THE CORPORATIST WAVE

CORPORATISM AND THE DIFFUSION OF “ORGANIC REPRESENTATION” IN EUROPEAN DICTATORSHIPS

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Corporatism and the diffusion of “Organic Representation” in European dictatorships

António Costa Pinto
Abstract

The paper examines the role of corporatism as a set of authoritarian institutions that spread across inter-war Europe and which was an agent for the institutional consolidation of fascist-era dictatorships. Institutionalized, in many cases in the wake of polarized democratizations, inter-war dictatorships tended to choose corporatism both as a process for the repression and co-optation of the labour movement, interest groups and of elites through ‘organic’ legislatures. Powerful processes of institutional transfers were a hallmark of inter-war dictatorships and we argue corporatism was at the forefront of this process of cross-national diffusion of authoritarian institutions.

Key Words: Corporatism; Fascism; Dictatorship; Interest Groups; Representation

Resumo

Este paper examina o papel do corporativismo como um conjunto de instituições autoritárias que se expandiram na Europa do período entre as duas guerras mundiais e que foram um agente da consolidação das ditaduras da época do fascismo. Institucionalizadas após processos polarizados de democratização, as ditaduras do período entre as duas guerras escolheram o corporativismo quer como processo de repressão e cooptação do movimento operário e dos interesses organizados, quer de elites através de parlamentos “orgânicos”. Poderosos processos de transferência de instituições marcaram as ditaduras do período entre as duas guerras e é aqui defendido que o corporativismo esteve na vanguarda deste processo de difusão transnacional de instituições autoritárias.

Palavras-chave: Corporativismo; Fascismo; Ditadura; Grupos de Interesses; Representação
When in 1952, in a country far from Europe, President Laureano Gómez tried (and failed) to reorganize political representation along corporatist lines, there were signs of it being the end of an era that had begun with the regimes of Sidónio Pais in Portugal (1917-18), General Primo de Rivera in Spain (1923-31) and Italian Fascism (1922-43). A Catholic corporatist with authoritarian tendencies close to those of Francoism in Spain, and leader of the Colombian Conservative Party, Gómez hoped to bring about constitutional reform that would have transformed him into the president of an authoritarian, paternalist and more confessional state with an executive that was increasingly independent of the legislature and with a corporatist senate. This failed experiment marked the end of an era of authoritarian institutional reform inspired by corporatism, which was one of the most powerful authoritarian models of social and political representation to emerge during the first half of the 20th century.

Corporatism put an indelible mark on the first decades of the 20th century – during the inter-war period particularly – both as a set of institutions created by the forced integration of organized interests (mainly independent unions) into the state and as an organic-statist type of political representation, alternative to liberal democracy. Variants of corporatism inspired conservative, radical-right and fascist parties, not to mention the Roman Catholic Church and the ‘third way’ favoured by some sections of the technocratic elites. But it mainly inspired the institutional crafting of dictatorships, from Benito Mussolini’s Italy through Primo de Rivera in Spain and the Austria of Engelbert Dollfuss, and the new Baltic States. Some of these dictatorships, such as Mussolini’s Italy, made corporatism a universal alternative to economic liberalism, the symbol of a ‘fascist internationalism’. In peripheral Portugal, Salazarism also made an aborted attempt to establish a League of Universal Corporatist Action (Liga de Ação Universal Corporativa) that was much closer to the Catholic ‘third way’ as a diplomatic means to export the Portuguese corporatist model – the most durable of all the corporatist dictatorships, surviving from 1933 to 1974. Some variants of corporatist ideology spread across Latin America and Asia, finding fertile soil in Brazil, Turkey, India and Japan.

When looking at 20th-century dictatorships we note some degree of institutional variation. Parties, cabinets, parliaments, corporatist assemblies, juntas and a whole set of parallel and auxiliary structures of domination, mobilization and control were symbols of the (often tense) diversity characterizing authoritarian regimes. These authoritarian institutions, created in the political laboratory of inter-war Europe, expanded across the globe after the end of the Second World War: particularly the personalization of leadership, the single party and the
organic-statist legislatures. Some contemporaries of fascism realized some of the institutions created by the inter-war dictatorships could be durable. As the committed early 20th-century observer, Romanian academic and politically authoritarian Mihail Manoilescu, noted, ‘of all the political and social creations of our century – which for the historian began in 1918 – there are two that have in a definitive way enriched humanity’s patrimony... corporatism and the single party’. Manoilescu dedicated a study to each of these political institutions without knowing in 1936 that some aspects of the former would be long-lasting and that the latter would become one of the most durable political instruments of dictatorships.

In this chapter we will examine the role of corporatism as a political device, against liberal democracy, that permeated the authoritarian right and dictatorships during the first wave of democratization, and especially as a set of authoritarian institutions that spread across inter-war Europe and which was an agent for the institutional consolidation of fascist-era dictatorships. Powerful processes of institutional transfers were a hallmark of inter-war dictatorships and we will argue corporatism was at the forefront of this process of cross-national diffusion of authoritarian institutions, both as a new form of organized interest co-optation by the state and of an authoritarian type of political representation that was an alternative to parliamentary democracy.

Social and political corporatism during the first wave of democratization

Corporatism as an ideology and as a form of organized interest representation was promoted strongly by the Roman Catholic Church, from the late-19th through to the mid-20th century, as a third way of social and economic organization in opposition to both socialism and liberal capitalism. Much of the model predates the Papal encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* (1891), and was due to the romanticization of medieval Europe’s feudal guilds by 19th-century conservatives who had become disenchanted with liberalism and fearful of socialism and democracy. Indeed, corporatist ideas became increasingly the vogue among younger Catholics frustrated with ‘parliamentary’ political Catholicism. Yet its influence on the formation of the policies of European Catholic parties in the post-war decade was limited. However, ‘the church’s explicit endorsement surely moved corporatism from seminar rooms to presidential palaces’, especially after the publication of the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931). Pope Pius XI assumed that as a result of the Great Depression liberal capitalism and its associated political system was in decline and that new forms of economic and social
organization were now needed. The powerful intellectual and political presence of corporatism in the political culture of Catholic elites ensured it became one of the most important elements in its spread.

Corporatism became a powerful ideological and institutional device against liberal democracy during the first half of the 20th century, but the neo-corporatist practices of some democracies during its second half – not to speak of the use of the word within the social sciences in the 1970s and 1980s – demands a definition of the phenomenon being studied, and for the sake of conceptual clarity, to disentangle social from political corporatism:

Social corporatism ‘can be defined as a system of interest representation in which the constituent units are organized into a limited number of singular, compulsory, non-competitive, hierarchically-ordered and functionally-differentiated categories, recognized or licenced (if not created) by the state and granted a deliberate representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for observing certain controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and support’.

Political corporatism can be defined as a system of political representation based on an ‘organic-statist’ view of society in which its organic units (families, local powers, professional associations and interest organizations and institutions) replace the individual-centred electoral model of representation and parliamentary legitimacy, becoming the primary and/or complementary legislative or advisory body of the ruler’s executive.

A central ideal of corporatist thinkers was the organic nature of society in the political and economic sphere. This was based on a critique of what Ugo Spirito called the egotistical and individualist homo economicus of liberal capitalism, which was to be replaced by a homo corporativus, who would be motivated by the national interest and common values and objectives.

During the inter-war period corporatism permeated the main political families of the conservative and authoritarian political right: from the Catholic parties and Social Catholicism to radical right royalists and fascists, not to speak of Durkheimian solidarists and supporters of technocratic governments associated with state-led modernization policies. Royalists, republicans, technocrats, fascists and social-Catholics shared ‘a notable degree of common ground on views about democracy and representation’ and on the project of a functional
representation as an alternative to liberal democracy, namely as constituencies of legislative chambers or councils that were established in many authoritarian regimes during the 20th century. However, there were differences between the Catholic corporatist formulations of the late-19th century and the integral corporatist proposals of some fascist and radical-right-wing parties. When we look at fascist party programmes and segments of the radical right, like the Action Française-inspired movements, the picture is even clearer, with many reinforcing ‘integral corporatism’ vis-à-vis the social corporatism of Catholicism. Two examples are sufficient to illustrate this tension.

In the Spanish Second Republic, the Spanish Confederation of the Independent Right (CEDA – Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas), formed in 1933 through the unification of a number of conservative Catholic groups and the first party based ‘on a politically-mobilized mass Catholicism’ (which for electoral reasons was poorly defined), called for the establishment of ‘a corporatist, Catholic and conservative republic’ similar to the one created by Salazar in neighbouring Portugal and that of Dolfuss in Austria. When José Antonio Primo de Rivera established the Spanish Falange (Falange Española), it was immediately suggested parliament be replaced by a system of corporatist representation that recognized the family, the municipality, the union, the business organization and the corporation ‘as the authentic basis of state organization’. However, in an attempt to differentiate its political programme from that of CEDA, the Falange strengthened its revolutionary programme, which included the nationalization of the banks, and José Antonio managed to unmask some of the conservative dimensions of the corporatist state.

In inter-war Belgium, where the Catholic unions believed the authoritarian models – even those of the Portuguese New State – were ‘statist’ and not to be followed (they even avoided using the word), the right-wing of the Catholic party was inclined to view them positively. For those on the extreme right of the Catholic party, corporatism had to be ‘the basis of political representation and a means of organizing the working class, which had lost all of its independence’. Some Catholics were sympathetic towards the authoritarian regimes in Portugal and Austria. Corporatism was an important aspect, but few Catholics wanted to replace democracy with a corporatist and authoritarian regime. Despite the differences between Flemish and Walloons in a Catholic subculture more sensitive to the working class in the former and more mistrustful of the ‘masses’ in the latter, corporatism permeated the political culture of the conservative elites – particularly the Catholic elite; however, their
influence on institutional reform was limited. In 1938, a very moderate proposal – more a project of social concertation than of corporatist organization – was approved by the senate.

The Rexis t Party (Parti Rexiste) led by Leon Degrelle emerged from a split within Catholic Action in November 1935. Independently of the complex path followed by Degrelle’s Rexists on their way to fascism, this movement’s roots were within the Catholic camp and did not escape the rule of the authoritarian radicalization of corporatist representation as a means of differentiating themselves from the conservatives. However, Rexism’s growing criticism of parliamentarianism went beyond corporatism, which was not a central theme of their political agenda. Other examples of similar tensions could be provided – from Romania to Portugal – as we shall see below.

Although cut from the same ideological cloth, social and political corporatism did not necessarily follow the same path during the 20th century. The historical experience with corporatism has not been confined to dictatorships, and in liberal democracies ‘implicit tendencies toward corporatist structures developed both before and concurrently with the emergence of fascism’. In fact, occupational representation was not limited to the world of dictatorships, with several democracies discovering complements to the typical parliamentary representation. Corporatist ideology was a particularly powerful influence in Ireland’s 1937 constitution, for example, which called for the election of groups representing interests and services, while several other inter-war bicameral democracies introduced corporatist representation to their upper chambers. France in the 1930s (and the Vichy regime) became one of the most important locations for the spread of the most significant variant of corporatist ideologies, witnessing ‘a veritable explosion of corporatist theorizing as intellectuals and politicians grappled with the implications of economic depression, social division and escalating international tension’. In addition to the neo-socialists and technocrats, many jurists and conservative and Catholic economists translated, interpreted and promoted corporatist alternatives, with significant transnational impact, particularly the Institute for Corporatist and Social Studies (Institut d’études corporatives et sociales).

