropriate for a potential leader in Europe's most advanced uniting project, the EU (European Union). Considering the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of Masaryk's state-building journey, as well as the current crisis debates in the EU, it seems appropriate to remind ourselves of a leader with a vision, determination, skill, and principles. The EU may need precisely those to stay united.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The purpose of the present article

The European Union, a construction whose underpinnings started to grow with the end of the second large-scale continental conflict, has been enduring yet another wave of what came to be comprehensively called a crisis. The most common features of this crisis are defined in economics' terms (e.g. employment, supervision of banks, and control of state budget management). Seeking for solutions to these dossiers has 'spilled-over' into reflection on their management, i.e. the most appropriate ways of dealing with newly emerged complications, generally merged into the term of governance reform. There is one aspect that gathered noticeable attention, yet was not met with much response. Several more or less recent studies, starting after the departure of Jacques Delors (former president of the European Commission) until today, indicate that the true crisis in the EU is the one of leadership<sup>3</sup>.

The EU is not to be considered as an end in itself. It is a means to accomplish a common European project. This common European project was quite straightforwardly defined at its beginning. Today, it seems more complicated for Europeans to reach a common definition of further ambitions. At the same time, if Europeans are struggling, it is arguably also because they are not guided or inspired in their reflection. In other words, if we want to build Europe, we also need the builder; the 'craftsman', who can lead us, work with us, inspire us.

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<sup>3</sup> We can mention Jack Hayward' work *Leaderless Europe* (Hayward, J. (2008). *Leaderless Europe*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press), some of Thierry Chopin's papers (e.g. Chopin, T. (2013). *Vers un véritable pouvoir exécutif européen : de la gouvernance au gouvernement*. Fondation Robert Schuman, Policy Paper 274), Charles Grant's contribution to the collective work *New designs for Europe* (Grant, Ch. (2002). *New leadership for Europe*. In Ch. Grant (Ed.), *New designs for Europe* (pp. 7-33). London, England: Center for European Reform), or Stefan Lehne's opinion as expressed on behalf of Carnegie Europe (Lehne, S. (2013, November 20). *The European Union Needs Political Leadership* [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2013/11/20/european-union-needs-political-leadership/guav>). Commentaries in this direction are also sporadically mentioned by several authors of world newspapers, such as *The Wall Street Journal* (e.g. Vigna, P. (2012, May 25). *Europe's Real Crisis is With its Leadership*. *Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <http://online.wsj.com/europe>), *The Financial Times* (e.g. Wall, S. (2005, May 24). *Europe urgently needs leadership*. *Financial Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.ft.com>), or *The Economist* (e.g. *The Economist* (2009, November 5). *The European Union is likely to choose weak leaders. It needs strong ones*. *The Economist*. Retrieved from <http://www.economist.com>).

The aim of this study is not to put forward any concrete names for this function, nor does it aspire to offer any manual for prospective future leaders in the EU. Its aim is to inspire, to offer a concrete example of a person, his actions, thinking, and convictions, most of which the author finds appropriate in Europe even today, roughly a century after the events that depicted Masaryk's virtues. After all, Europe appears as an appropriate ground where the seed of learning from historical experiences can grow.

### **1.2 The focus of the present article: Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk**

Tomáš Masaryk was sixty-four when he decided to fight for an independent Czechoslovak state. He defended his goal around the globe and returned four years later to Prague, unanimously and *in absentia* elected as the president of the new state.

Born to a Slovakian coachman and to a Czech-German house servant in a little village, he worked his way up to become a Professor and a deputy in the Austrian Parliament before the First World War. He only came to be known to the general public in the affair of the Manuscripts (historic documents that allegedly proved that the Czech literary culture was older than the German one). He defended their falseness and was publicly excluded from the Czech nation as a traitor.<sup>4</sup> Yet, more than twenty-five years later, in 1914, he engaged in a four-year-long crusade for the creation of the Czechoslovak state, which brought him great glory, recognition, and love from his compatriots. Today a legendary, even mythological figure, largely called "Daddy Masaryk", he seems to have secured a place next to other great traditional Czech figures, such as Saint Wenceslas or Jan Hus (Pynsent, 1989, p.2).

One naturally wonders how it happened; how is it that this man, whose destiny was to become a laborer, raised himself so far above his environment to become the glorified leader of his fellow-countrymen? How did an old man of peasant origin succeed in pulling apart one of the great European empires and in creating an independent state in Czech and Slovak lands, under imperial rule for centuries? The present study details those years when Masaryk laid down the foundations of the Czechoslovak state and subsequently presided over it, period where he exercised remarkable leadership<sup>5</sup> and statecraft<sup>6</sup>. With severe lack of support from the Czech public, with no army and almost no resources of his own, and in a very uncertain international context, he successfully managed to fulfill his mission, all the while holding on to his beliefs and ideals of truth, honesty, and humanity. Based on the evidence that is evinced later in this study, I hold that the legacy of his leadership, which combines realist focus on facts with belief in moral principles and higher goals, is the one of balanced reason with sentiment, and ceaseless activity with the aim of achieving good. The argument will be exposed in two parts; first, the substance and form of Masaryk's statecraft will be analyzed through the lenses of the sources consulted; and second, Masaryk's philosophy and convictions will be assessed.

## **2. Analysis of Masaryk's Construction of the Czechoslovak State**

Masaryk's statecraft during the war inspired a number of scholars, mainly of Czech and Anglo-Saxon origin, starting in the 1920s while he was still alive. We can roughly divide the several decades of this literature into three main periods: the 'romantic' period, the period of censorship and manipulation, and the post-communist era.

The main body of literature on Masaryk's struggle for the Czechoslovak state comes from the romantic period. The authors are mostly personalities who worked with him, such as Edvard Beneš (his closest associate), Jan Herben (his main biographer), R. W. Seton-Watson (friend and close ally in England), or personalities who met Masaryk as a part of their interest in the Czech history or in Masaryk himself (such as Victor Cohen, Donald Lowrie, Paul Selver, Cecil Street, or W. Preston Warren). They write in the aftermath of the establishment of the new state, at the occasion of Masaryk's jubilees, and after his death. In one way or another, they all portray Masaryk's heroic efforts, flawless moral principles, admirable analytical skills, dedication and the strength of his character. For instance, Donald Lowrie (1930), who wrote the first English biography of Masaryk, describes him as the "greatest personality alive on our globe today" (p.ix), and Adolf Jarolímek (1948) writes at the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Masaryk's death that he "enlightened our past, warmed our presence, and illuminated our future" (p.48).

