| CHAPTER 7 |

The Czech Concepts of East Central European Integration

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ABSTRACT

The beginning of this chapter analyzes the conditions of the creation of the Czech nation and its geographical position; the chapter then focuses on the Czech concepts of European integration, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries. In the past, the Czech or Czechoslovak state has been relatively significantly involved in efforts for international cooperation and integration processes. The difficult international situation of a state often surrounded by several hostile neighbors, as it was between the world wars, usually contributed to this. In the years 1526–1918, Czech lands were part of the Central European Habsburg monarchy. In the 19th century, the Czech national movement primarily considered two integration concepts. These were based on transforming the monarchy into the protector of small—especially Slavic—nations (Austroslavism) or, exceptionally, efforts to cooperate with powerful Russia (Pan-Slavism). Between 1918–1938, Czechoslovakia strived for international cooperation and European integration; from 1948–1989, it was part of the Soviet bloc. The fall of the communist regime in 1989 was a major advantage to the majority interest of the society to 'return to Europe,' symbolized by joining Western European organizations.

KEYWORDS

Central European Habsburg monarchy; Austroslavism; Pan-Slavism; Czechoslovakia; Soviet bloc

1. The circumstances of modern nation-building

The modern Czech nation identity was created as the result of the Czech national movement, usually referred to as the National Revival (Obrození in Czech). It began during the Enlightenment at the end of the 18th century and by the middle of the 19th century, had created a modern nation. It encountered primarily German dominance in Central Europe and Austria, since during the 1848 revolution, many Germans still considered the Czech lands a natural part of the planned united Germany.[1] However, in contrast to that of the Slovaks, for example, the Czech national movement

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1 Urban, 1982, pp. 32–44. Rákosník, Spurný and Štaif, 2018, pp. 39–42.

was supported by older tradition: the tradition of the Czech state and Czech Crown, the numerical predominance of the Czech population, and generally until the 17th century, even political dominance. Moreover, there was a certain preference for the Czech language until the defeat of the estates in 1620. Consequently, unlike Hungary, where there were many different language groups dominated by Latin until modern times, it is possible to consider the medieval Czech nation and nation-state. In the middle ages, the occasional manifestations of national feeling among Czechs in Central and Eastern Europe were already quite exceptional. Sharp anti-German attacks were already found in Dalimil's chronicle, which was probably completed after 1314 (or 1325).

Since the settlement of the Slavs in the 6th century, Czechs or formerly Czech-speaking Slavs, have always been numerous in the Czech lands. However, while the Czech lands have basically been free since Charlemagne's campaign in 805, at other times, they were a quite centralized part of a confederation of states, sometimes even a few. It was considered an Empire (officially, since 1512, the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation) from 800 or 962 until 1806 and was also part of the Habsburg monarchy from 1526 (a follow-up to earlier bonds, mainly from 1490) to 1918. Among them, the population that spoke German dialects predominated, which, from the 13th century until 1947, comprised a one-quarter to one-third minority population in the Czech lands. Unlike the Slavs in the east of present-day Germany, the Czechs were not Germanized, in spite of repeated onsets that occurred mainly in the 13th and 14th centuries during the great German colonization of Central Europe and then again in the 17th and 18th centuries.[2]

The minority issue of Germans in the Czech lands was one of the key elements of development from the 13th century until the tragic end after the Second World War. However, it cannot be ignored that more significant national conflicts did not begin until 1848. In older times, the population's religious division played a much more crucial role, beginning with the Hussite Reformation in 1419. Until the severely forced re-Catholicization after the defeat of the estate uprising in 1620, the Czech lands had complicated religious conditions. At the time the modern national movement developed, Catholicism was an issue that many key figures in the Czech nation considered forced and foreign, including the respected father of the nation, František Palacký (1798–1876), and the first president, Tomáš G. Masaryk (1850–1937), who were closer to Protestantism. Both key representatives focused on developing the Czech nation—Palacký as a respected historian, Masaryk as a philosopher—and sought to derive the modern Czech nation from the Protestants defeated in 1620. This led to long-standing disputes over the so-called meaning of Czech history.