Many ideologists of social corporatism – particularly within Catholic circles – advocated a societal corporatism without the omnipresent state, but the praxis of corporatist patterns of representation was mainly the result of an imposition by authoritarian political elites on civil society. In fact, ‘whatever pluralist elements there were in corporatism (notably the stress on the autonomy of corporations), they were annihilated by a foundational commitment to a supreme common good, infusing with a sense of purpose and direction a complex pyramidal
edifice that had the state at its apex. Under inter-war dictatorships, social corporatism became synonymous with the forced unification of organized interests into single units of employers and employees that were tightly controlled by the state and which eliminated their independence: especially the independence of the trade unions. Social corporatism offered autocrats a formalized system of interest representation with which to manage labour relations: legitimizing the repression of free labour unions through the co-optation of some of its groups in state-controlled unions, often with compulsory membership. Last but not least, corporatist arrangements also sought to ‘allow the state, labour and business to express their interests and arrive at outcomes that are, first and foremost, satisfactory to the regime’. 

Despite some dictatorships legitimizing themselves with a corporatisme d’association that was closer to Social Catholicism, or which had some modernizing projects, the model adopted by the great majority of dictatorships was much closer to fascist statism. As one French observer noted in 1942, after studying the practices of five European dictatorships, ‘corporatisme d’association is seen as the only true corporatism... and it does not exist!’ In practical terms, the institutionalization of social corporatism in most dictatorships followed models close to the proclamations contained in the Italian labour charter (Carta del Lavoro), thereby demonstrating its primacy. State intervention, a large imbalance between business and labour associations (with the former having greater influence and the independence of the latter eliminated) and the creation of strong para-state institutions, was typical of almost all the corporatist experiments. In fact, the elimination of free unions and their forced integration into the state was the dominant characteristic.

However, during this period corporatism was also used to refer to the comprehensive organization of political society beyond state-social groups relations seeking to replace liberal democracy with an anti-individualist system of representation. As Williamson noted, ‘what did unite the corporatist was their indifference to the concept of democracy and democratic norms’ and from this it was just a small step to corporations as a representational structure. Corporatist theorists presented a reasonable diversity of the ‘organic basis of representation drawing on the permanent forces of society’, in their alternatives to liberal democracy, but as the Marquis de La Tour du Pin (1834-1924) noted, this representation must be ‘essentially consultative’. The curtailment of this new legislature’s powers and the autonomy of an executive with a head of government who is not responsible to parliament is an almost universal proposal of corporatists in early-20th-century politics.
George Valois, the syndicalist ideologist of French Action (Action Française) and founder of one of the first French fascist movements, encapsulated the functions of corporatist legislatures when he proposed the replacement of parliament with general estates (etats généraux). ‘This body was not to be an assembly in which decisions were made based on majority votes or where the majority would be able to overwhelm the minority; rather, it was to be an assembly in which the corporations adjusted their interests in favour of the national interest’.42 In 1926, the Spanish general, Miguel Primo de Rivera, was not engaging in intellectual romanticism when he introduced corporatist principals in his dictatorship, proclaiming ‘the parliamentary system has failed and no-one is crazy enough to re-establish it in Spain. The government and the Patriotic Union (UP – Unión Patriótica) call for the construction of a state based on a new structure. The first cell of the nation will be the municipality, around which is the family with its ancient virtues and its modern concept of citizenship’.43 In Austria in 1934, Chancellor Englebert Dollfuss reaffirmed the words of the Spanish general – words many dictators were either thinking privately or repeating publicly – ‘this parliament... will never, and must never, return again’.44 From this perspective, corporatism was an extremely appealing proposal for crafting and a powerful agent for the institutional hybridization of inter-war dictatorships, largely surpassing the ground from which it sprang.45

Since representation is an essential element of modern political systems, authoritarian regimes tended to create political institutions in which the function of corporatism was to give legitimation to organic representation and to ensure the co-optation and control of sections of the elite and organized interests. ‘Working out policy concessions requires an institutional setting: some forum to which access can be controlled, where demands can be revealed without appearing as acts of resistance, where compromises can be hammered out without undue public scrutiny and where the resulting agreements can be dressed in a legalistic form and publicized as such’.46 Another implicit goal of the adoption of corporatist representation, Max Weber noted, was to disenfranchise large sectors of society.47 As Juan Linz states: ‘corporatism encourages the basic apoliticism of the population and transforms issues into technical decisions and problems of administration’.48

Institutionalized, in many cases in the wake of polarized democratizations, inter-war dictatorships tended to choose corporatism both as a process for the repression and co-optation of the labour movement, interest groups and of elites through ‘organic’ legislatures. Nevertheless, if the introduction of social corporatism was firmly associated with the
European dictatorships of the first half of the 20th century, their transformation into the base element of ‘organic representation’ in the new authoritarian political institutions, particularly the ‘corporatist parliaments’ was much more diverse, even if its spread was much more rapid (See Table 1.1). The constitutions, constitutional revisions and their authoritarian equivalents are a clear indication of this dynamic. In the immediate aftermath of the First World War and the early 1920s, with the exception of the short-lived regimes of Sidónio Pais in Portugal and Gabriel D’Annunzio in the Italian regency of Carnaro, no corporatist parliament was provided for in any of the new constitutions, but by 1938 the number had risen exponentially.49

**Table 1.1. Dictatorships and Corporatism in Europe, 1918-1945**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Regime</th>
<th>Type of Party System</th>
<th>Social Corporatism</th>
<th>Political Corporatism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td></td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>Ustaše Regime (1941-45)</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td></td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>Metaxas Dictatorship (1936-41)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>National Socialist Regime (1933-1945)</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td></td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>Smetona Dictatorship (1926-40)</td>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td></td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>Pilsudsky Dictatorship - (1926-1935) -(1935-1940)</td>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>Royal Dictatorship (1937-40)</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No (after 1941)</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>Tiso Dictatorship (1940-44)</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Francoism (1939-1975)</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yugoslavia</td>
<td>Royal Dictatorship (1929-1934)</td>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In many cases, the corporatist or economic parliaments either co-existed with and assisted parliaments or replaced them with a new legislature with consultative functions, which provided the government with technical assistance. The most influential theorist of Quadragesimo Anno, the Jesuit Heirich Pesch, did mention the economic parliament as a ‘central clearing house’ of his organic view, but he left its structure to the future.50 With
Rerum Novarum, the corporatism frame became clearer, with a corporatist reorganization of society associated with the strong anti-secular principals of parliamentary democracy held by Pope Pius XII. In 1937, Karl Loewenstein saw ‘this romantic concept of organic representation’ in new legislatures trying to be a ‘true mirror of the social forces of the nation and a genuine replica of its economic structure’. However, the role of corporatist bodies within the dictatorships was, as we will see below, much less romantic.

It is from this perspective we revisit the processes of the institutional crafting of social and political corporatism in inter-war European dictatorships, on three axes: construction of the political authonomy of the dictator and his executive from the legislative, the creation of a single or dominant party, the levels of state control of Interest Groups, and especially of the union movement, and the types (and projects) of authoritarian legislatures they created.

Italian Fascism: Quick diffusion and slow institutionalization

The institutionalization of corporatism in Italy is particularly interesting because while it may have been an element in the spread of social corporatism it was the dominant model, and its implementation was one of the slowest and with more inter-institutional tensions that the other transitions to authoritarianism. Even as an integral part of the PNF programme and quickly outlined in the declaration of principles in the 1927 Charter, it was to take another 11 years for the new system to be integrated and completed with the creation of the Camara dei Fasci e dei Corporazione.

As a declaration of the principles of Fascist corporatism, the 1927 Carta del Lavoro fell short of the aspirations of Fascist syndicalism; however, it was the most influential document within those dictatorships that adopted social corporatist institutions, playing a role model in Europe and beyond. As Matteo Passeti shows, the influence of the Carta del Lavoro crossed borders, connected intellectual circles, contaminated ideological currents and inspired policy-making as a ‘real epochal factor’.

Drawn up by Justice Minister Alfredo Rocco, the Carta del Lavoro defined three main principals of Fascist social corporatism: first, the authoritarian regulation of labour conflict through the abolition of the right to strike and lockout and the creation of the labour courts; second, the state monopoly on labour relations through the legal recognition of a sole employer association and a single trade union for every sector; and third, the creation of the first corporatist bodies through the constitution of the National Council of Corporations. These elements created a new authoritarian model of labour relations and the subordination
of interest groups to the state. Moreover, from its promulgation in April 1927, the Carta del Lavoro was heralded by its promoter as a ‘universal document’. In Bottai’s words, through this corporatist charter, Italy regained its pre-eminence among nations. The great depression increased the pace of the popularization of corporatist policies and its institutions spread across Europe and the world. Corporatism was now, more than ever, a transnational keyword that met the expectations of the dictators and conservative political elites.

The institutionalization of political corporatism was, however, very much slower in Fascist Italy. In the celebrated Futurist manifesto of 1918, Filippo Marinetti announced the ‘transformation of parliament through the equitable participation of industrialists, farmers, engineers and businessmen in the government of the country’. However, even before their fusion with the National Fascist Party (PNF – Partito Nazionale Fascista), the nationalists of Enrico Corradini and Alfredo Rocco were the most systematic ideologists of integral corporatism and national syndicalism. For Rocco, this integral syndicalism represented both the integration into the state of organized interests and the elimination of parliament and senate in favour of bodies representing professions and other functional groups. Rocco’s statism was perhaps the most different from Catholic corporatism since it was a strategy for the passive and subordinated integration of the masses into the state.

Many authors stress the primacy of institutional reform over the economic question in Italian Fascism. In the inaugural speech of the Fasci di Combattimento (Italian League of Combatants), Mussolini immediately referred to the need for the ‘direct representation of interests’, which was also noted in the PNF’s 1921 programme. Mussolini and the PNF had institutional reform and the elimination of liberal representation in mind ever since the March on Rome of 1922; however, the ‘legal’ nature of the Fascist seizure of power, the presence of a monarch who was heir of the liberal period and some inter-institutional conflicts, particularly with the PNF, ensured the process was slow and full of tension.

The first concern of the Fascists was to secure political control of parliament, which they quickly achieved, while eliminating its capacity for legislative initiative and declaring the independence of the executive and the head of government. Following this, corporatist representation was an ever-present in the proposals for the abolition of a parliament that managed to continue existing – at least formally – for a few more years. The capacity to implement fully the reform introducing corporatist representation were limited. There were significant differences between the projects of Giuseppe Bottai, in which the institutions of the Chamber and the senate were illogical and meaningless in a corporatist state, and more
moderate proposals whereby parliament, and more specifically its higher chamber, the senate, would be transformed in line with the new principles of corporatist representation. In November 1927, the Grand Council discussed a plan for reform that was supposed to determine the issue of the corporatist state once and for all, but once again there was no outcome and the regime carried on as essentially a hybrid, retaining liberal principles alongside corporatist ones.

In 1929, elections were replaced with plebiscites in which Italians could respond yes or no to candidates chosen by the Fascist Grand Council from a list of names put forward by the PNF, the Fascist syndicates and business organizations. In this way representation became organic, accompanied with the corporatization of interest organizations as outlined in the 1927 labour charter, and the chamber dominated by the PNF. With the shift to the plebiscitary phase, the primary responsibility for nominating candidates to the Chamber of Deputies lay with the national confederations of legally-recognized unions, who were to put forward 800 names, twice the number to be elected. A further 200 names were to be put forward by charitable bodies with legal recognition, or by organizations of national importance. The Fascist Grand Council’s task was to select the 400 whose names would appear on the approved list and be submitted to the plebiscite.

In 1931, Mussolini called on the Fascist Grand Council to begin reforming parliament. The secretary of the PNF, Giovanni Giuriati, who was also president of parliament, was charged with the project. At the beginning of the 1930s, the debate around corporatism and the reform of representation became a hot topic. There were several options available within the limited pluralism of the regime, with the former nationalist, Rocco, calling for a model of corporatism limited more to labour relations, while Giuseppe Bottai called for a more decentralized model without forgetting the manifest desire of the PNF to dominate the future chamber. Farinacci opposed the proposal to turn the National Council of Corporations into a corporatist chamber because he thought this would undermine the PNF. Giuriati finally proposed the establishment of a Fascist legislative assembly and the dissolution of the senate; however, Mussolini, possibly in order not to enter into conflict with the king, opposed the abolition of the upper house of the liberal era, which the PNF subsequently ‘fascistized’.