<sup>4</sup> The journal *Národnosty* read: "Go to hell, hideous traitor; cling to whomever you want with your doubtful spiritual smallness and moral misery (...). We exclude you from our national body." (Mahler, 2002, p.33)

<sup>5</sup> Leadership will be understood as a capacity to guide, to inspire, to endure hardships for, members of a political community.

<sup>6</sup> In simple terms, statecraft can be defined as the art of governing a political community.

The period after the 1938 Munich Agreement and the 1948 Communist *coup d'état* left Masaryk either unpublished or instrumentalized by the totalitarian regimes for decades. For Leninists and Stalinists, Masaryk represented the prototype of a bourgeois politician and of a servant of Western imperialism. It was only after the 1968 Prague Spring that it was again permissible to write about him in a scholarly manner (Hajek, 1983, p.165). Indeed, as Bradley Abrams argues (2004), the figure of Masaryk was not one whose importance the Czech communist intellectuals could simply deny. They had to “incorporate the Masaryk cult into their agitation if they did not want to come into conflict with the soul of the Czech people”. Thus, Masaryk became “a socialist even if he was never a socialist” (p.129).

The writers in the post-communist era seem to have adopted a twofold direction. On the one hand, there are works such as the one of Andrea Orzoff or Zbyněk Zeman, which represent the tendency to de-romanticize Masaryk's role in the creation of Czechoslovakia, emphasizing the importance of the context of the First World War, as well as of the discrepancies between his teachings and his actions. They no longer feel the previous unquestioned loyalty and adopt a more distant view. On the other hand, Zdeněk Mahler or Bohumil Sláma argue that Masaryk's work is undeservedly forgotten, reminding us that his legacy and his teachings remain an underlying desired goal of the Czech society today.

The present section is divided into three parts. First, the ‘what’ aspect is addressed, i.e. what did Masaryk do to build a state; second, the ‘how’ question is answered, depicting the elements of method and strategy that Masaryk used to achieve his goal; and third, the actions undertaken by Masaryk as the new President are presented.

### **2.1. Masaryk's path as a state-builder: From an isolated decision to glorified success**

“Until events demonstrated to him the necessity for revolution, Masaryk was not a revolutionary.” Indeed, initially Masaryk's moral beliefs induced him to think that men of different origin and opinions could live in harmony together, if they were equal, and work together for the welfare of Austria (Street, 1970, p.19). However, observing the Austrian policies and ideas in the years preceding the war, Masaryk became increasingly opposed to the empire. He states in his memoirs: “the better I knew Austria and the Hapsburg dynasty the more was I driven into opposition. This dynasty which in Austria seemed so powerful, was morally and physically degenerate” (Miliukov, 1930, p.402). In his book *The New Europe*, he reveals Austria-Hungary as a “relic of the Middle Ages, a mediaeval negation of the modern ideas of State and nationality”. Furthermore, Austria was increasingly falling under the influence of the Pan-German idea, involving the degradation of the Slavs, which would be only strengthened if Austria was to win the war with Germany (*President T. G. Masaryk*, 1923, p.8).

Masaryk realized that there could be no future for the Czechs, Slovaks, or even the Yugoslavs, within Austrian borders: “Austria has shown that it is incapable of forming a State in accordance with the laws of justice and humanity. (...) We can safely hope for our independence, and also that we shall not be under Austria” (Selver, 1940, p.264). Therefore, “[o]ur revival will only be completed when we have gained our autonomy in a definite form of political independence, for we cannot use our full resources, and we shall not be able to do so, as long as we are not our own masters” (Van Wijk, 1923, p.21). The trigger itself that made Masaryk decide to act, as he described it, was a concrete situation he observed as the war began: “When I heard that a man had been hanged in Moravia simply because he had in his possession a Russian proclamation by the Grand Duke Nikolai (...) and that this and that good patriot had been shot, I was ashamed that we politicians were still hesitant when our common folk were already active” (Cohen, 1941, p.144). The Czech nationalist agitation created by the war and the unwillingness of Czech soldiers to fight for Austria led the imperial authorities to place Bohemia under strict military authority. With the increasing number of arrests, the atmosphere in Czech lands was getting tense and it became clear that little effective work could be done there. Masaryk thus prepared to work abroad.

Such decision being his own personal one, he crucially needed to rally support and organize the network of the potential adherents to his Czechoslovakian idea, both at home, and abroad. Thus, before leaving, he set to organize the Czech drive against the Austrian empire, in order to provide him with information and authority for his activities abroad. Together with his devoted former pupil Edvard Beneš he formed a secret society called *Maffie*, gathering Czech politicians, not very publicly known since they would be less quickly suspected by the police. *Maffie's* role was mainly to conduct secret propaganda at home and to cipher correspondence with Masaryk and others abroad (Lowrie, 1930, p.187).