The complex issue concerning the Czech nation is its relationship with the Slovaks. The linguistic proximity of Czech and Slovak is extraordinary, as the languages are mutually intelligible. The differences are smaller than for many groups considered to be one nation, regardless of the very different dialects, as is the case with the

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2 Facing, 2002.

Germans; in contrast, for the Chinese, for example, the dialects are mutually incomprehensible.[3] However, there is a quite different historical tradition, where on the one hand there is a traditional Czech state incorporated into the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation, while on the other hand, it was one of the groups of multinational Hungary, which was considerably Hungarianized. However, since 1490—temporarily even in older times—both groups have lived permanently in one originally very free, later centralized, confederation of states ruled by the Habsburgs since 1526. Linguistic proximity was well known; after all, in Slovakia, the Czech language was often used as the formal language. However, the real interest in the second group was quite low.

For Slovaks, therefore, at the time the modern national movement developed, the crucial question was whether to join the more advanced Czech nation, which was also much more numerous; in contrast to the long-standing usual double, it was up to four times larger at the beginning of the 20th century. It was not until the 1840s that the idea of an independent nation prevailed, but Czechs still viewed Slovaks just as a specific part of the Czechoslovak nation. At the end of the monarchy, the Czech nation had numerous advanced elites, although it usually lacked the nobility, while the influential classes in Slovakia were mostly Hungarianized. The issue of attitude toward Slovaks then, of course, spread to the newly formed Czechoslovakia, where the concept of the Czechoslovak nation provided the Czechs (and Slovaks) with a two-thirds majority, keeping key Germans as the minority even though they were greater in number than the Slovaks.

In the past, the Czech or Czechoslovak state has been relatively significantly involved in efforts for international cooperation and integration processes. The difficult international situation of a state often surrounded by several hostile neighbors, such as it was between the world wars, contributed to this. King George of Poděbrady's project (1420–1471, with the king elected in 1458), was prepared between 1462–1464 with the help of foreign experts such as Antonio Marini of Grenoble. The aim was to create an association of Christian states to maintain peace. To this day, these attempts have a considerable response, and even the UN claims its legacy; however, the first real international organization to address the issues was not established until 1919. The official reason was to defend the Christian world against the aggressive Turks, who conquered Constantinople in 1453 and ended the millennial history of the Byzantine Empire, which followed the Roman Empire. The real reason, however, was the Czech state's threatening isolation due to religious differences.[4]

At the beginning of the 15th century, a reformation inspired by Jan Hus took place in a large part of the Czech lands, preceding the European Reformation initiated by Martin Luther by about a century. This led to several unsuccessful crusades against the Czechs from 1420–1431, and, despite the compromise concluded with the church, there were still efforts to eliminate the Czech Hussites and completely subordinate them to the Catholic Church. The only Czech king who was a Hussite was George of

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3 Hobsbawm, 2000, pp. 54–57.
4 Kuklík and Petráš, 2007, p. 33.

Poděbrady (elected in 1458 from Czech nobility). He was, due to faith, in permanent conflicts with domestic Catholics (for example, the center of Silesia Wroclaw never recognized him as a king), but also with foreign rulers (later primarily the Hungarian King Matthias Corvinus).[5]

An extensive and detailed plan to create an international organization was therefore prepared. Its apparatus and the permanent Congress of State Representatives were to be based in Basel, with the most complex issues to be dealt with by a special council composed of monarchs. Wars were to be unacceptable and disputes settled peacefully; a certain type of international court was also to be established. While this is one of the most remarkable Czech contributions in terms of developing international organizations and thus integration, it nevertheless failed.[6]