Another commission was then created by hierarchies of fascism and jurists, supported by civil servants who studied the systems in Germany, Poland, Portugal and Austria. It was not until 1936 – 14 years after taking power – that Mussolini was finally able to announce the
establishment of the Chamber of Fasces and Corporations (Camera dei Fasci e delle Corporazioni), and with it the corporatization of political representation. After two years of discussion, the Solmi commission concluded its work. On 7 October 1938, the Grand Council approved the bill on the establishment of the Chamber of Fasces and Corporations and the maintenance of a senate by royal appointment, a legacy of the liberal past. The creation of this new chamber marked the end of the process of institutionalizing the corporatist regime. Among other things, this endorsed the union between party and corporation, which was subsequently approved by parliament in January 1939. The Chamber’s official opening took place on 23 March 1939 with 682 ‘national councillors’ in attendance: 18 members of the Fascist Grand Council, 139 from the National Council of the PNF, and 525 from the National Council of Corporations.

An essential characteristic of the new chamber was that its members took their seats there by virtue of their membership of other bodies within the regime, of which the most important were the Party’s national council, provincial administrations and the National Council of Corporations. The reform also implicitly heralded the end of the concept of a parliamentary term, as the chamber was a permanent body: its members would only cease to be national councillors if they were to lose their posts within one of the regime’s bodies. This chamber then became the functional representation of the PNF’s national council and National Council of Corporations, while members of the Fascist Grand Council became ex-officio members. A survey of its members in 1939 allows us to note a difficult balance between counsellors of the PNF and the corporations, with the latter being – at least formally – dominant. In practice, the situation was different, since the PNF was also represented within the corporatist structures.64 Because he had to recognize all national counsellors by decree, Mussolini had the last word.

Although the Italian Fascist model of corporatism has spread around the world before its institutionalization, the Italian example was consecrated into a bicameral political system, with an advisory corporatist chamber and a politically controlled senate, with a strong single party and an omnipresent Grand Council.

Corporatism in the ‘longue durée’: The Iberian experiences

The more durable experiments in the institutionalization of social and political corporatism were the Iberian dictatorships of Primo de Rivera and the Francisco Franco in Spain and Oliveira Salazar in Portugal. Those of Franco and Salazar especially, because their longevity
made them an interesting laboratory for analysing corporatist institutions. The creation of a single or dominant party and of corporatist legislatures also presided over the consolidation of these regimes, enabling a safer assessment of their functions.

In September 1923, General Miguel Primo de Rivera led a coup against the liberal regime, issuing a manifesto to the country in which he denounced social agitation, separatism and clientelism. His imposition of order was justification for a transitional dictatorship; however, he held a plebiscite on a plan to change the constitutional order and institutionalize a new regime. This was quickly implemented through the creation of a party, the Patriotic Union (UP – Unión Patriótica) controlled by the government, of a corporatist parliament with limited powers and an attempt to integrate all organized interests into the state with the abolition of class-based unions. The fact the dictator was a soldier was no obstacle to the institutionalization of the regime, and Miguel Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship was an illustration of ‘the idea that the existence of a single national interest contained in military thinking coincides with the vision of the common good of the organic-statist model’, an ideological element that became part of the history of 20th-century dictatorships. The UP played the role of the regime party in Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship, despite the regime’s limited pluralism allowing other parties to exist legally, indicating that ‘within the regime there is only one party’. In fact, the UP represented the attempt to create a party from the top down, based on sections of the conservative elites of the previous oligarchic parties. As it was mainly an instrument of the dictator and of the government, the UP was weak as a single party in terms of elite recruitment and as a decision-making centre that only exercised some functions at the local administration level.

The institutionalization of social corporatism, started at the beginning of 1923, with the labour code and culminated in November 1926 when the Labour Minister, Eduardo Aunós, signed the law for the institution of the National Corporatist Organization (ONC – Organización Nacional Corporativa). In particular, as in the Fascist model, the ONC was a centralized and state-led organization with a pyramidal structure that provided control over labour relations, but although he admitted his intellectual debt to Italian Fascism and to its primacy, the Spanish counterpart had more concessions to the liberal tradition, including a degree of trade union freedom, retaining the right to strike and even collaboration with part of the socialist movement, which was not banned. Eduardo Aunós was a genuine representative of corporatism thinking in Spain in the 1920s and 1930s. He was secretary to the conservative liberal politician Cambó and influenced by traditional Catholic thought and the works of the
Marquis de La Tour du Pin (1834-1924). He was also an international reference of the spread of corporatism in international organizations, as president in 1929 of the 13th International Labour Conference and head of the International Labour Organization (ILO). After the end of Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship, it continued to be one of the most active ideologues of corporatism in Spain, in exile during the Second Republic, and joined Falange de las JONS in 1937, becoming a minister in Franco’s government.69

A national consultative assembly was established in 1927 which, as its name suggests, collaborated rather than legislated. This assembly, the first corporatist chamber in inter-war Europe, consisted of 400 representatives of the state, local authorities, the party, municipalities and professional groups, in a process controlled by the interior ministry.70 Even while participating in this corporatist assembly, some conservatives remained suspicious of its consultative functions. On the eve of the dictatorship’s collapse in 1929, the project for the new constitution that would result in a dramatic increase in the executive’s powers and the establishment of a single chamber, the members of which were to be nominated by the UP and elected by direct and corporatist suffrage in equal measure, was presented to the public. According to the preliminary draft of the constitution, the new parliament would have been constituted as follows: half of the members elected by direct universal suffrage, 30 life deputies by royal appointment and the others ‘elected by special colleges of professions or classes’.71

Some of the institutional traces of this early dictatorial experiment in the Iberian Peninsula were also present in Portugal, which experienced one of the longest dictatorships of the 20th century, and which until the end claimed a corporatist legitimacy. On 28 May 1926, a military coup put an end to Portugal’s parliamentary republic. Between the end of the republic and the institutionalization of Salazar’s New State there were seven unstable years of military dictatorship; however, it is worth citing the project for a new constitution that the leader of the military uprising, General Manuel de Oliveira Gomes da Costa, presented to the first government of the dictatorship just one month after the coup: ‘A new constitution based on the following principles: national representation by direct delegation from the municipalities, the economic unions and the educational and spiritual bodies, with the absolute exclusion of individualist suffrage and the consequent party representation’.72 Other projects were discussed during the years that followed, but this example demonstrates the importance of corporatist alternatives in Portuguese anti-democratic elite political culture. In fact, in 1918, during the brief dictatorship of Sidónio Pais, a parliament controlled by a dominant party
formed by the government co-existed with a senate with corporatist representation; however, it lasted only briefly.

Even although corporatism was present in the dominant ‘political families’ of the military dictatorship, from the integralist monarchists to the republicans, the many constitutional projects discussed and presented to Salazar, alongside the institutionalization of social corporatism with the 1933 National Labour Statute (ENT – Estatuto Nacional do Trabalho), expressing tensions between the integral corporatism of some, particularly the traditionalist monarchists, and the conservative liberalism of the republicans, or between President Carmona who was elected in 1928, and Salazar. The single party, the National Union, was created in 1930 from above and based on the unification of conservative elites from the various parties that supported the dictatorship, was not a focus for any tension in the institutionalization of Salazar’s New State.73

The introduction of social corporatism by Salazar’s New State (1933-1974) in Portugal deserves particular attention since corporatism was written into the 1933 constitution and given a central role in determining institutional structures, ideology, relations with ‘organized interests’, and the state’s economic policy, as well as its long duration. The foundation stone of social corporatism was contained in the 1933 ETN. As a declaration of corporatist principals, ETN owed a great deal to Italian Fascism’s labour charter, although, as in the case of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship, tempered by the ideals of Social Catholicism.74 With the ETN, approved unions were the first sector to be affected, and subsequent legislation foresaw a long series of intermediate bodies that would lead to the constitution of the corporations.75 Social corporatism was strongly institutionalized in the Portuguese case, with agencies to encompass virtually all social groups and professions, but until the 1950s, when the corporations were finally created, a sizeable part of the representation of the organic elements of the nation was chosen by the corporatist council, made up by Salazar and ministers connected with the sector.

The founder of the Portuguese corporatist system, Pedro Teotónio Pereira, was a former Integralist, a radical-right Action Française-inspired elitist movement, who united young radical-right-wingers, fascists and social-Catholic civil servants within his department. The promulgation of the ENT provoked tensions with a native fascist movement, Rolão Preto’s National-Syndicalists (MNS – Movimento Nacional-Sindicalista) because it ‘stole [their] thunder’.76 For NS, corporatism was a key objective and the cornerstone of its plans to reorganize the state. Although Salazar’s programme diverged from theirs, the ETN was
nonetheless a severe blow to NS attempts to establish a distinct identity while allowing some of its leaders to join the regime.

Once the ETN was established and the appropriate control mechanisms created, the organization of labour was undertaken. The government gave the unions two months either to accept the new system or to disband. Substantially weakened after the 1926 coup, the unions accepted the new legislation, albeit by only a slight majority. The most important unions were simply dissolved when they rejected the legislation. In January 1934 a strike took place to protest the so-called ‘fascistization’ of the remaining unions; these were then recreated from the top down by officials from within the corporatist apparatus, although many remained based on the previous unions.

The new unions were controlled by the National Institute of Labour and Welfare (INTP – Instituto Nacional do Trabalho e Previdência). Their governing statutes and prospective leaders were submitted to state approval. If they diverged from the ETN, they were summarily dissolved. Even members’ dues came under official scrutiny. In order to keep them weak and ineffective, national representation was not permitted. The rural world was represented by the casas do povo (community centres). The regime did not recognize social differences in a rural society overseen by ‘associate protectors’, actually latifundistas. The old rural unions were abolished, particularly in the latifundia-dominated south. To ensure the working classes were culturally provided for, the National Foundation for Happiness at Work (FNAT – Federação Nacional de Alegria no Trabalho) was created.

The importance of the corporatist system becomes clearer when examining state economic intervention from 1930 onwards.77 The pre-corporatist institutions that could ensure smooth relations between the state and the emerging corporatist institutions, such as the organizations of economic co-ordination, were maintained. According to official rhetoric, they were to disappear gradually over time as the corporatist edifice neared completion. In practice, however, they became central features of the regime, gaining total control over the grémios (guilds) in the agricultural sector, the weaker industrial areas and the agro-food export sector.78 The integration of the old employers’ associations into the new corporatist system was asymmetrical, especially when compared with labour. Decrees governing the grémios sought to reorganize employers and the liberal professions, but in a more moderate and prudent fashion. The employers’ associations remained tentatively active. Although supposedly ‘transitional’, some of them lasted as long as the regime itself.
The development of Salazar’s constitutional project at the beginning of the 1930s and the institutions defined by him were symptomatic of the role of the various conservative currents supporting the dictatorship and the role of the military. The first project called for a corporatist system for the election of both the president and parliament; however, between this and the project presented to the public in 1932 many changes were introduced by Salazar and his council of notables. In the 1932 project, there was a legislature of 90 deputies, half elected by direct suffrage and half by corporatist suffrage. This project was strongly criticized by some republican military officials as well as by the followers of Lusitanian Integralism (IL – Integralismo Lusitano) and Francisco Rolão Preto’s NS while the church was more concerned with the absence of God in the constitution. Republican military officials criticized the corporatization of representation while the MNS and the IL believed the constitution had given up too much ground to republican liberalism. President Carmona and Salazar were mainly worried by the distribution of powers between them.