He escaped Austria in the last hour and established himself in the neutral soil of Switzerland for a few months in order to coordinate all Czech forces outside Bohemia. He began by organizing the Czech people in Switzerland into committees to collect funds and to publish newspapers on the Czech cause, the result of which was soon an active and smoothly working organization. The appeal was extended to the Czechs in England and France, and subsequently to the ones in Russia and the United States (Lowrie, 1930, p.217). In spite of Austrian spies and his initial isolation, he had organized a united front by the summer of 1915. "Although there was no official state, or even official organization, it was clear that all Czechs looked to Masaryk as their 'chief, (...) [who] could give expression to their common hopes" (Cohen, 1941, p.155). Masaryk thus became the official "state-crafter". The symbolic moment of this event was his speech in July 1915, at the commemoration of the fifth centenary of the martyrdom of Jan Hus, the great Czech reformer and patriot. At this meeting that Masaryk himself organized, he described the tradition of Hus as a fighter for freedom and proclaimed his ideas as the Czech national program.<sup>7</sup> In August 1915, with Edvard Beneš and Milan Rastislav Štefánik he created the Czech Committee Abroad, which in February 1916 became the Czechoslovak National Council, essentially a government in exile. The most important act of the Committee was a proclamation, where all Czech political parties and Czech activists abroad demanded an independent Czechoslovakia (Herben J., 1948, p.70). Beneš was sent to Paris, where he began making connections to Parisian intellectual and political life, and Masaryk was to continue his worldwide journey. He started in Paris and London. The task of getting France and Britain on board was not going to be easy. As Donald Lowrie (1930) relates: he was "appalled to discover that in France, and England as well, scarcely anyone had ever heard of the Czech nation and no one thought he had time to bother with such new matters. The war was taking everyone's attention and even that was going rather discouragingly for Paris and London" (p.193). Masaryk wanted to persuade both the elites and the public about the Czech national cause. After waiting for quite a while, he had an interview with the French Prime Minister, Aristide Briand. Masaryk's argument was that "if the Central Powers win the war, Austria will become a mere tool in the hands of Germany. If the Allies win, the smaller nationalities within the Empire must have their liberty. One way to help the Allies win, is to promise help to these smaller nationalities" (p.194). Briand was convinced; he assured Masaryk of the sympathies of France for the Czech nation. The news of this assurance, together with an interview with Masaryk, subsequently appeared in *Le Matin*. This not only caught the attention of the French public and thus prepared the ground for the progress of Czech action, it started to make Western Europe realize how closely the Czech question was associated with the problem of the post-war organization of Europe (*President T. G. Masaryk*, 1923, p.15). Masaryk further relied on Universities in advancing his cause. He gave the inaugural address at the School of Slavonic Studies at King's College London titled "The Problem of Small Nations in the European Crisis". He later remembered it as his "first [large-scale] political success" (Orzoff, 2009, p.44). Masaryk defended that a small nation must win its right to a place in the world by its character and its realization of moral ideals. It was translated into French and widely read. The progress made was perceivable; in Paris Masaryk had to wait for the interview with the Prime Minister while in London, it was the Prime Minister himself that agreed to preside at this lecture<sup>8</sup>.

Briand had kept his word. When in December 1916 President Woodrow Wilson sent out a note asking both sides of the conflict about their war aims, the freedom of the Czechoslovak people was listed as one of the objects of the war in the Allied powers' reply of January 1917. Jan Herben (1948) argues that it was precisely Briand who inserted this aim into the document (p.71). For Masaryk, it was a great triumph.<sup>9</sup> It was an official recognition of his efforts, his ideals for his own people were approved by the great powers.

In the meantime the news of the revolution in Russia came to Masaryk. He had long wanted to provide the National Committee with an army, which would allow him to provide his claims with more strength and credibility, and to give the Allies a more tangible proof of aid. There were thousands of Czechs and Slovaks in Russia as prisoners of war (former Austrian soldiers), part of them had already formed into regiments to fight against Austria (Lowrie, 1930, p.205). Masaryk thus decided to leave London for Russia. As soon as he arrived, literally dodging bullets in the middle of the Bolshevik revolution, he began negotiating with Russian authorities as well as forming connections with the Czech soldiers (Zeman, 1990, p.94-99). He had no problem convincing the soldiers to fight, he was received by them as a true hero and liberator<sup>10</sup>. After

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<sup>7</sup>"Hus and the reformers of his time demanded the right to think and act for themselves; the Czech nation faces exactly this problem today. Every Czech who knows his native history must decide for or against Austria. Hus is our living program." (Lowrie, 1930, p.192)

<sup>8</sup> The Prime Minister, Mr. Asquith, fell ill, but Lord Robert Cecil deputized for him.

<sup>9</sup> Beneš recorded with pride and joy: "We received telegrams and letters of congratulations from our Russian colony and our troops, our American colony and our compatriots in Italy, Switzerland and elsewhere." (Cohen, 1941, p.173)

<sup>10</sup> A paragraph in the Czech newspaper in Petrograd read: "He has arrived. At last our waiting is over. The most ardent desire of our hearts is fulfilled. Professor Masaryk, so loved by us all, is at last among us. Our "Little Father", our wise leader. The news of his arrival speeds

months of negotiation, the Bolshevik authorities finally agreed to grant the Czechoslovak troops the status of an army of a neutral power, and allowed them to leave Russia as soon as possible. Upon this agreement, Masaryk concluded the first Czechoslovakian treaty, in which 30,000 Czechoslovak troops were to be sent to France (Beneš, 1971, p.357).

In the beginning of 1918, Masaryk decided to go to the United States, where he thought the ultimate decision about his nation's fate would be made. He quickly learnt that not only did the American people know little or nothing about the Czechs, they viewed the war as a struggle against Germany and not Austria (Cohen, 1941, p.203). Opinion in the official circles ran that although the Austrian Empire was not a perfect example of peace and tolerance, it had a very good reason to exist as "Europe's watchdog in the East" (Orzoff, 2009, p.49). The task of rallying support for his cause was still a little easier than in previous years. When he came to Chicago, the next largest Czech city after Prague at that period, he was received with striking enthusiasm and acclaim<sup>11</sup>. He had secured the support of Louis Brandeis of the Supreme Court<sup>12</sup>, of Nicholas Murray Butler (Head of Columbia University), of Charles William Eliot (Head of Harvard), as well as of the ex-President Theodore Roosevelt (Cohen, 1941, p.205). His cause was thus making progress, but he needed to convince one last person, Woodrow Wilson. Their interview lasted no more than 40 minutes, during which, although more interested in Masaryk's thoughts on Russia, President Wilson was won over to his opinion (Lowrie, 1930, p.220).