2. Territorial self-definition of Czechs and the Czech lands

The Czech state was established during the 9th century and by the beginning of the 11th century, its borders largely corresponded to today's Czech Republic, with the significant exception of eastern Silesia. These borders are primarily created by mountains: the Krkonoše Mountains in the north, the Krušné Mountains in the northwest, the Šumava Mountains in the southwest, and the Beskydy Mountains in the east. The traditional and dominant center of the Czech lands is Prague, whose traditions date back to before the state was established in the 9th century. The state consists of two main parts—Bohemia and Moravia—with Bohemia approximately twice as large as Moravia in population and area. A small part of Silesia is also part of today's Czech Republic. All of Silesia (in size comparable to Bohemia), which has been Polish since 1945, was part of the Czech lands in 1327–1742. However, nostalgia for the lost 'ancient territories,' which is one of the dangerous aspects of international politics, does not manifest itself in the Czech lands. To this day, Poles think of the territories in the east belonging to Poland in 1919–1939, those during the famous Polish-Lithuanian Union 1386–1795, or those of the Hungarians of St. Stephen's Crown, which existed from the 11th century to 1918. History is also invoked by much more influential nations. such as Germany or Russia. The Czechs do not have such considerations or even requirements, because today's borders correspond to its historical ones. A certain connection exists with Slovakia, which formed the eastern part of Czechoslovakia between 1918–1992, but the Czechs generally appreciate the good relations between the two countries and the possibilities of smooth travel within the EU.

The problem here was rather the opposite, when German nationalists considered the Czech lands as an age-old part of Germany, even though it was fragmented. Under Austria, the situation gradually moved toward disintegrating the traditions of the Czech state within this system, the western parts of which could then become part

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5 Veber, 2004, pp. 75–78.
6 Kuklík and Petráš, 2007, p. 33.

of Germany. For example, the oldest university in Central Europe, Charles University in Prague, was called the oldest German university in the 19th and 20th centuries. However, the creation of Czechoslovakia and the crushing defeat of German nationalism in 1945 combined with the expulsion of millions of Germans from the east apparently ended such efforts.

In the history of the Czech lands, there are certain differences between Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia. However, their significance at individual stages differs considerably; at the time of the national movement at the end of the 18th century and in the first half of the 19th century, the difference was relatively considerable. After the defeat of the Czech estates in 1620, the traditional Czech crown (Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia until 1742, Lusatia until 1635) gradually disintegrated and became more of a formality, with the countries being tied directly to Vienna. The positions of Czech nationalists also differed considerably; the strongest were in Bohemia, those in Moravia were significantly weaker, and the part of Silesia belonging to the monarchy after 1742 was more Polish and German. The Czech national movement referred to the traditions of the Czech crown and talked about the so-called historical state law. However, only the extension of Czech rights was realistic.[7]

After Czechoslovakia was established, the differences between Bohemia and Moravia weakened, and Silesia, with dangerously strong Germans and Poles, was merged with Moravia in 1927. In 1949, an administrative reform established regions, which removed the traditional land border, especially by creating the Jihlava region, which includes historically Czech and Moravian areas. However, certain demands of part of Moravia's population appeared at the time of the liberation in 1968,[8] especially in the democratic conditions after 1989. Many inhabitants took the opportunity to declare their Moravian or Silesian nationality.

3. The Czech concepts of Slavic integration in the long 19th century (1789–1918)

From 1526, the Czech lands were part of the Habsburg Empire, which, after the defeat of the estates in 1620, gradually limited the traditions of the Czech lands. While the medieval Czech state slightly preferred the Czech language, which remained until 1627, the leading elites later quickly denationalized. In the 18th century, Czech was more of a language for the countryside and poor; however, the national movement known as the Revival from the end of the 18th century, sought to change this. If integration was considered, it was usually based on transforming the monarchy into the protector of small—especially Slavic—nations (Austroslavism) or, exceptionally, efforts to cooperate with powerful Russia (Pan-Slavism). In the conditions of the then

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7 Rákosník, Spurný, and Štaif, 2018, pp. 36–37.
8 Petráš, 2007, pp. 315–316.

politically weak Czech nation, it was difficult to imagine, for example, independence and cooperation with countries such as France or Britain.