Although seen as a model corporatist regime at the end of the 1930s, the final version approved by Salazar and submitted to a plebiscite was a compromise. Portugal became ‘a unitary and corporatist republic’, but the president and the National Assembly were elected through direct – not corporatist – suffrage. In fact, the constitution opted for a single chamber, with a national assembly occupied exclusively by deputies selected by the single party, the UN, and elected by direct suffrage; however, it also created a consultative corporatist chamber composed of functional representatives. The National Assembly had few powers before an executive free of parliamentary ties; however, the corporatist chamber was to be a consultative body. The Portuguese corporatist chamber, which was made up of 109 procurators and whose meetings were private, remained a consultative body for both the government and the National Assembly.

The longevity of the Portuguese regime and some research into Salazar’s corporatist chamber allows us to reach some conclusions (which, unfortunately, cannot be generalized given the absence of comparative data) about functional representation. Despite the great majority of procurators in the chamber representing functional interests, a small group of administrative interests were nominated by the corporatist council that was led by the dictator and which constituted the chamber’s elite. In practice, these ‘political’ procurators, making up an average of 15 per cent of all procurators, controlled the chamber.

An analysis of a large number of the corporatist chamber’s ‘advisory opinions’ during the first decade of its operation allows us to conclude that its function within the framework of the
dictator’s consultation system, ‘permitted it a first hearing of the impact of public policies and to make suggestions about the implications of the measures to be adopted’. Finally, it also underlined its subordinate character compared to the National Assembly, given that its advisory opinions were not necessarily taken into account during debates in the National Assembly. However, it is worth noting that the National Assembly was also given a subordinate role as an adviser on legislation and was closely integrated with the executive and subservient to it in a regime, not of separation of powers but of ‘organic unity’.

Compared with Salazarism, Franco’s neighbouring regime represented the institutionalization of a dictatorship through a radical break with the institutional liberal past – much more so than Italian Fascism. The product of a bloody civil war, the main characteristic of the first years of the Franco regime was its radical break with democracy. During the early years of Francoism, ‘the nominal structure of the Franco regime was the most purely arbitrary of the world’. Officially announcing a totalitarian model following the creation of a single party formed through the forced unification of groups that had supported him during the civil war, FET-JONS (Falange Española de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional-Sindicalista), under Falange leadership – even if placed under Franco’s authority – not only managed to create a party apparatus and ancillary organizations that were much more powerful, but its access to segments of the new political system was closer to the PNF in Mussolini’s Italy.

Social corporatism was an essential component of Francoism and its institutions, which began to be sketched out in nationalist-controlled areas during the civil war, where tensions existed between the Falange’s national syndicalist model and those of groups closer to conservative Catholics. Not all of these conflicts were doctrinal in nature; some were expressions of the fears within the Falange that its role in the creation of the new corporatist structure would be reduced. However, these fears were not confirmed, as both the 1938 labour charter (Fuero del Trabajo) and the definition of the institutional structure of the Francoist labour organization gave the Falange a central role. In 1940, when the syndical union law required most workers, technicians and employers to join one of the 27 multi-function, vertical and sectoral syndicates, the process was controlled both at the state and party level by the Falangists. Despite the fascist rhetoric accompanying the creation of the corporatist system being powerful, with the removal in 1941 of Salvador Merino, the Falangist director of syndicates, the party’s influence was to diminish and, more significantly, the original concept of vertical syndicates was to be replaced with employers and workers being represented in separate sections.
Under Ramón Serrano Suñer’s leadership, in 1940 FET-JONS’ political committee outlined the first project of constitutional laws, which also anticipated the establishment of a corporatist parliament. A total of 20 of the draft’s 37 articles were devoted to it. As Stanley Payne notes, Serrano Suñer backed a ‘more fully fascist political system than Franco was willing to permit’. The most controversial proposal contained in this project was the institutionalization of FET-JON’s political committee as a collegiate co-ordination body between the state and the movement: a kind of Francoist version of Mussolini’s Fascist Grand Council. Conservatives viewed this body as the interjection of the party in the state, and Franco dismissed it.

Franco’s decision to create a corporatist parliament in 1942 was an important step in the consolidation of his regime – particularly given the tide of the Second World War was turning against fascism – and the chief institutional innovation of this phase of the redefinition of legitimacy. Religion and organic-statist views of state-society relations did play a central role. The Spanish Christian roots, the exceptional historical position of the Caudillo and representation of the people through a system of ‘organic democracy’, were to be the main elements of the legitimacy of consolidated Francoism after the era of fascism.

The Spanish corporatist parliament, the Cortes, was established as an instrument of collaboration with Franco in whom all legislative power resided as regards the formulation of laws. The procurator’s oath was only rarely present in other ‘corporatist parliaments’ of the period: ‘In the name of God and all the saints, I swear to carry out the duties of procurator to the Cortes in complete loyalty to the head of state and general of our glorious armies’. According to the law governing the Cortes, this new legislature was to serve ‘for the expression of contrasting opinions within the unity of the regime’. Franco, the head of state, would continue as ‘the supreme power and to dictate legal norms’, but the Cortes would represent ‘a valuable instrument of collaboration in that task’. The first Cortes consisted of around 423 procurators, made up of 126 members of the single party’s national council, 141 from the syndical organization, 50 appointed by the Caudillo and the remainder representatives of the municipalities, families and associations of liberal professions, etc. Cabinet ministers and the head of the judiciary were also members. The large majority of procurators were public servants; consequently, the weight of the bureaucracy within it was very significant. The first municipal elections for the appointment of procurators by the family, trade union and corporation corps were held in 1948. The only change in the composition of the Cortes was the introduction in 1967 of 108 family representatives,
formally elected through a restricted electoral system. Needless to say, the cabinet was responsible to the head of state and Cortes was designed to advise and to deliberate upon proposed laws coming from the government. To avoid the creation of informal factions within Cortes, its president was nominated by Franco and the heads of commissions were nominated by the president of Cortes. Few institutional changes took place during the dictatorship’s long duration.

The Nazi exception and the Austrian model: Corporatism in Germany and in Dollfuss’s Austria

The fate of corporatism in the Nazi dictatorship is complex. From very early on social corporatism was present in the Weimar Republic and during the great restructuring of the ‘organized interests’, especially of labour under Nazi rule. As stressed above, one should be careful when using the concept of corporatism in relation to Nazi Germany, but it help us ‘understand a number of important characteristics and institutions of the regime in its relationship with industry, commerce and agriculture’.98

The founding programme of the German National Socialist Party (NSDAP – Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei), published in 1920, made mention of ‘corporatist and professional chambers’, but political corporatism remained essentially a playground for intellectuals until 1930 with little presence in Nazi political manifestos. Nevertheless, some sections of the Nazi elite remained sympathetic to a ‘form of socio-political representation by hierarchically-organized occupational estates (berufsstande), which were to bring together individual and general interests in an “organic” manner’.99 Othmar Spann’s corporatist model was partially endorsed; however, proposals for corporatist representation in inter-war Germany were mainly contained in the political culture of conservative and authoritarian elites and the Italian ‘Fascist corporatism was praised as an antidote to Nazi socialism’.100 In the late Weimar period, Von Papen had taken an important step towards authoritarian government, liberating it from dependence on shifting parliamentary majorities; but a second chamber with representatives of the professions and corporations, an idea that had been advanced by some corporatist thinkers, was never on the cards. The ‘window of opportunity’ presented by the Weimar’s late authoritarian period was closed with the Nazi rise to power in 1933.

From 1933, the Nazi regime began eliminating free trade unions, integrating them into the state-sponsored German Labour Front (DAF – Deutsche Arbeitsfront). Cristian trade unions assumed they enjoyed special sympathy from the Nazis because of ‘their nationalist and
corporatist traditions’, but they were soon disabused.101 Workers, employees, craftsmen, trade industry and liberal professionals were to be organized into five associations, with DAF as the peak association.102 In 1936, with the creation of the central economic chamber, the reorganization of employers’ associations was complete and was later articulated with DAF and the Nazi Party, which brought Nazi Germany closer to the social corporatist model.103

‘Organic’ representation was never on the cards in Nazi Germany as well. As a Nazi law Professor wrote in 1934, ‘The German people were not a static organism in the sense of corporatist theories, but were “followers of the Führer on the road to the Volksgemeinschaft”.’104 The fate of the corporatist institutions in Nazi Germany shows that the Nazis were not willing to accept institutions that might curtail Hitler’s political power, and political corporatism was apparently incompatible with the ‘polycracy’ evolution of the Nazi political system in the late 1930s.105

Further south, in Austria the opposite was happening in 1933 and 1934. Othmar Spann and other corporatist ideologists had a greater presence in the political arena. In fact, the institutionalization of Englebert Dollfuss’s dictatorship in Austria was one of the most complete expressions of an attempt at the authoritarian fusion of social and political corporatism under the hegemony of authoritarian political Catholicism. Its most more significant characteristic is that it originated from an authoritarian derivation of dominant sections of the Christian Social Party (CS – Christlichsoziale Partei), and was based on a constitution that promoted integral corporatism and was pursued after the assassination of Dollfuss by his successors before the indifference and sometimes hostile reaction of Austrian National Socialists, and which was suppressed quite brutally following the 1938 Anschluss.

In Austria, corporatism was a project shared by fascist Heimwehren (home guard) and conservative Catholics; however, the hegemony of its institutionalization by political Catholicism was obvious.106 From the beginning of the 1920s the CS put forward proposals for the partial corporatization of political representation and, by the beginning of the following decade, under the leadership of Ignaz Seipel, the CS moved away from democracy. This CS leader was one of the most important supporters of the corporatist option as the ‘true democracy’ in Austria.107 In 1929, the CS repeated some of its 1919 proposals for a corporatist upper chamber, a proposal that was rejected by the Social Democratic Workers’ Party of Austria (SDAPÖ – Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei Österreichs). However, when Dollfuss suspended the constitution, dissolved parliament, banned the political parties and began governing with emergency powers, the transition to authoritarianism was enabled
through the institutionalization of corporatist representation formalized in the 1934 constitution. In this context, the influence Heimwehr fascists had on the corporatist option cannot be understated, since it coincided with the time they had their greatest political influence within the new regime. As they were closer to the Italian Fascist model and to Othmar Spann, they had been proposing projects for the corporatization of the political system since 1930.

The 1934 constitution established a period of transition, and when Hitler invaded Austria in 1938 a large part of the corporatization process had not yet left the drawing board. According to the new constitution, the legislative structure of the Austrian New State was based on three pillars representing self-government in economic, state and cultural politics, and functioning as advisory bodies. They had to offer opinion on planned legislation when requested by the government: the state council (Staatsrat), which was a kind of upper house made up of 40-50 men of merit and character appointed by the federal president – it was mainly concerned with matters of state and welfare; the Federal Cultural Council (Bundeskulturerrat), which had 40 members, including two women, who were all appointed by the federal president for a six-year term; and the Federal Economic Council (Bundeswirtschaftsrat), which was made up of 80 people and was the only body in which the names of the seven professional corporatist bodies were listed in the constitution. Overarching these pillars at the top of the constitutional framework was the Federal Diet (Bundestag). This corporatist parliament consisted of 20 delegates from the state council, 10 from the federal cultural council and 20 from the Federal Economic Council. All these council members were supposed to be elected by these councils, but after 1934 they were appointed directly by the federal president. The Bundestag had only limited powers to decide on proposals from and to the federal government.

In electoral terms, the organic vote was established; however, we should not forget that as elsewhere with the absence of organized corporations these bodies were composed of members appointed by the president and the chancellor since only two of the seven professional corporations had been created by 1938. The CS was dominant in many of these advisory bodies, although during the first two years of the regime the Heimwehr had more places within them than their electoral strength in the parliament of the democratic period.108 The government had a great deal of autonomy in relation to these advisory bodies, which had only limited and partial veto powers that could be circumvented by the executive. The subjection of the legislative branch to the government left little room for the
expression of opinion on public policy not sanctioned by the executive. In fact, between 1934 and the end of the regime following the Nazi occupation, 69.31 per cent of the legislation was adopted directly by the council of ministers.