One great power after another started to recognize the Czechoslovak state. On June 29<sup>th</sup>, the French Foreign Minister Stéphen Pichon notified the National Council in Paris that the French Government acknowledged the claims of the Czechoslovak nation to independence. Forty days later, on August 9<sup>th</sup>, Great Britain recognized the Czechoslovak Army and National Council (*President T. G. Masaryk*, 1923, p.25-26). The US granted recognition to the National Council as a Government *de facto* on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, thus fulfilling the promise which had been made to Masaryk. Only a month later, on October 7<sup>th</sup>, Germany and Austria sent a peace offer to Washington. Masaryk had to react quickly and issued the Czechoslovak Declaration of Independence, declaring the National Council as a provisional Government, and reminding the US their recognition of the National Council as a *de facto* Government. The reply to the peace offer fully adopted the point of view expressed in this Masaryk's Declaration<sup>13</sup>. This was the ultimate victory for Masaryk. The Declaration was signed and proclaimed in Prague on October 28<sup>th</sup>, which became for all Czechoslovaks what the 4<sup>th</sup> of July is for Americans. The Provisional Government elected Masaryk as its President; he received this information from Beneš, who added: "Your authority is unlimited and you are awaited there. All our activity has met with enthusiastic approval" (Selver, 1940, p.292). The new government was established when the Austro-Hungarian regiments went home without firing a shot at the totally unarmed Czech masses (Kovtun, 1990, p.xvi).

## **2.2 Masaryk's formula: Components of the successful struggle**

### **2.2.1. Preparation and Planning**

"He is not a statesman who does not see at least a bit of the way forward and does not prepare the evolution of years to come." (*Masaryk*)

As soon as the war broke out, Masaryk thought the success of the Central Powers would mean for Vienna to become a German satellite, which would further worsen the situations for the Czechs. Therefore, he decided to take action on the side of the Entente. At this specific point, Donald Lowrie emphasizes the importance Masaryk attached to a careful and in-depth preparation for his long fight:

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over all Russia. It flies to our heroic fighters in front-line positions, it will reach the farthest prison camp, and everywhere there will be boundless, inexpressible joy, and new hope." (Lowrie, 1930, p.209)

<sup>11</sup> Masaryk found the streets between the station and his hotel hung with Czechoslovak and American flags; and a great procession with military bands and mounted marshals escorted him to his hotel. (Lowrie, 1930, p.217)

<sup>12</sup> This honored figure in America remembered Professor Masaryk when as an unknown European professor he stood up and defended the cause of truth against popular agitation and patriotic pretension. He defended an unknown poor Jew, JozefHilsner, against false accusations of ritual murder of a Christian girl. (Cohen, 1941, p.205)

<sup>13</sup> The concluding paragraph of Wilson's response runs as follows: "The President is (...) no longer at liberty to accept a mere 'autonomy' of the peoples of Austria-Hungary as a basis of peace, but is obliged to insist that they, and not he, shall be the judge of what action on the part of the Austro-Hungarian Government will satisfy their aspirations and their conception of their right and destiny as members of the family of nations." (Selver, 1940, p.290)

The times called for action on Masaryk's part, but how? His conduct at this juncture is typical of the man's whole life. Before he could act effectively he must first know the facts. Instead of immediate action merely for the sake of action, he turned his whole energy for more than four months to the most thorough study imaginable. It began by conversations with leaders of all the Czech political parties, to see how far they were ready to move in the anti-Hapsburg action. (Lowrie, 1930, p.182)

Before he left for Switzerland, Masaryk sent out letters to friends in France and London to already arrange some interviews. He was set to gather the necessary information to determine the plans of the Allies in order for him to be able to determine the right course of action. In his own words: "I collected all possible data upon friend and foe, and gathered biographical material upon those who played an active political part. Before meeting statesmen and public men, I read their writings or speeches and got as much information as I could about them" (Masaryk, 1969, 319-332).

Victor Cohen adds that Masaryk insisted that his colleagues and accomplices be equally well-prepared. He relates that Masaryk "would examine each volunteer to carry messages, personally, would tell them of the difficulties and dangers they would meet, what story to tell if they were caught. He would make them rehearse their story again and again." Masaryk himself prepared for all the eventualities, such as his own death: "He was aware that some spy or fanatic would attempt to assassinate him. He simply discussed with Beneš how to continue the work should such an eventuality happen (Cohen, 1941, p.155, 162). Masaryk's insistence on planning and thorough preparation arguably constituted a valuable tool of his leadership.<sup>14</sup>

#### 2.2.2. Creating a narrative: Cultural diplomacy and propaganda

Andrea Orzoff (2009) focuses on one specific subject of this preparation and the method of Masaryk's work at home and in exile – propaganda, as she calls it. In order to build the support for his idea of a Czechoslovak state, Masaryk purportedly selected some parts of the Czech tradition and minimized others in depicting what was to become the Czechoslovak nation. The story he told interpreted the Czechs and Slovaks as Western in their values and in their political inclinations: they were "Enlightenment rationalists yearning to be free of Austrian repression". Their new state would thus be dedicated to tolerance, egalitarianism, and human rights (p.24).

Masaryk developed considerable efforts to reach both, elites and public opinion, mainly through his memoranda, interviews, lectures, and newspapers. He headed the establishment of information centers and press agencies in several Great Power capitals (Orzoff, 2009, p.24). He was writing simultaneously for ten different newspapers in London, the most important of which was Seton-Watson's *The New Europe*, all the while submitting memoranda to the British government as an expert on Russia and Austria (Herben J., 1948, p.73-74). In Paris, the Czechoslovak cause was conveyed by journals such as *Journal des Débats*, *Le Temps*, *Paris Midi*, and *La Victoire*<sup>15</sup>; in Russia, the task was carried by the newspaper *Czechoslovak*; and in the United States, a Slav Press Bureau was established along with regular contributions to the American Czech newspapers (Zeman, 1990, p.101).

The central theme Masaryk put forward in his articles was the absolutist, reactionary, and dangerous nature of the House of Habsburg: "[The Austrian Emperor] Francis Joseph is a warning example of the perils of monarchism – of the gross immorality of unrestricted absolutism masquerading under modern constitutional and parliamentary forms in order to hide its own nakedness" (Orzoff, 2009, p.45). He argued that the only possibility of rendering Germany harmless was to split Austria-Hungary up into its national elements (*President T. G. Masaryk*, 1923, p.18). While openly admitting that he was engaged in propaganda, Masaryk emphasized that Czech propaganda was above all honest: "not to distort facts or make boasts; not to make empty promises (...), [but] to let facts speak for themselves, and use them as evidence. (...) To lie and exaggerate is the worst propaganda of all" (Čapek, 1947, p.253).