The key question of the Czech national existence, as well as that of some other Slavic nations (Slovaks, Croats, Slovenes, after 1878, Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), specifically Ruthenians, partly Poles, but also Hungarians) was their position within Austria, originally the Habsburg Empire, which was established in 1526. On the contrary, the paradoxically preferred German population lived mainly outside the monarchy and had (especially until 1870) several of its own states. The Austrian national orientation was unknown, except by the official elites. The small or even medium-sized nations, especially Slavic ones, were the ones existentially connected with the monarchy. In the middle of the 19th century, the monarchy had a population of approximately 36 million, which consisted of 8 million Germans, 5 million Hungarians, 15 million Slavs (including 4 million Czechs and 2 million Poles), 6 million Italians (most lost in 1859 and 1866), and 2 million Romanians. The more capable representatives of the Slavic nations realized that possible independence would be quite risky in difficult European conditions. Especially after 1878, the Balkans showed the risks of a multinational empire disintegrating; the word Balkanization was and still is a pejorative for experts.[9]

The Habsburg Empire protected itself from the Turks and the dangers of Islam for the first two centuries. At the end of the 17th century, it lost its importance except in southern Hungary. In the 19th century, however, two fundamental threats appeared that persisted even after the crucial changes caused by the First World War; these, in fact, still exist today. From the west, there was a risk (even if only partial) of the unification of the very large German nation, which had previously culturally dominated Central Europe; many nations then feared assimilation. From the east, the threat was Russia's domination that had existed since 1760 when it first conquered Berlin. Russia was undeveloped with a tough absolutist regime, while Central Europe was liberalizing. There was also a cultural difference due to the Orthodox religion. However, the Slavic nations were partly influenced by the great Slavic state.

Concerns about German nationalism, Russian backwardness, and absolutism had led many politicians in the monarchy to support the state since the 1840s, even though they were well aware of its weaknesses. As they were largely members of the Slavic nations, we consider Austroslavism. In accordance, Austria became the mainstay of the small Slavic nations. The most significant development of Austroslavism, which was also the result of demographic and cultural issues, occurred among the Czechs. After the privileged Germans and, after 1867, the Hungarians, they formed the largest nation, as well as the largest Slavic group. In addition, next to Vienna, the Czech lands were the richest and most advanced, which stands out in comparison with, for example, the south of the monarchy or Galicia.[10]

9 Šesták, 1986, pp. 1–3.
10 Petráš, 2012.

Before the revolution in 1848 and the liberalization of the development of politics with Austroslavism, Karel Havlíček Borovský, the most famous Czech publicist and a renowned artist and politician, visited in 1846. He brutally lost his original ideals of Russia during his visit and began to harshly reject pan-Slavism. A key figure of the Czech nation, historian František Palacký, who was also recognized by the Germans, then developed and scientifically elaborated the concept of Austroslavism.[11] Even in the initial period of liberation in the spring of 1848, the Germans took Germany's unification with the Austrian and Czech regions of Austria for granted. The emerging German parliament in Frankfurt invited Palacký as a representative of the Czech lands. However, in his famous letter to Frankfurt dated April 11, 1848, he refused to participate in forming great Germany or to send representatives of the Czech lands to the Frankfurt Parliament. However, this is also considered to be what initiated the Czech-German conflict, which ended with the expulsion of the Germans after 1945.[12]

Palacký was recognized as the father of the Czech nation and was also respected by the state when the monarch appointed him as a member of the House of Lords, although he did not have an aristocratic origin. He theoretically elaborated the concept of Austroslavism in his 1865 study, Idea of the Austrian State (Idea státu rakouského) and in a number of articles in newspapers and magazines. The idea of Austroslavism was strongly affected by the Austro-Hungarian Compromise in 1867, when the two largest nations that were not Slavic concluded a deal at the expense of the others. Confidence in the possibility of reshaping the centuries-old Habsburg Empire declined significantly, although some of these ideas survived until the end of 1918.[13]

In addition to the idea of Austroslavism, other concepts manifested themselves at the end of the monarchy. The idea of integrating into great Germany had only a minimal response. Individuals claimed their German nationality after 1848, at the time of strong nationalism and the growing Czech-German conflict; they were, however, considered national traitors. Even people who rejected nationalism then risked being expelled from the Czech national society. The most famous case of this type appeared in December 1886 when an article was published in the first issue of the magazine Čas Our two question (Naše dvě otázky). It spoke critically about the Czech national society, asking whether the intensive effort to create a national culture was not a waste of time and whether it would not be spent more effectively within the great German nation.