A central element in the institutionalization of the new regime was the creation of a single party, the Fatherland Front (VF – Vaterlandische Front), in 1933, into which segments of the old CS party and the Heimwehr were channelled from above. Dollfuss, who could not count on the unanimous support of the old CSP, which he called outdated, used this organization as a highly centralized and completely obedient political tool; however, it has been noted the VF ‘remained a bureaucratic organizational shell with no dynamic development or importance of its own’. The VF was given formal status in May 1934, on the same day the corporatist constitution came into force. Two years later it was institutionalized as the only legal party. Dollfuss declared himself the leader of the VF and appointed Starhemberg his deputy. Starhemberg remained deputy after Dollfuss’s assassination in July 1934 until he was replaced by Schuschnigg in 1936, who went on to combine VF leadership with the top position in the state.

Membership was open both to individuals and organizations loyal to the ideals of the fatherland as a substitute for a written programme. Dollfuss dissolved the CSP, just like he had done with all other political parties, transferring its followers and their support networks into the VF. The backbone of the VF leadership and senior state officials belonged to the dominant conservative politics and bureaucracy. The VF was established as a single party and its steering committee, the Führerrat, was similar to Mussolini’s Fascist Grand Council. Dollfuss’ successor, Kurt Schuschnigg, was able to reduce the influence of the Heimwehr and forced it to partially unite within the VF.

Corporatism in inter-war central Europe and the Balkans

The fate of political corporatism in central Europe and in the Balkans is more diverse since many of these authoritarian experiences were brief, giving birth in some cases to poorly institutionalized and hybrid regimes. Some of them were ‘able to work within a formal parliamentary framework with a dominant government party that obtained a majority through corrupt electoral practices, co-optation of some political elites and outlawing or harassing those that oppose them, and by tolerating a weak and tamed opposition’. While the form of government divided conservatives and the radical right, these regimes incorporated significant compromises that led to the establishment of poorly institutionalized
regimes, with semi-democratic institutions and electoral procedures. Inter-war Hungary and Poland are the closest examples of this.

The stabilization of Hungary following the successful counter-revolution gave rise to a hybrid regime under the paternal but firm leadership of Admiral Miklós Horthy; however, it was under the premiership of Count Stephen Bethlen in 1921 that the new regime was consolidated. Bethlen, as with so many European conservative leaders, believed democracy was ‘suitable only for rich, well-structured and highly-cultured countries’, which was not true of Hungary in the 1920s. Hungary needed to be somewhere ‘between unbridled freedom and unrestrained dictatorship’. He carried out a programme of electoral reform that reconciled a reduction in the electorate with a clientelist open vote in the rural districts while retaining the secret ballot in the major cities.

The second step was the creation of a government party that would ensure, through political pressure and clientelistic procedures, its domination of the system. This was achieved with the creation of the Unity Party (EP – Egységes Párt), which from 1922 won successive semi-competitive elections during the Bethlen era. The EP-dominated house of representatives was joined an upper house restored in 1925 along corporatist lines, with representatives of the three religious denominations, 36 professional and economic chambers, 76 representatives of the counties and municipalities, 48 life members appointed by Horthy and 38 aristocrats.

When in 1932 Horthy reluctantly appointed Gyula Gömbös prime minister, despite the fragmentation of the Hungarian extreme right, the regime began to move to the right. Gömbös, known as ‘Gombolini’ by his political enemies, had been the leader of a right-wing paramilitary association and was a close associate of Horthy, who nevertheless mitigated the most radical parts of the former’s strategy. He reorganized the EP, renamed it the Party of National Unity (NEP – Nemzeti Egység Pártja), gave it more responsibilities in respect of extra-electoral political mobilization, provided it with a small paramilitary section and turned its attention to mass mobilization. Gömbös also planned a system of compulsory organized interest representation based on vertical corporatism inspired by the Italian labour charter, with several professional chambers in which representatives of both employers and employees would handle labour issues.

He attempted to suppress the bicameral parliament (through the creation of a council of state to replace the senate) and presented plans for the creation of a new parliament.
consisting of elected representatives and delegates from the municipalities, state departments and professional corporations. In 1935, plans for the institutionalization of a corporatist single-party dictatorship were presented in the electoral campaign and announced to Goering; however, Gömbös died the following year, and with him his plans, which had in any event been blocked for some time when the corporatist system was taken off the agenda and the reorganization of the party suspended. Some of the party’s organizations were dismantled and it was restored to its ‘original condition of an electoral machine based on the local bureaucracy’.

Somehow anticipating the academic discussions on hybrid or semi-democratic regimes that were to take place at the beginning of the 21st century, in 1972 one historian of Poland defined the inter-war Polish regime as a ‘semi-constitutional guided democracy’. In fact, when Józef Pilsudski led the coup d’état that overthrew Poland’s parliamentary democracy in 1926, it did not lead to a rapid transition to dictatorship. With his origins in democratic nationalism, which was very different from the counter-revolutionary origins of the Hungarian leading elite at the same time, some of the dilemmas in classifying Pilsudski’s regime do not differ greatly from those of Bethlem’s Hungary. The concentration of power, the creation of a dominant party coalition, the Non-partisan Bloc for Co-operation with the Government (BBWR – Bezpartyjny Blok Współpracy z Rządem), to support the general in parliament and, finally, the presentation of a new constitution and of a more coherent dominant party were the marks of his governance. While Pilsudski had many powers, parliament – despite having been diminished and controlled – continued to be a problem for the president, given that it still represented a very significant degree of pluralism.

In 1935, a new constitution attempted to limit much that was already the functional praxis of the regime. The executive was made responsible to the president rather than parliament, with article two stating the president was responsible only ‘to God and history’ for the fortune of the state, a principal later replicated by dictators like Franco in Spain. The constitution provided for a bicameral system; however, the amount of legislation that could be decided by decree was increased. The decisive break with liberal parliamentarianism was nevertheless adopted by the electoral laws defining the legislature’s composition. The innovation was in the definition of the electorate, which remained individual and direct, although candidates were to be nominated organically.

The parliament (Sejm) was reduced from 444 to 208 deputies, with the country divided into 104 two-member constituencies in which the candidates were selected by local commissions.
led by a president nominated by the government and comprising of delegates from local government, corporations, the chambers of commerce, industry and agriculture, the liberal professions and trade unions. The scope for manipulation by the government was impressive and a homogeneous and obedient Sejm was assured. The upper house was later reduced to 96 members with one-third appointed by the president and two-thirds by electoral councils elected by similar organic institutions. Opposition parties reacted by boycotting the elections.

Pilsudski died in 1935 and Poland remained a dictator-less dictatorship led by his closest military associates, although with increased factionalism. The regime’s institutional fragility following the dissolution of the BBWR led in 1936 to the creation of the Camp of National Unity (OZN – Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego), a regime party that was better structured and more powerful than its predecessor, and which was more of a single party. Adam Koc, a young Pilsudski follower, endowed the party with a youth section that he wanted to offer to the fascist Falanga, which had a more clerical and corporatist political programme. Koc also proposed the liquidation of the trade union movement and ‘the establishment of a system of corporations on the fascist model’ as part of OZN’s programme; however, this option was far from consolidated when Poland was invaded and occupied in 1939.

In the cases of Romania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, the political space for corporatist alternatives and its relations with the attempt to create dominant or single parties was conditioned by the relationship of power between the monarchs, the conservative parties and their leaders within the framework of ‘royal dictatorships’.

In the case of Romania, the short dictatorial experiment did not lead to a consolidated regime, but the clear goal was to institutionalize a single-party regime. When on 10 February 1938 King Carol II suspended the constitution and inaugurated a period of royal dictatorship, his first steps were to abolish the political parties, create a single party – the Front of National Rebirth (FRN – Frontul Renasterii Nationale) – and hold a plebiscite on a new corporatist constitution. The FNR became a triage party for candidates during the legislative, local and professional elections. The deputies and senators not only had to swear loyalty to the king, now the leader, but had to wear the FNR uniform, as they did in the opening session of the new parliament in June 1939.

The fascists of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu’s Iron Guard, the Legion of the Archangel Michael, did not respond to the royal coup d’état, and initially accepted the Legion’s dissolution. The
royal dictatorship sought to steal some of the Iron Guard’s ideological appeal, adopting the propaganda of ‘organic nationalism, family, church and the gospel of work’. According to the new constitution submitted to a plebiscite in 1938, the new parliament was selected according to the sectoral categories of agriculture, industry, commerce, the professions and the intelligentsia. Corporations were not the base of the process but a new ‘organic’ electoral system. At the end of 1938, however, a system of guilds (bresle) was created to frame professional interests by field of activity or profession, and which was responsible for collective labour contracts. The senate came to be made up of representatives of the ‘state bodies’ and by leaders of institutions representing professionals included in the categories recognized by the constitution. Ministers were chosen by the king and were responsible only to him while legislative initiative was transferred from parliament to the king. Manoilescu, the theoretician of corporatism, was an eminent strategist of the royal dictatorship’s economic policy.

Following the execution of Codreanu and other fascist leaders, and coming under Nazi pressure to integrate them into the regime, King Carol II reorganized his single party, which he renamed the Party of the Nation (PN – Partidul Națiunii), which incorporated the remaining fascists and to which membership was compulsory for all public and corporatist office holders. Corporatism was a minor ideological component for Codreanu’s Iron Guard, despite Manoilescu’s attempts to develop it. As the legionary leader Ion Mota stated, corporatism ‘is entirely colourless from a folk point of view’ and just after modification of the ‘ethnic structure of the state’ could be an option for Romania.

In 1940, King Carol II went into exile, leaving his son to preside over a duumvirate constituted by General Antonescu and the Iron Guard, now led by Horia Sima. During the short time the Iron Guard was the single party of the National Legionary state, no initiatives for corporatist reorganization were advanced. When Antonescu withdrew the Legion from government, the regime that remained took on the appearance of a military dictatorship with a plebiscitary tone. Antonescu concentrated all powers without a single party and with a General Plebiscitary Assembly of the Romanian Nation’ (Adunarea Obsteasca Plebiscitara a Națiunii Române), a pompous name for the two plebiscites he convened. At the municipal level, the local councils were replaced by administrative officials, representatives of professions and trade selected by the prefects.

Corporatism also made a brief appearance in Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and, more clearly, in Metaxas’s Greece. In Bulgaria, following Colonel Damian Velchev’s 1934 coup d’état, both
parliament and the political parties were dissolved with the proposal to institute corporatist representation through the creation of seven corporations (estates) that were to provide the basis for the election of three-quarters of the members of the new parliament, the Assembly (Subranie). In 1935, the Union of Bulgarian Workers was created as a voluntary syndical union. Also established was the ‘Social Renewal Directorate’, an educational and political leadership organization. Plans for a single party were nevertheless blocked by the king. Feeling his position threatened, King Boris assumed full power, inaugurating a period of royal dictatorship the following year, with controlled parliaments and electoral laws that were carefully constructed to ensure government control of the chamber.

In Yugoslavia, King Alexander opened a period of ‘royal dictatorship’ in 1929 that was to last until his assassination in France in 1934. Alexander imposed a new constitution in 1931, concentrating executive power in his person, limiting the powers of the bicameral legislature while maintaining a quasi-universal public suffrage and creating a more centralized political system. In December 1931, the dominant party was created. Initially named the Yugoslav Radical Peasant Democracy (JRSD), based on the names of its main parties, in 1933 it was renamed the Yugoslav National Party (JNS).

This was the context in which the king received a constitutional proposal that consecrated corporatism from the Serbian radical-right politician Dimitrije Ljotic (1891-1945). Appointed minister of justice in 1931, he was the author of a constitutional project following a corporatist model that was rejected by King Alexander. In his own words, ‘an organic constitutional hereditary monarchy, undemocratic and non-parliamentary, based on the mobilization of popular forces, gathered around economic, professional, cultural and charity organizations, that would be politically accountable to the king’.