#### 2.2.3. Activism, courage and determination

About myself I can say that I never twiddled my thumbs. (*Masaryk*)

<sup>14</sup>Jan Herben's son Ivan relates as one of the anecdotes about Masaryk: "At his eightieth birthday, Masaryk asked his doctor how long he was going to live because he had still a lot of work to do. When his doctor estimated that ten or more years was possible, Masaryk simply answered "ok" and was evidently planning the work ahead." (Herben I., 1948), p.26)

<sup>15</sup>In his memoirs, Beneš recalls trying to ensure that the Czechoslovak cause would be raised in the Parisian press at least twice each week. (Beneš, 1937, p.104)

None of the consulted authors denied Masaryk's perseverance and bravery in his restless militancy for the cause he defended. On the one hand, in Masaryk's eyes, activism was an inevitable conclusion regarding the situation of the Czechs: "We are a small nation in an unfavorable geographical position: in effect it imposes upon us the obligation to be more alert, to think more, to achieve more than the others (...)" (Ebenstein, 1947, p.568). On the other hand, his character would not have allowed him to think otherwise. As Bradley Abrams says (2004), "one who waits until everything somehow turns out on its own, or lets others guide events, is not Masarykian" (p.131). Masaryk strongly disliked plain phrases, mottoes and abstract expressions. While he believed in the power of ideas, he thought that "ideas remain vain unless we find men to defend them" (Soubigou, 2002). "It was high time for our love for our country to descend from our mouths to our hands" (Jarolímek, 1948, p.96). Not only a statesman has to be active, he needs to be prepared to make great sacrifices in his struggle: "Who does not want to take the trouble, don't let him talk of nation and patriotism" (Ebenstein, 1947, p.569). Masaryk himself had showed great courage, as related by W. Preston Warren (1941):

[H]e had *courage* [emphasis in the original]: courage in the face of ideas, to see things as they are and not to hesitate to ferret out all prejudices and submit them to the severest criticism; courage in the face of men, to stand for the right, with one's head high, before the Masters of Vienna and their valets; to risk position, fortune, payment with one's life if necessary, for fidelity to a great ideal. (p.169)

It is through his activism and determination that his influence and the awareness of his cause were spreading. He recalls: "Today I am astonished that I had the strength to work as I did then. (...) I tried to contrive that every day the newspapers should publish something against Austria and about us; we had to make our cause known" (Preston Warren, 1941, p.159). When he negotiated with the Russian general staff in order to obtain their approval for the establishment of a neutral Czechoslovak army, he would succeed at the end of August 1917, only to resume the negotiations shortly after the retirement of General Brusilov who granted the approval. His successor General Kornilov, also retired and only the third in line, General Dukhonin, gave the approval on October 9<sup>th</sup>. Less than a month later, however, on November 7<sup>th</sup>, the Bolshevik revolution broke out and Masaryk had to start over again (Selver, 1940, p.275). Even when he triumphantly achieved his goal upon return to Prague, he said to the awaiting crowd: "We have reached the top, but it is easier to reach the top than to stay there" (Beneš, 1971, p. 485-486).

Masaryk's activism is not always seen in a positive light. AdreaOrzoff (2009) commented on this theme; writing that Masaryk was willing to use connections and his substantial charisma to back his allies and block his opponents, especially as President. He was allegedly a political pugilist, who "sometimes lacked the grace and wisdom to know when to abandon the fight" (p.22). Ivan Herben (1948) also portrays Masaryk as a restless fighter, although in a very different setting. When asked to comment on a recent attack on an innocent man who did not defend himself, Masaryk responded: "If someone hits me, I would beat him down with a brick, even if I had to pull it out of the wall!" (p.35) He was eighty-three at that time.

#### 2.2.4. Getting help from others

While writings on Masaryk generally agree that the first Czechoslovak state was mainly a result of his efforts, initiated by his own decision, they also all agree that he was not alone in carrying out this mission. One of the essential components of Masaryk's leadership was his ability to gather support and rally people to his cause, despite his initial isolation.

The first person to join Masaryk was Edvard Beneš, his former student, who 20 years later was recommended by Masaryk himself to take over the presidency. He provided Masaryk with financial means, but more importantly with crucial information and connections, acting as administrator and organizer (Orzoff, 2009, p.42). In London, Masaryk found eager helpers in Professor Seton-Watson and Wickham Steed, editor of the London Times. They allowed him not only to efficiently express his views in the English Press, they helped him to obtain a Professorship at King's College, which he used to impact upon English academic circles and also to assure his financial survival (Lowrie, 1930, p.197). In France, his work within the academic community was facilitated by Professor Denis, a distinguished French scholar who specialized in Slavic studies, but most of all by Milan Rastislav Štefánik, a Slovak and also his former pupil, who became a French citizen and a temporary General after years of work in France before the war. It was Štefánik who arranged for Masaryk the meeting with Prime Minister Briand. Paul Selver especially emphasizes the importance of help in the last phase of the struggle, in the United States. When Masaryk arrived to the US, he found that Edvard's brother, Vojta Beneš has done substantial work in uniting the Czechs and Slovaks there

as well as in countering the anti-Masaryk propaganda which was subsidized by Vienna. Upon reaching Washington in May 1918, he immediately got in touch with Richard Crane, who was secretary to Robert Lansing, Secretary of State, which ultimately led to the interview he had with Woodrow Wilson. Masaryk also received help from previously unknown people, such as Emanuel Voska, an American citizen of Czech origin, who voluntarily offered himself to carry his messages to Paris, London, and New York (Selver, 1940, p.285).

The paramount support he obtained in the final phase for the creation of the state was the alliance of Slovaks to his project. Without them, the Czechoslovak state could not come into existence. Slovaks were kept under tight political control by Hungary until spring 1918. They formed the Slovak National Council, which signed in June 1918 an agreement with the Czechs in Pittsburg, reading as follows: "We approve the political program which aims at the union of Czechs and Slovaks in an independent State comprising the Czech territories and Slovakia." On October 30<sup>th</sup>, two days after the Prague's proclamation of independence, Slovaks demanded the right of self-determination and solemnly joined the new Czechoslovak state.