> Imagine the unequal duel of the Czechs with Germany, the duel with a knife! At the very least, maintaining a mere, bare nationality would require an immense amount of effort and self-denial of the most noble intelligence, a sacrifice that would wane over time.[14]

11 Hroch, 1999, p. 88.
12 Kořalka, 1990, pp. 18–22.
13 Rákosník, Spurný and Štaif, 2018, pp. 39–42.
14 See for example http://archiv.ucl.cas.cz/index.php?path=Cas/0.1887/1/1.png

This provoked a furious controversy between Czech nationalists, and most of society completely rejected such considerations. Although the little-known young Hubert Gordon Schauer (1862–1892) submitted the article, many considered then already well-known Tomáš G. Masaryk as the real co-author. There was talk of a philosophy of national suicide because Masaryk was then scientifically interested in the highly controversial issue of suicide.[15]

Considerations in addressing the issue of small nations in Central Europe and their actual assimilation were, at the time of strong nationalism, logically utterly unacceptable for the majority. However, hindsight can also be seen in their unreality. In the 19th century, there were real reflections on assimilating numerous groups, such as the Slovenes and Czechs, and even Hungarians and Poles. However, in recent decades, countless long-assimilated groups such as the Cornwall have been revived. National conflicts would seem to be easily resolved by denationalization, but this is met with considerable resistance.[16]

At first, before the spread of national conflicts between the Czechs and the Germans, it seemed that provincial patriotism could also prevail. Certain trends could be found in part of the nobility or official elites; the most famous of the theoretical thinkers is the priest, mathematician, and philosopher Bernard Bolzano (1781–1848). In 1805–1819, his sermons for students received great response, but they provoked the intervention of the absolutist regime. He considered himself Czech in the provincial sense, even though he was of German-Italian descent.

Another idea that was supported in the Czech environment was Pan-Slavism. In the 18th century, awareness that a group of Slavic nations existed was related to the development of linguistics; the success of the Russian troops, which repeatedly passed through the Czech lands during the Napoleonic Wars, played an important role for the public. To understand the appeal of Pan-Slavism, it is necessary to be aware of the situation in Europe in the first half of the 19th century, when modern nationalism was emerging. Some elements of Pan-Slavism appeared earlier, for example, among the Yugoslavs (e.g., the Croatian Juraj Križanić) during the Turkish threat in 17th century, but the main appearance was in the 19th century.

In Europe, three main groups of nations are included as Indo-Europeans: Romans, Germans, and Slavs. In the 19th century, the Roman nations had great France; still famous Spain and Portugal with their overseas territories, fragmented but for their culture and history; and respected Italy. The Germans had the main naval power, and the most developed country in the world, Britain; numerous and advanced Germans with the great Austria and Prussia; and the important Netherlands, Denmark, and Sweden. Despite their size, the Slavs lived as a rather secondary population in Austria and Turkey, where they were also religiously oppressed. There was also great Russia, with a key role in the defeat of Napoleon, which, despite its backwardness—for the Slavs of Central Europe and religious and cultural differences—was tempting. In

15 Urban, 1982, pp. 383–385.
16 Petráš, 2006, pp. 694–740.

particular, the Poles had already had dark experiences with the tsarist empire, which, in Europe in the 19th century was usually considered a supporter of reaction and backwardness. However, the Czechs knew little about this empire.