Ljotic resigned after the king rejected his proposed constitution, theoretically because the project was too authoritarian. However, as Stefano Petrungaro notes, bearing in mind subsequent political developments that resulted in a mild, but nonetheless authoritarian style of government, one can wonder whether the problem with Ljotic’s constitution proposal was not that it was too authoritarian, but rather because it was too ‘corporatist’ for the king, representing a threat to his dictatorial powers. Nevertheless, with the second federal constitution (October 1931) and law (March 1932), the institutional framework — although not fully corporatist — became clearer: ‘an autonomous consulting body constituted by experts on economic and social issues’ was created and its members, proposed by the ministers and appointed by the king, were selected from among professional organizations.
The economic council was made up of 60 members with the ‘representatives of capital’ playing a dominant role. The workers and public employees were assigned five seats. Nevertheless, the 1931 constitution, and the ‘limited pluralist’ elections that followed institutionalized a dominant party, clientelist and hybrid regime. In 1934, King Alexander was assassinated in France and Yugoslavia returned to a semi-democratic path.

The ‘Fourth of August’ regime in Greece, was established in the wake of a coup d’état led by the prime minister, Ioannis Metaxas, who was head of a small conservative, anti-parliamentary and royalist party. Metaxas did not create a single party following the dissolution of parliament and the political parties, as this would have been difficult for the king to accept; however, he did place great hope in the creation of an official youth organization, the National Youth Organization (EON – Ethnikí Orgánosis Neoléas), which was inspired by the fascist model. A few weeks after the 1936 coup, Metaxas’s programme was clear, ‘the old parliamentary system has vanished forever… with its 14th point indicating “the remodelling of society by easy stages on a corporatist national basis so that a truly national representation may emerge”.’ 137 In early October 1936, he stated his intention to proceed to ‘a carefully and methodically organized, over a period of time and gradually, organization of [Greek] society along corporatist lines [that will become] the basis for a carefully theorized and planned system of a corporatist national assembly that would be in accordance with the interests of the whole nation’. 138 In 1937, he ‘drew up plans for … an all-powerful corporate state’. 139 In fact, the regime embarked on a ‘programme of “horizontal” restructuring of economic and labour relations in a pattern that revealed the influence of the Italian Fascist and Portuguese Salazarist experiments with corporatism, with this latter being particularly evident in his plans for constitutional reform. 140 The plans became more concrete when Metaxas designed a new system of national delegation supported by two bodies: the supreme council of national labour and the assembly of the professions, paving the way for the institutionalization of corporatism as a system of political representation. 141 According to several sources, the king’s opposition to corporatist representation led to the postponement of the project, but Metaxas’s own changes to the new constitution project highlights his own hesitation on his institutional project.

Corporatism and the presidential dictatorships of the Baltic countries

The construction of personalized authoritarian regimes in the young Baltic countries was rapid. In 1926, a military coup d’état in Lithuania brought Antanas Smetona to power, while in 1934 an almost syncretic series of coups led to the institutionalization of presidentialist
dictatorships in Estonia and Latvia, which were only brought to an end with the Soviet invasion of 1940. The most elaborate attempt to institutionalize corporatist regimes in the region took place under Konstantin Päts in Estonia and Karlis Ulmanis in Latvia.

The institutionalization of social and political corporatism in the Baltic States illustrates both the greater distance from the cultural matrix of corporatism in Catholicism and the radical right, as well as its almost immediate employment as an alternative to liberal parliamentarianism. In Estonia, for example, Päts was far removed from the ideological and cultural origins of his peers in Southern Europe.

Despite the influence of the Catholic Church and a generous concordat in Lithuania, the swift concentration of power to President Smetona caused a number of conflicts between the now dominant party, the Tautininkai, and the Christian Democrats, which had initially been involved in the pro-authoritarian coalition. By the end of the 1930s, this party had a youth wing and a militia. Parliament eventually became a simple consultative body and the president elected by ‘special representatives’ of the nation selected by the dominant party; however, despite this, pressures for the official party to have a more active role were not supported by the president.142

Corporatist economic bodies were established during the 1930s, and even if it was the opposition Christian Democrats who explicitly advanced the idea for the creation of an organic state, its implementation became central to Smetona’s political discourse.143 The strategy for controlling parliament involved an electoral process in which the candidates were selected by the municipalities and not the political parties, which had in the meanwhile been dissolved. The dominant party obtained an overwhelming majority in the parliament that had mere consultative powers. With Smetona being glorified as the ‘leader of the people’, Lithuania became the first authoritarian single-party state of the Baltic countries.144

After the silencing of parliament following the 1934 coup d’état in Estonia, in 1935 Päts dissolved the political parties and sought to create a single party, the Fatherland League (Isamaaliit), to support the president. This party was not so very different in its origins and initial functions from those of its peers, such as the UN in Salazar’s Portugal, the UP of Primo de Rivera or the Fatherland Front in Austria, and its elite had been co-opted from the former political parties. With the hostility of the local radical right organized in the Vaps movement, which was banned and periodically persecuted, Päts’ strategy in the meanwhile illustrated that the ‘expropriation of the more popular ideas and external forms of fascism by
conservative elites and dictators was a common occurrence in the 1930s’. Organization by occupational groups was promoted as an alternative to parties and parliamentarianism since corporatist organizations ‘had been a pet concept of Päts’ for quite some time’. He even claimed the legacy of German social democrats like August Bebel and the ‘self-governing’ traditions of guilds.

Between 1934 and 1936, the regime created 15 professional chambers, representatives of which would later be assigned seats in the upper house of the National Assembly. In 1935, a transitional institution to advise the government was also created, the State Economic Council (Riigi majandusnõukogu) with 15 members elected by the occupational chambers and 10 appointed by the president. The political system was not made wholly corporatist with the 1938 constitution: the new Riigikogu, like the National Assembly, was bicameral, the lower Chamber of Representatives (Riigivolikogu) had 80 directly-elected members, while the upper chamber, the state council (Riiginõukogu), had 40 members. Of the latter, 16 were chosen by the corporatist chambers, while of the 14 institutional representatives, six were appointed ex officio: the commander-in-chief, the heads of the Lutheran and Orthodox churches, the rectors of the two universities, and the head of the Bank of Estonia; local governments elected four representatives, while the civil guard, education and culture, health sector and ethnic minorities each elected one. According to the constitution, the right to nominate candidates for the office of president was given to three institutions: the Chamber of Representatives, the state council and a council of representatives of local governments who were each allowed to nominate one candidate.

In Latvia, Karlis Ulmanis, leader of the main right-wing Agrarian Union (LZS – Latvijas Zemnieku Savienemiba), declared a state of siege after several attempts to revise the constitution to limit parliamentary power. Parliament was eventually dissolved, along with the political parties – including his own; however, unlike his Baltic neighbours, Ulmanis did not create a single party. Nevertheless, mobilization of the members of the previous party elite was significant. Ulmanis initially ruled via the government, and once the presidential mandate was over, in 1936, he combined the office of the prime minister with that of the president. He nourished a cult of personality around himself, becoming the Vadonis (leader) of Latvia.

The institutionalization of corporatism in Latvia was the most complete of all of the Baltic States and historians have debated the external influences on it, including the Italian and the Austrian. A total of six corporations were created between 1934 and 1938, and the old
associative and syndical structures were abolished, with the corporatist chambers being placed under the control of the respective ministries that nominated a large number of their members. The regime also created a state economic council and a state cultural council to supervise the activities of the different corporatist chambers. While some observers have noted that Ulmanis wished to create a corporatist parliament, based on this embryonic institution, permanently replacing the ‘plenary meeting of political parties’, the project only left some traces. The first joint meeting of the two councils was convened in 1939, but the Soviet invasion put an end to these plans. There were claims Ulmanis was seriously considering the possibility this ‘joint summit’ of the two councils representing the chambers would have a central role in a future constitutional design. 149

The fate of corporatism under Axis rule

The fate of corporatism in the so-called ‘puppet’ and satellite regimes during the Second World War is illustrative of several facets: on one hand, the degree of independence and diversity of the national political elites in the institutional design of these regimes and the varied condition of the occupying forces and, on the other, the ‘economy of war’ factor, which in many cases was instrumental for the corporatist models of social and economic intervention. In this short analysis of the countries under Nazi occupation (Vichy France, Slovakia, Croatia and Norway) we will give priority to the former, with the understanding, however, that it is clear the war strengthens the corporatist arrangements of state, labour and interest groups relations.150

The decision to introduce social corporatism in Marshall Pétain’s collaborationist ‘French state’ was an illustration of its great influence in the political culture of the French conservative and radical-right elites. Under Vichy the tensions inherent in the approval of the charte du travail (labour charter) were not between the corporatists and anti-corporatists, but rather between variants of the same species.151 In addition to this, the ideological and legitimating output based on corporatism developed strongly and was present in the discourse of Marshall Pétain and some sections of the Vichy elite. In fact, of all the regimes associated with the Nazi occupation, Vichy was the one in which corporatism had by far the greatest presence and, significantly, where it was most rooted ideologically among the political elite, their institutions and their propaganda. Nevertheless, while social corporatism made a real attempt to become institutionalized, the same cannot be said of political corporatism, which was only vaguely sketched out in some constitutional projects.152
The corporatist dynamic and principles are present from the first moment in Vichy: ‘The National Assembly concedes all powers to the government of the Republic, under the signature and authority of Marshall Pétain, president of the council, in order to promulgate one or more acts of the new constitution of the French state. This constitution must guarantee the right to work, of families and of the country. It will be ratified by the nation and applied by the assemblies that are to be created...’.153 Pétain and his inner circle expressed a public discourse based on an organic view of society, the basis of which were the family, the region and the profession.154 Independently of the institutional tensions in the construction of authoritarian political institutions, the dominant cultural model in Vichy, which was expressed in its propaganda and ideological legitimation bodies, was ‘a conscious and organized traditionalism... that favoured images of a rural, corporatist and religious society’.155

Marshall Pétain, like other dictators of the time, used several ‘constitutional acts’ to concentrate legislative power to his person, and ensured ministers answered to him alone. Both parliament and the senate were suspended before being closed entirely in 1942. Later, in the context of a difficult regime ‘coalition’ and Nazi demands, Pétain created the office of vice-president of the council for Pierre Laval and increased the powers of a ‘head of government’, giving it a more bicephalous model. In Vichy, the single party that had often been discussed was never institutionalized. Against the background of a tense ‘limited pluralism’, which included Catholics and liberal conservatives as well as the fascist parties, the internal tensions and Nazi power hindered its effective institutionalization, determining the centrality of a controlled administration.156

One of the first corporatist structures to be created by the Vichy regime, even before the approval of the labour charter, was the National Corporation of Farmers (Corporation Nationale Paysanne). Created at the end of 1940, designed to assist with the economic and social reorganization of the rural world and coinciding with the legacy of rural associations defending corporatism – such as Jacques le Roy Ladurie’s Central Union of Agricultural Syndicates (UNSA – Union Centrale des Syndicats Agricoles) – the ruralist ideology of parts of the Vichy elite and the urgent need for the administration to reorganize and regulate production, distribution and agricultural price policies.157

The labour charter – the law on the ‘social organization of professions’ – was introduced in October 1941. While it was inspired by Fascist Italy, Franco’s Spain and Salazar’s Portugal, because of the powerful presence of corporatist economists, law professors, technical
experts, political activists and former union leaders it was not a straight adaptation of the charters published in these countries. The Catholic Church hierarchy, with a more nuanced reaction than its unions, and Catholic Action both endorsed the charter. In addition to the establishment of compulsory union membership and the outlawing of strikes, the charter organized the world of work in 29 ‘professional families’. The report addressed to Marshal Pétain introducing the law, stressed its ambiguities, presenting it as a kind of framework law that would organize the future of labour relations in France, rather than as a guide to determine the course of their development; nevertheless, the purpose of the charter was clear: ‘the creation of future corporations that are the great hopes for France’s future’.