#### 2.2.5. Assembling an Army

We need a well-disciplined army. [But] I am not a militarist. (*Masaryk*)

Most of Masaryk's activities during those four years were in the realm of cultural diplomacy, raising awareness and winning hearts and minds. However, Masaryk was very well aware that this strategy needed to be complemented with something more palpable, more concrete, and more impactful. Emil Ludwig (1936), a renowned biographer, described the rationale in the following way: "If one wants from those statesmen their support in the creation of a new country, or at least that they do not fight it, one needs to offer to those spoiled men a *présent*, which means, in times of a war, some army troops" (p.52). While the majority of authors acknowledge its significance, Edvard Beneš (1971), Masaryk's right hand, emphasizes this point with the greatest vigor. Beneš was convinced that "our Siberian army was our strongest political factor" (p.139).

Aware of their salience, Masaryk established a close relationship with his 'boys', and made every effort to provide his army with equipment and moral support (*President T. G. Masaryk*, 1923, p.21). When he was about to depart from Russia, the soldiers were running out of supplies and had no money. He quickly negotiated with the British General Consulate coupons worth 40,000 British pounds (Herben I., 1948, p.57-58).

The impact of the Czechoslovak army was felt the strongest in the West when they took control of the Trans-Siberian railway. When retreating from Russia with the aim of reaching the western front in France, they separated into three groups along 8,000 km and progressively controlled all of Siberia (Beneš, 1971, p.359). This unexpected escapade made a great impression in the US and in France, and was even written about as "the most sensational maneuver in the war" (Mahler, 2002, p.64).

The Great Powers were increasingly intrigued by this army and its potential use in their war effort. Masaryk and Beneš used them as much as they could in their efforts to grant recognition for the future Czechoslovak state. In June 1918, Georges Clemenceau told Beneš: "I want all your soldiers in France". Shortly after Beneš's answer, "You can count on me, I will go with you all the way", France recognized the Czechoslovak right to independence on June 29<sup>th</sup> (Orzoff, 2009, p.48). Masaryk also used the army's success in the note he addressed on the same day to the Secretary of State Robert Lansing, asking for recognition: "I think that this recognition has become practically necessary: I dispose of three armies [in Russia, France and Italy], I am as a wit has said, the master of Siberia and half of Russia, and yet I am in the United States formally as a private man" (Zeman, 1990, p.110).

#### 2.2.6. Gaining legitimacy

The most criticized aspect of Masaryk's leadership during the four war years is the arguable lack of legitimacy at the outset of his actions. When Masaryk made his decision to emigrate and start his struggle abroad he was indeed a private man, an academic, and the leader of a minuscule party in Austria's parliament, with no further backing. Victor Cohen (1941) describes his position as follows:

He was relatively unknown, his people were unknown. He had no credentials to enable him to speak in the name of his people. There was no official organization in Prague that he could represent. By many influential Czechs he was openly disavowed. His self-imposed task was to disrupt the oldest empire in Europe, backed by the most militant power in the world. To the matter-of-fact, it was more than a quixotic task. (p.150)

From the available literature, we can identify three courses of action that were preferred by the Czech public to the one offered by Masaryk. According to Zdeněk Mahler and Andrea Orzoff, most influential Czech political figures decided to side with the Habsburg Empire. They would merely strive to improve their situation, advocating more power in the empire's decision-making and eventually pushing for a "trialist" form of empire (the Czechs would be elevated to the same status as the Hungarian part of the monarchy had enjoyed since 1867). They disagreed with Masaryk's strategy, judging it as a "foolhardy gamble" (Orzoff, 2009, p.40) and declining the attempts of *Maffie* to enlist their help. The second group, according to Mahler (2002), would simply wait and then side with the strategy that would be more beneficial for them and for the Czechs (p.55). The third position was also anti-Habsburgian like Masaryk's, but concentrated on Russia, whereas Masaryk focused on the Western powers. The main protagonist of this course of action, Karel Kramář, wished to see the Bohemian crown placed on the head of the Russian Tsar (p.55). He had the largest following among the Czechs who together believed that Russian troops would progress westwards and push the armies of the Central Powers with ease. Kramář, therefore, remained in Prague, waiting for the Slav brothers to come, but was arrested instead (Zeman, 1990, p.65). Cecil Street defends however Masaryk's foresight as regards Russia and its lack of interest and capacity to help the Czechs<sup>16</sup>.

Finally, according to Orzoff (2009), the fact that all were progressively converted to the idea of an independent state for Czechoslovakia is not Masaryk's merit. She argues that it was more the rhetoric of national self-determination and democracy propagated by the United States that fueled the imagination of Czech politicians for their own state (p.46). This, in itself, does not question Masaryk's abilities as a state-crafter, as she admits that it was still predominantly his effort that put Czechoslovakia into existence, but it emphasizes the allegedly illegitimate character of his struggle. Brendan Clifford (2004), Irish historian and activist, is more radical. He criticized the very idea of an independent Czechoslovak state and Masaryk's national movement that led to it. "There was no actual Czechoslovak national movement at all. It was only a dream of Masaryk's," and Masaryk himself had almost no role in the creation of Czechoslovakia as "it was part of the international policy adopted (...) by some of the Great Powers, who wished for this kind of a buffer structure in Central Europe. (...) Czechoslovakia owes her independence, in fact, solely to the philanthropy of Great Britain, France, Italy and the United States" (p.36). However, such an account seems to ignore both the initial preferences of the Entente and the US, which wished to safeguard Austria as Europe's guardian of the east, and as an entity easier to manage (one interlocutor as opposed to a multiplicity of them); and the impact the Czechoslovak army had on the perceptions of the Allies. Therefore, if the preferences of Allies have shifted, it seems to be mainly due to Masaryk's action.

### **2.3. Masaryk's statecraft in his first presidential steps**

The first Czechoslovak Republic was judged in its times, and is even today seen as, "the most prosperous, progressive and democratic state of Central Europe" (Abrams, 2004, p.118). It became an island of democracy and stability in the region until the rise of Nazism and communism. Most of the authors converge in the opinion that such a result was achieved thanks to Masaryk, to his vision of politics as well as to the policies he put forward.

