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Circumstantial Liberals: Czech Germans in Interwar Czechoslovakia

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Monday, **November 20th 2017**, 5:00 p.m.

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While ethnic minorities may ultimately strive for creating their own state, or joining an ethnic kin state, these options are rarely realistically feasible. In such conditions, I argue, that dominant ethnic minority representatives strive to collaborate with the ethnic majority, and pursue liberal political goals, such as the protection of minority rights and civil liberties, that would ensure the survival and wellbeing of all ethnic groups. This contrasts with much of the literature which sees ethnicity as a source of particularistic, rather than liberal, politics. However, I suggest that when the plausibility of secession or irredentism increases, ethnic representatives abandon their liberal collaborative aims, and rather seek to end their minority status through exit. I study these mechanisms on the case of the German minority in interwar Czechoslovakia. Using historical analysis and quantitative content analysis of parliamentary speeches between 1920 and 1938, I demonstrate that the political actions of ethnic minority representatives are circumstantial.

Jan Rovný is assistant professor at the Centre d'études européennes and the Laboratory for Interdisciplinary Evaluation of Public Policies at Sciences Po, Paris. His research concentrates on political competition in Europe with the aim of uncovering the political conflict lines in different countries.