The efforts of Hubert Lagardelle, a former syndicalist and head of the Ministry of Labour in 1942 and 1943, to put in place the centrepiece of the charter – single unions or professional social committees – had limited results, with the single unions struggling to see the light of day and the first professional social committee not inaugurated until 1943. In the end, only the company social committees were created as both managers and entrepreneurs identified in them a means of institutionalizing forced class collaboration.

The creation of the national council (Conseil National) as a consultative chamber may have been the embryo of a Vichy corporatist chamber, but it was short-lived and, as in many other cases, was unable to articulate social corporatism as functional representation. The context of its creation was also complex and generated tensions between Pétain and other groups within the Vichy elite. With 213 members, this consultative chamber included 49 deputies, 28 senators and 136 representatives of social, economic and cultural interests. It only operated between 1941 and 1942, introducing ‘advisory opinions’ and constitutional projects. The way in which the national council operated was not too different from the Portuguese New State’s corporatist chamber. There were no plenary sessions, as it operated only through commissions, and its debates were private. In some constitutional projects discussed by the national council, there was a concern for including corporations in a future constitution, by reflecting its integration in representative-consultative institutions, but they never saw the light of day. At the beginning of 1944 Pétain approved a constitutional project to introduce a compromise between liberal and corporatist representation that never came into force, defining a parliament elected by individual suffrage (the Chamber of Representatives) and a senate with representatives of the corporatist institutions and members of the ‘country’s elite’, in both cases nominated by the head of state. The remaining 250 members had to be elected via colleges that incorporated departmental councillors and
delegates of the municipal councils. Corporatist representation, unlike the labour charter, never officially figured in any Vichy constitutional text that saw the light of day.

While Pétain’s regime proved to be poorly institutionalized, the same cannot be said of Catholic Slovakia, a satellite state with a status similar to that of Vichy France. When the Slovak state was created as a German protectorate in 1939, the expanded heir of Andrej Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party (HSLS – Hlinkova slovenská l’udová strana) became the single party, led by his successor and vice-chairman, the Catholic priest Józef Tiso, under the motto ‘One God, one people, one party’. Greatly influenced by the Austrian Catholic Church and by Ignaz Seipel, ‘as early as 1931, [Tiso] moved away from parliamentary democracy by endorsing the Catholic corporatism of Quadragesimo Anno’. As Tiso noted in 1930, the nation was a single set of origins, customs and language, constituting an organic whole. However, despite being the guide of the dictatorship and of the single party, Tiso had to share power with Vojtech Tuka, who was more radical and had been appointed prime minister, and whom the Germans wished to retain.

The new constitution, inspired by Salazar’s Portugal and Dolfuss’s Austria, sought to reconcile liberal parliamentarianism with corporatism, and within the single party, the Party of National Unity (SSNJ – Strana Slovenskej Národnej Jednoty), the pro-corporatist clerical faction was the most important. The regime’s brief existence, Tuka’s more radical faction and the influence of Nazi Germany and of the German minority prevented the rapid evolution towards a consolidated corporatist and organic system.

The 1939 constitution proclaimed Slovakia a Catholic state in which ‘the nation participates in power through the HSLS’, and in fact the single party took control of parliament. The newly created council of state developed into a corporatist upper house to advise Tiso, who had in the meanwhile become president, and who in 1942 was to be proclaimed leader by the Slovak assembly. Members of this Privy Council included the prime minister, the president of the Slovak assembly and members nominated by Tiso, the single party and each corporation (stände): moreover, in a manner similar to Mussolini’s Fascist Grand Council, this council chose the candidates for parliament. The implantation of a corporatist system called Christian solidarism was then programmed. All Slovaks were obliged to join one of the corporations (agriculture, industry, commerce, banking and insurance, liberal professions, public servants and cultural sector employees) that replaced the unions, and the political cadres within these corporations had to be members of the single party. As in other dictatorships, the institutionalization of social corporatism was resisted by industrialists who
denounced the plan as ‘revolutionary’.175

After the Axis forces attacked the Kingdom of Yugoslavia on 6 April 1941, and its territory was partitioned between Germany, Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria and other client regimes, there were some different strategies for political control.176 In the case of Croatia, the Axis established the Independent State of Croatia (NDH – Nezavisna Država Hrvatska) while most of Serbia was placed under a German administration that gave some powers to a more fragile local government. The NDH was established under the political leadership of Ante Pavelić and his Ustasha – Croatian Revolutionary Movement (Ustaša – Hrvatski revolucionarni pokret). The Ustasha movement was a radical ultra-national organization associated with fascism and terrorist political action. Ante Pavelić, a lawyer and extreme-right politician whose main political activity in inter-war Yugoslavia was always associated with the independence of Croatia, went into exile in Germany and Italy on a number of occasions, which was where he founded the Ustasha. During the 1930s, the movement was increasingly influenced by Italian Fascism and German National Socialism. By the late 1930s, however, it was developing a racist ideology through its demand for a ‘Gothic’ identity for all Croats and by idealizing the peasantry. The Ustasha was fiercely Catholic, identifying Catholicism with Croatian nationalism. As corporatism became an element of ideological convergence between the Croat Catholic movement and Ustasha, most Catholic intellectuals in Croatia supported the construction of a social system based on an organic view of society. As the decade progressed, the Ustasha ‘adapted the Italian Fascist model to Croatian conditions. In the case of corporatism, as on the national question, there was an unmistakable convergence of views between the Ustasha and radical Catholics’.177

The NDH was marked by improvisation and the disarticulation between the party and the state, as well as by generalized and terrorist violence against all ‘foreigners’, particularly Serbs, Jews and Roma. Ethnic cleansing was at the forefront of NDH ideology and ‘totalitarianism and violence remained woven into the very structure of the state’.178 In fact, one of the basic goals of Ustasha ideology was to create an ‘ethnically pure Croatia’.

Decision-making within the NDR was increasingly centralized in the person of Ante Pavelić, who arbitrarily broadened and narrowed his circle of close advisers according to circumstances and who was ‘always very unwilling to convene government meetings’.179 The NDH introduced most of authoritarian and fascist-inspired institutions, even though these were often poorly developed: the single-party, a youth organization, a system of national labour syndicates and an outline of ‘professional organization chambers’ as the beginning of a
social corporatist system. In 1941, the Ustasha regime established the General League of Estate and Other Fasces (Glavni savez staliških i drugih postrojbi). Although established in the framework of the Ustasha movement, membership of one of the 16 – later 18 fasces – soon became compulsory, as the aim of the system was to include and to steer all of the Croatian economy and society. In May 1941, the Ustasha leadership established special communities (zajednice), membership of which was also compulsory and which were intended as collective organizations for the entire economic process. The Ustasha reconvened the Croatian parliament, the Sabor, with a reference to the medieval kingdom. Members of parliament were selected by the Ustasha government from among five categories, and meetings were convened just a few times after the initial session. In 1942, a consultative assembly, the state council, was created in preparation for a corporatist parliament.

In military occupied Serbia, the German authorities established a domestic government with very limited powers. General Milan Nedić, a radical conservative nationalist, was put at its head. Ironically, in order to fashion the institutions and government policy, Nedić turned to Dimitrije Ljotić, the former Minister of Justice in the Royal Dictatorship of King Alexander, who had resigned after the rejection of his corporatist constitution. After his short time in government, Ljotić became leader of Zbor, a radical-right party based on small fascist groups. During the Nazi occupation, he was able to reorganize Zbor and its militia, which became of central importance within the collaborationist Serbian administration. The result was a conception of the state as a blood community, religious Christian-Orthodox mysticism and corporatist principles. As with the NDH in neighbouring Croatia, several social corporatist organizations were established, although – as in other cases where they overlapped with the need to prepare labour to be mobilized for the Nazi war effort. Included in the plans to improve the status of Serbia that were presented to (and rejected by) the Nazi authorities, the project to build a new ‘organic’ political structure for the creation of a Serbian state also included a representational structure that would be articulated through a number of ‘people’s chambers’ at the village, municipality and state level, and which would demonstrate the ‘resurgent, persistent and flexible nature of corporatist theories in the Serbian context’.

Quisling’s brief and limited rule in Nazi-occupied Norway is another interesting case because it represents the takeover of (limited) power by a small fascist party, National Unity (NS – Nasjonal Samling), which was influenced by both National Socialism and Italian Fascism in both its ideology and political programme, but which was closer to Nazi Germany in its
international relations. On the very first day of the Nazi occupation of Norway, Vikun Quisling, the leader of National Unity, led an initially unsuccessful coup against the Norwegian government. Sometime later, though, National Unity became the single party and the main instrument of Norwegian collaboration. It was during one of these phases that the Nazis gave the Norwegian authorities some scope for manoeuvre and political independence with which to construct a regime under occupation. When the opportunity arose at the end of 1942, Reichkommissar Terboven announced the transfer of power to Quisling, who was appointed President-Minister of an ‘autonomous government’.

When Quisling was appointed to this position his intentions, according to one of his biographers, were threefold: ‘to conclude peace with Germany, introduce a corporatist state and summon a Council of the Kingdom’. Corporatism had been a part of National Unity’s programme since the 1930s, calling for the organization of a corporatist chamber that would unite workers and employers under the same umbrella. While its proposals to reverse parliamentarianism were vaguer than those of other fascist movements, National Unity was in agreement with all other Scandinavian fascist parties, which ‘wholeheartedly opted for corporatist ideas’.

Social corporatism under National Unity rule was given its first push with the creation of the Office for Corporations within the Ministry of the Interior in 1941. Almost all voluntary associations were to be registered ‘in order to become corporate members of the state’. This process to institutionalize a ‘labour corporation’ faced a strong and partially unexpected resistance from organized interests, with even civil servants, fearing the domination of the state apparatus by the party, expressing their discontent to the Germans.

Quisling’s plan was quite clear as it was implemented: the creation of autonomous, legalized guilds (corporations) ‘along Italian lines’. The organization of guilds licenced by the state and the new basis for a national assembly to replace the old parliament was the realization of the new order’s authoritarian representation. Only the state-organized guilds were represented. A memo from the interior ministry detailed the number of representatives to be sent by each corporatist body, noting that members of the single party ‘would be required to act as delegates’. In total, there were 120 representatives from the 13 corporations, of which six had been established by the spring of 1942. This advisory corporatist parliament, the Riksting, consisted of two chambers: the Næringsting (Economic Chamber) and the Kulturting (Cultural Chamber).
Students of Quisling’s short rule in Norway offer different reasons for the abrupt end to the project to convene the Riksting and institutionalize the National Assembly. Among the reasons was that this Riksting, with its limited authority, did not have the unanimous support of the National Unity leadership, who feared it would be infiltrated by the old parties. There was also some resistance from organized interests, particularly from within the economic sector, to the forced integration into the state, while the Nazi authorities, fearing social conflict, viewed it with suspicion. However, the most plausible explanation may be the social resistance to ‘corporatization’, and the lack of belief that Quisling’s controlled assembly ‘could be trusted as state organs’. Quisling then decided to make plans for a legislature that was based on the single party rather than on the corporations. However, he decided to make the Næringsting and Kulturting advisory bodies to the ministries of industry and of culture, respectively. He announced this plan at the National Unity convention in September 1942 and informed the party that a new constitution would have to create a new political representation that was mainly based on the single party. The corporatist chambers should be, in his own words, ‘exclusively of a professional and not a political nature’.190

Concluding Remarks

Inter-war dictatorships created political institutions that were to become generalized after the Second World War: personalized leadership; the autonomy of the executive; and a single or dominant party system. The major contribution of corporatist models to these dictatorships was to offer a ‘third way’ between economic and political liberalism and ‘class struggle’ socialism that legitimized bringing the independence of the union movement to an end and the (more limited) state structuring of interest groups. This is the most important explanatory factor in the transnational spread of Italian Fascism’s labour charter (Carta del Lavoro) among inter-war dictators. On the other hand, and independently of the extent of its institutionalization, corporatism also offered an ‘organic statist’ model of political representation as an alternative to liberal parliamentarism.
Corporatism has been frequently and legitimately associated with the Catholic political culture of the early 20th-century, although Fascism also codified it as an authoritarian alternative to liberal democracy. While was present in the institutions of some democratic regimes, it was only in the dictatorships that a serious effort was made to organize political regimes according to corporatist ideology. The success of this process of diffusion of corporatism among European dictatorships illustrates the pragmatic adoption of authoritarian institutions by dictators with weaker links to the cultural background of Catholic or Fascist corporatism. While there was some variation, the ideology of a single national interest, typical of anti-democratic conservative elites, proved compatible with the organic-statist core of corporatism, with the successful practical experience of some regimes leading to its rapid diffusion.