As regards to his vision of politics, Masaryk believed that the Presidency should remain above party politics. In his own words: "Members of Parliament are for the most part not up to the historical task, the Parliament does not work properly, it is mostly fighting, there is no time for a true discussion, uncomfortable opinions get violated and put apart in an absolutist way, which angers the opposition and ultimately discredits the Parliament and thus the Republic" (Mahler, 2002, p.77). He insisted on anchoring his vision into the new Constitution. He was successful. The President was granted the constitutional right to nominate the government; to be in touch with it by writing or in person; to chair the meetings of the cabinet, without having a vote; to address the Parliament on the state of the republic; to recommend measures to Parliament, and to return laws to Parliament for reconsideration (Zeman, 1990, p.131). Masaryk also used his charisma to influence the Parliament and lead it towards what he believed was the path of democracy. This led Roman Szporluk to affirm that Masaryk was never a "real" democrat; he was and remained throughout his life a Platonist, as he said of himself to Čapek in his old age, and had retained his Platonic belief in government by the good and the wise (Thomas, 1986, p.477).

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<sup>16</sup>"Almost alone among Czech patriots Masaryk maintained his skepticism, not only of Russian intentions towards Bohemia, but even of the ability of Russian arms to perform the task. He knew only too well how feeble was the interest felt in Russia for those Slavs who did not belong to the Orthodox Church, and how deep a gulf existed between the civilization and the culture of the Eastern and Western Slavs respectively. From the very first moment he determined to base his actions upon an appeal to the Western Powers, to whom the Czechs were linked by a common culture and by common democratic ideas." (Street, 1970, p.17)

As regards Masaryk's policies, one of the first measures he advocated for in the domestic realm aimed at improving the education of the Czechoslovak population. Masaryk believed that institutions (such as Parliament) are not enough, and that true democracy stems from an educated electorate. This education was necessary to bridge the gap between the elites and the population: "Under Austria, the whole of our education was undemocratic. (...) The difficulty of passing from an aristocratic and monarchical to a democratic system arises from the failure of monarchical aristocracy to accustom citizens to bear responsibility and to take decisions. (...) Our republic has to educate its citizens in democracy" (Miliukov, 1930, p.405). The result of Masaryk's educational policy was reflected in the high level of literacy among the Czechs, almost 96% of those over ten years were literate in 1930 (Abrams, 2004, p. 118). Education was only one pillar of Masaryk's policies as President; he saw policies granting equality as an inevitable counterpart. On the one hand, he granted full national rights and equality of citizenship to the minorities living within the Czechoslovak state (Germans and Hungarians) and tried to include them into the public life as much as possible. On the other hand, Masaryk managed to insert the equality of women directly into the Constitution. Article 106 decreed that "privileges of sex, birth, and occupation will not be recognized by the law" (Feinberg, 2006, p.34-35).

In his foreign policy, Masaryk sought to ensure security of the newly established state. He was aware that Western powers had their own interests and challenges to worry about, not always identical to the ones of Czechoslovakia. Thus, alongside the alliance with France, Masaryk and Beneš established a system of treaties with Romania and Yugoslavia under the name of Little Entente (Zeman, 1990, p.149). The common interest that allied them were Hungarian revisionist claims. It was a defensive alliance built up not in opposition to the "Great" Entente, but in supplement to it.

The First Czechoslovak Republic was torn apart by Hitler's ambitions voiced in the Munich Accords of 1938. The writings on Masaryk, however, do not blame him for these events. He gained immunity partly because of his poor health, which did not allow him to counter the spread of the Nazi extremism (although he insisted and organized a military review on the occasion of the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Republic in 1933 at the age of 83), and partly because they all agree that he would have never conceded and gave up the battle as Beneš did, if he had remained in office. Masaryk is depicted as both, the founder of the Czechoslovakia and the democratic father of the nation, which grants him, according to the Czech philosopher Milan Machovec (2000), a place in the Czech history similar to the ones George Washington and Abraham Lincoln hold in the American history (p.32). For Masaryk, democracy was not merely a way of governing the new Republic in terms of public administration; it entailed values and principles that he derived from his philosophy. The next section starts with the analysis of the latter.

### **3. Assessment of Masaryk's Philosophy and Convictions**

Masaryk trained to be a teacher; he received his doctorate in philosophy in 1876 in Vienna, where, three years later, he was appointed lecturer in philosophy. He also taught at the newly reopened Charles University in Prague, and at King's College London. Through his academic career, he became well-known for his philosophical work in *Suicide as a Social Mass Phenomenon*, where he diagnosed the crisis of Western civilization, and for his extensive analysis of the Marxist ideology in his book *The Social Question*.

The two central concepts of Masaryk's philosophy that influenced his actions are his notions of truth and humanity. They embody Masaryk's love for facts and the traditional 'love thy neighbor', as well as they represent the moral values, which he considers the politics should be based upon. This thrust for the concrete and factual, and the push for moral action he derives from these values, make him a realist, but a realist with ideals. These affirmations are further developed in this section.

#### **3.1. A philosopher in politics**

On the one hand, when studying Jan Hus, one of the greatest figures of Czech history, Masaryk took one of his teachings, the motto 'Truth will prevail', as the basis for his action and for his living. He believed truth to be superior to all other preoccupations and wanted to apply it to all domains of one's life: "Truth above all, truth always and everywhere" (Jarolímek, 1948, p.95). The description that Stanley Hoffman (1970) uses to characterize Charles de Gaulle applies to Masaryk as well: "He was always more concerned about being right than with achieving immediate results. There is a determination to be right even at the cost of immediate (...) popularity." In the age of the Czech national awakening, Masaryk argued that the two Manuscripts that supposedly proved Czech culture older than German were forgeries; he was depicted as

the national traitor. However, he explained that: “national honor requires the defense (...) of the truth, and there is more morality and courage in admitting a mistake than in defending it” (Soubigou, 2002). Later on, he defended a Jew, whom he previously did not know, against accusations of ritual murder of a young Christian girl. He was eventually proven right in both cases. In short, Masaryk strove to establish truth as the guiding principle of politics. He believed that political conflicts arose from inadequate knowledge; the quest for truth and facts would thus ensure greater insight into circumstances, and lead to more informed policy-making and thus to better policies (Orzoff, 2009, p.30). He believed truth was the most practical thing in politics (Jarolímek, 1948, p.95).

On the other hand, the notion of humanity is for Masaryk the moral basis of politics. In the simplest terms, humanity is an updated concept of ‘love of one’s neighbor’, without which the life in a (politically organized) group will disintegrate and despoil itself (Preston Warren, 1941, p.203). In his memoirs, Masaryk (1969) defends that “states and politics will not stand without moral ground. (...) The moral ground of all politics is humanity, and humanity is our national program”. However, Masaryk’s humanity calling for loving one’s neighbor is not to be considered sentimental, or intrinsically pacific. This humanity needs to be translated into an active will of improving peoples’ lives and combating injustice. In order to achieve this moral good, Masaryk was however ready to make great sacrifices and even tolerate violence. In his own words: “Humanity is not identical with pacifism at all cost”. He was well aware of the risks his fight entailed; for the Czechs, Masaryk’s failure would mean even stronger oppression and for himself a lifelong exile.<sup>17</sup> However, if Masaryk upheld the struggle against evil, it also meant that sword might be needed. If he was opposed to radicalism and revolution, he did not repudiate them if they proved to be the last means to defend the truth (*President T. G. Masaryk*, 1923, p.6). In his speech to Czech and Slovak soldiers in Russia in 1917, Masaryk explained that “war is something terrible, inhuman; especially this war. But the war is not the greatest evil – to live in injustice, to be a slave, to enslave, is worse” (Jarolímek, 1948, p.105).

### 3.2. A realist with ideals

The victorious ideas and ideals are not born of fantasy and indifference to facts. (*Masaryk*)

The active will of fighting evil, together with the love of truth, led Masaryk naturally to become a realist. Ever since Masaryk discerned “the lethargy and poison of romanticism” in Czech politics, he sided with realism, in the sense in which he would oppose reality *not* to the ideal, but to the imagination (Preston Warren, 1941, p.169). In 1895, in his book *The Czech Question*, Masaryk argued: “What we need is realism. (...) Realism must be directed against exaggerated historical tradition” (Van Wijk, 1923, p.21). He was faithful to his views in his years abroad as well. He would criticize Kramář and other Czech Russophiles’ idealization of the East and the emotion and mysticism of their arguments (Abrams, 2004, p.135). When talking to the statesmen during the war, such as Briand or Russian generals, he would concentrate his argument on factual considerations, such as the discourse that a free and independent Central Europe would help contain future German aggression (Orzoff, 2009, p.41).

His attachment to realism was also motivated by a very pragmatic preoccupation. As Paul Selver (1940) puts it:

He explained that his attachment to realism, and to the strict methods of scientific inquiry which it implied, was due to his need for something to counteract his inborn romantic tendencies, and to impose upon himself a mental discipline. Being a realist meant a constant and deliberate effort to him, for he always had to exercise restraint upon his impulsive nature. (p.312-313)

Yet, he saw no conflict in being realist and at the same holding on to ideals. In *Conversations with T. G. Masaryk*, a dialogue version of Masaryk’s memoirs, Karel Čapek (1947) comments: “You talk like a pure spiritualist; and yet all your life you have been taking on other tasks, actual practical, real ones – it is not for nothing that they call you a realist.” And Masaryk replies: “Of course, sir; but even in the actual and material, a spiritual and eternal process is taking place” (p.7). For Masaryk, having ideals required thinking on the realist and factual means of their application. He thus came to be called an amalgam of a “practical

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<sup>17</sup> Immediately after the Masaryk’s interview with Briand became publicly known, he was declared a traitor and his property was confiscated, his daughter Alice and Beneš’s wife were imprisoned, and Masaryk’s wife was constantly terrorized by the secret police. When he read an article which said that after having spent months in prison, Alice was condemned to death by shooting, Masaryk stood up and said: “A man never goes into a thing like this without counting the cost; the cost to himself and to others” (Lowrie, 1930, p.200). On the same note, when in November 1916 the new Austrian Emperor Franz Jozef made a peace proposal, granting Czechs equality with Germans and Hungarians, Masaryk did not agree with it even though it meant cessation of violence (Cohen, 1941, p.170-172).

organizer" and a "practical dreamer" (Cohen, 1941, p.148), or a "constructive realist" (Preston Warren, 1941, p.168). He is considered to be the founder of a school of thought that transformed the romanticized Czech national revival into a pragmatic form of a concrete political program.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The main skills and qualities that helped Masaryk to overcome a seemingly impossible outset situation, to reverse the odds, to direct minds and hearts towards him, to attract new ones on the way, and to overcome constant and unexpected obstacles, arguably constitute a very appropriate basic toolkit for the kind of leader that the EU needs.

Masaryk's actions depicted strong determination to follow the outset objectives, the courage to do so even in situations of danger, lacking support or resources, a natural charisma that always came useful in rallying support and consensus making, and not least honesty, stemming from his love for truth, that he would uphold irrespective of the resulting popularity. Masaryk's actions represent a commendable alliance of realist appreciation of the situation and of resources available based on facts, and of underlying moral values. He engaged in no idealistic crusades, yet he remained faithful to his ideals of truth and humanity.

Masaryk's great merits include also the definition of what one can call a 'healthy' nationalism. He advocated as well as he represented equilibrium between sentiment and reason. He refused passionate and oversensitive nationalism, "for he never based life and the world upon passions, feeling and instinct", as Beneš remarked at his funeral (Beneš, 1937, p.27). His nationalism was devoid of imaginary romanticized belligerent narratives, which is especially crucial and meaningful in an age where different nationalist rhetorics seem to be regaining ground in Europe.

Ultimately, Masaryk's personal steering forces are both rare and valuable. He was a determined and active person in each of his activities throughout his life, especially during 1914-8. He possessed in every moment in his life the self-assurance of a man convinced that he acted in accord with his conscience (Kovtun, 1990, p.2). He would always do his best to keep his word, a rare quality widely compromised in today's politics. He however failed on the final one. As Ivan Herbenidyllycally describes it, when Masaryk's son Jan was leaving for London as an ambassador in 1934, he told him: "And remember, that 90<sup>th</sup> birthday of mine will happen, I have made a firm decision about it!" (Herben I., 1948, p.138) He died before, on September 14<sup>th</sup>, 1937, at the age of 87, a little more than a month before the celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Czechoslovak republic.

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