The majority of inter-war dictatorships were personalized authoritarian regimes. Even those regimes institutionalized following military coups or military dictatorships gave rise to personalist regimes and attempts to create single or dominant regime parties. The personalization of leadership within dictatorial regimes became a dominant characteristic of the fascist era. However, autocrats need institutions and elites to exercise their rule, and their role has often been underestimated as it has been taken as a given that decision-making power was centralized in the dictators. To prevent the undermining of their legitimacy and the usurpation of their authority, dictators need to co-opt elites and to either create or adapt institutions, like controlled parliaments, corporatist assemblies and other bureaucratic-authoritarian consultative bodies, to be the locus of the co-optation, negotiation and (sometimes) decision-making: ‘without institutions they cannot make policy concessions’. On the other hand, no authoritarian regime can survive politically without the critical support of interest groups and such modern elites as bureaucrats, managers and the military.

Institutional transfer was a hallmark of inter-war dictatorships, but the processes of diffusion was differentiated. In the case of social corporatism it is clear the influence of Italian Fascism was central. The comparative analysis of the labour charters or their equivalent within these regimes demonstrates the role-model function of the Italian Fascist labour charter to the great majority of these dictatorships, the national adaptations of which were an expression of the ideological and cultural diversity of the coalition that established them (see Table 1.1). The projects of authoritarian constitutions and labour charters, albeit in less statist versions than those of Italian Fascism, generally began with the organic principle. Social corporatism
as the state-led forced integration of interest groups into para-state structures and especially of the decapitation of independent union movements transcends the inter-war period; however, the process of political engineering through which these dictatorships provided a channel for complex interest group structure co-optation became a blueprint of the 1930s.

In the Portuguese New State, Dollfuss’s Austria, Tizo’s Slovakia and even in Spain under Franco, political Catholicism was a greater presence than in Vichy France, Estonia or Quisling’s Norway, for example. However, this is central in the design of a common heritage for the creation of structures of interest intermediation, for the dissolution of independent unions and the establishment of state-led bargaining structures within these regimes. Even when such institutions remain on paper, as in the case of Greece under Metaxas, the outlines are very similar. The institutional design of some projects in German-occupied Europe are also very instructive, since they were the product of regimes that found a ‘window of opportunity’ enabling them to implement social corporatism because of its local strong ideological presence rather than as a result of pressure from the Nazi authorities. That was clearly the case in Vichy, Slovakia and Quisling’s Norway.

The quasi-universal adoption of social corporatism by inter-war dictatorships was not always followed, as some theorists anticipated, with the institutionalization of corporatism as a representational structure. However, even where it was, the creation of ‘organic legislatures’ should not be separated from the creation of the regime parties – whether single or dominant – that provided legitimation for the abolition of political pluralism, forcing the authoritarian coalition to merge in a single or dominant party under personalized rule.

As we have seen above, very few inter-war European dictatorships existed without a single or dominant party. If the regimes of Italy and Germany were based on a takeover of power by a fascist party, many civilian and military rulers of inter-war Europe did not have a ‘ready-made organization upon which to rely’. In order to counteract their precarious position, dictators tended to create regime parties. Some fascist movements emerged during the inter-war period either as rivals to or as unstable partners within the single or dominant government party, and often as inhibitors to their formation, making the institutionalization of the regimes more difficult for the dictatorial candidates – as in the case of Vichy or Romania. However, almost all of the inter-war dictatorships created (or attempted to create)
single or dominant parties that would become the dominant political institutions in these new regimes.

Some of these parties represent an interesting example of party formation within an authoritarian context. Genetically, they are parties created ‘from above’ that sought to monopolize political representation and channel and neutralize the large and contradictory bloc supporting the dictatorship. They were a variant of ‘unified parties’, representing ‘the fusion from above of a new political entity’ that forces existing conservative political groups to integrate or be excluded. The founding agreement may, to varying degrees, include existing parties or pressure groups. This is particularly important when elections and other forms of constitutional representation are still in use, even if in a limited way, as was the case in Hungary and Poland. Such parties generally lack a representational monopoly and co-exist with other ‘organic’ political institutions over which they have no control and have a party apparatus with limited independence from the government and administration. The absence of a codified ideology is also a product of their being a post facto creation. In some dictatorships, where corporatism became an important element of the official ideology – as in Salazar’s Portugal – the single party was defined as the ‘national corporation of politics’, and the names of these parties symbols of the organic-statist projects of the dictatorships: the Primo de Rivera’s Patriotic Union, Salazar’s National Union, the Hungarian Party of National Unity and the Polish National Unity Camp. The failed attempts at creating royal dictatorships in Romania (Party of the Nation) and Yugoslavia (Yugoslav National Party) were examples of the same pattern. Regardless of their origins though (whether predating the dictatorship or created from above following the breakdown of the previous regime) or their nature (whether mass or elite parties) they performed similar roles in the new political system by providing an institutionalized interaction between the dictator and his allies and political control over corporatist institutions in the majority of inter-war dictatorships.

Corporatist theorists may have diverged in terms of organic political representation, but contextual factors were central to the design of new forms of representation. The ideology of the corporatist state as a state based on functional rather than individual forms of representation was perhaps most powerful in the authoritarian sectors of the right in inter-war Europe: nevertheless, its implementation in the dictatorships was incomplete and much less universal. Despite the primacy of social corporatism, the constitution of organic political representation as an alternative to parliamentary democracy also plays a central role in the
The diversity of legislatures designed by authoritarian constitutions and institutional reforms suggests the domination of mixed systems of single or dominant party legislatures with corporatist chambers. Very few inter-war European dictators had, from the start, the institutional power General Franco had in 1939, with the majority of them experiencing great difficulties with the institutional design of their regimes, leading them into an accommodation with the more prominent members of the coalitions that brought them to power. In such cases, the ‘institutionalized interaction between the dictator and his allies results in greater transparency among them, and by virtue of their formal structure, institutions provide a publicly observable signal of the dictator’s commitment to power-sharing’. Nevertheless, however appealing the principle of corporatist representation may have been to authoritarian rulers, the creation of corporatist legislatures was much more difficult to implement in many dictatorships, even when it had been part of the dictators’ programme. In some countries, such as in Greece, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria, it was blocked by monarchs who feared losing their power, while in others, such as Portugal, it was the initial compromise with segments of conservative liberal parties that led to the institutionalization of bicameral systems with a corporatist chamber and a parliament controlled by the dominant or single party. In Austria, although never fully implemented, the pattern was for almost integral functional representation.

To conclude, as far as can be observed from the case-studies analysed above, the political institutions of the dictatorships – even authoritarian legislatures– were not as many students of fascism have suggested, merely window dressing. Dictators also need compliance and cooperation and in some cases, in order ‘to organize policy compromises, dictators need these institutions’ that can serve as forums in which factions, and even the regime and its opposition, can forge agreements’, that can help authoritarian rulers maintain coalitions and survive in power.’ As we have seen, corporatist parliaments are not just institutions for
legitimizing dictatorships, they can also be the locus of that process. If this is so, corporatism, with a single or dominant party, was the inter-war dictatorships’ most powerful institutional device and certainly their lowest common denominator.


3 Like Alfred Stepan and Juan Linz, we use this expression to refer to the ‘vision of political community in which the component parts of society harmoniously combine… and also because of the assumption that such harmony requires power and the unity of civil society by “the architectonic action of public authorities” – hence “organic-statism”’. See A. Stepan, *The State and Society: Peru in Comparative Perspective*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1978; J. J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*, Boulder, CO, Lynne Rienner, 2000, pp. 215-17.


21 P. J. Williamson, *Corporatism in Perspective*, op. cit., p. 32.


23 Ibid, p. 178.


34 Stepan, The State and Society, op. cit., p. 47.


40 Williamson, Varieties of Corporatism, p. 63.

41 Ibid. p. 69.


And ‘those chambers are only components in their regimes… no legislature in an authoritarian regime has either the formal or de facto power to question the ultimate authority of a ruler or ruling group’. See J. J. Linz, ‘Legislatures in organic-statist-authoritarian regimes: The case of Spain’, in J. Smith and L. D. Musolf, eds, *Legislatures in Development: Dynamics of Change in New and Old States*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1979, pp. 91, 95.


See A. Gagliardi, *Il Corporativismo Fascista*, p. 4.


61 Perfetti, ‘La discussion’.


66 Navarro, El regimen de Primo de Rivera, p. 86.

67 Ibid, p. 207.


71 See Velez, Das Constituições.


80 Pinto, *The Blue Shirts*.


82 Estêvão, ‘A câmara corporativa’.

83 Castilho, *Os Procuradores*.


90 Ibid. p. 260.


105 See M. Broszat, The Hitler State.


111 Ibid, p. 156.


The predominance of Roman Catholicism in Poland did not give rise to strong Catholic parties, and although the ‘detailed model of a corporatist system that made provision for setting a new vertical power system at whose head would be a corporatist national chamber’ was part of the small Christian Democratic Party’s programme, this did not influence Pilsudski’s institutional reform. See L. Kuk, ‘A powerful Catholic Church, unstable state and authoritarian political regime: The Christian Democratic Party in Poland’, in Kaiser and Wohnout, Political Catholicism, p. 157.


The electorate could send a delegate to these commissions, but they required 500 notarized signatures, which was a worthless procedure. See Polonsky, Independent Poland, p. 397; Wynot, Polish Politics in Transition, p. 26.

124 Polonsky, Independent Poland, p. 430.


133 Ibid, p. 162.


136 See Petrungaro, this book.


139 H. Cliadakis, *Fascism in Greece*, p. 47.


147 *Constitution of the Republic of Estonia*, 1938, p. 84.


152 As in other cases, interpretations of corporatism and Vichy have become conceptually and empirically polarized and the concept of corporatism (or neo-corporatism or dirigisme) was also changing. See, O. Dard, ‘Le corporatisme en France à l’époque contemporaine: Tentative de bilan historiographique et perspectives de recherches’, Histoire, Economie et Société, 1, 2016, pp. 45–57.


159 Le Crom, Syndicats.


164 Cointet, Vichy et le Fascisme, p. 61.


166 Which led one of these experts to state that ‘the Vichy regime was not corporatist, but instead deserves the more precise term of pre-corporatist’, see Cointet, Vichy et le Fascisme, p. 189.


182 Petrungaro in this book.


188 Dahl, *Quisling*.


193 Geddes, ‘Stages of development’ p. 185.


197 Marcello Caetano, *O Sistema Corporativo*, Lisbon, o Jornal do Comércio e das Colónias, 1938, p. 51

198 We should not underestimate these authoritarian constitutions since they serve to consolidate autocratic coalitions in power. Uncertainty is very great at the beginning of a new authoritarian regime and constitutions represent ‘one key mechanism through which political actors other than the dictator can codify their right and interests’. M. Albertus and V. Menaldo, ‘Dictators as founding fathers? The role of constitutions under autocracy’, *Economics & Politics*, 24 (3), 2012, pp. 279-306. See also, T. Ginsburg and A. Simpser, eds., *Constitutions in Authoritarian Regimes*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2014.