At the time of the Czech National Revival, some writers enthusiastically professed Pan-Slavism. The most prominent of them was Jan Kollár (1793–1852), who came from Slovakia but promoted the use of Czech instead of Slovak. A difficult blow to reflections on Slavic unity meant a real acquaintance with the backward conditions of the tsarist empire, where the key was *Pictures of Russia* (*Obrazy z Rus*) (1843–1846) by Karel Havlíček Borovský (1821–1856). In contrast, the rather limited Pan-Slavic tendencies in the Czech lands were sometimes used by the Germans to attack, claiming that the Czechs were the backbone of the European reaction and that they wanted to control the monarchy and oppress the Germans in Bohemia. Many actions seeking only (in fact, Austroslavistic) cooperation between the Slavs in the monarchy and possible cultural cooperation with other countries were attacked as cooperation with tsarist absolutism. This was also the case with the Slavonic Congress of June 1848, one of the manifestations of democratization after the fall of Metternich's absolutism in March 1848. The chairman was František Palacký, who was promoting Austroslavism against Pangermanism. During the negotiations, riots broke out in Prague, and the congress could not even be officially ended.[17]

After the establishment of Bach's neo-absolutism, various political ideas, including Pan-Slavism, were suppressed. These would come alive again with the liberalization after the defeat in Italy in 1859. In 1867, there was another Slavonic congress in Moscow, which had been being prepared since 1865. It is often described as an anti-Austrian event organized by Russia, which is not true. The tsarist regime only agreed to the event, which acquired a sharp anti-Austrian tone due to the great irritation of the Austro-Hungarian dualism in 1867. The congress, where the central role had an ethnographic exhibition, was attended by the main representatives of Czech politics František Palacký and František Ladislav Rieger, acting as the main representatives of the Slavs of Austria-Hungary. Rieger rejected radical Pan-Slavic plans for religious, linguistic, and national unification, emphasizing the already distinctive Slavic nations. In Moscow, he did not even hesitate to boldly support the Poles, who after the lost uprisings of 1830–1831 and 1863–1864, were severely oppressed by Russia. According to him: 'True brotherly love between us, true noble Pan-Slavism is possible only if each Slav will recognize his brother equal in origin and rights.'[18] Of course, the tsarist regime was not pleased with such an approach, and the local propagandists of Pan-Slavism realized that cooperation with the Czechs and other Slavs from Austria who were accustomed to liberal conditions could also undermine the tsarist regime. Some individuals in Bohemia professed Orthodoxy, but with the stabilization of Austria-Hungary after dualism and a strong alliance with Germany on the international level since 1879, Pan-Slavism lost any real significance.

17 Urban, 1982, pp. 39–50. Šusta, 1923, p. 68.
18 Šesták, 1986, p. 33.

A new, rather inconspicuous wave of Czech Pan-Slavism appeared around the end of the 19th century and was partly connected with the economic interests of expanding Czech industry. At that time, there were already several independent Slavic states in the Balkans, which attracted investments not only from France and Germany, but also from Britain and Austria, although to a lesser extent. Czech entrepreneurs and intelligentsia used Slavic reciprocity here, while Germans and Hungarians aroused distrust due their completely different language and being supporters of an often hostile and arrogant great power. In particular, in Serbia, the Mašín family, originally from Nymburk, gained enormous influence when Svetozár Mašín (1851–1886) became the first husband of Queen Draga of Serbia. His brother Aleksandar (1857–1910) was the army commander who, in 1903, orchestrated the overthrow and murder of the Obrenović dynasty, including Queen Draga. Incidentally, this coup infuriated Vienna, as Serbia, which came from being an obscure to an enemy during the new dynasty and even supported internal opponents, as in Bosnia, which led to the assassination in Sarajevo.

Even greater economic opportunities were offered in massive undeveloped Russia, where numerous Czech migrants headed, mainly to Volyn. The most important politician associated with these activities was Karel Kramář (1860–1937), the first prime minister of Czechoslovakia from November 1918 to July 1919; he was later chairman of the key right-wing national party of National Democracy and the chief opponent of President Tomáš G. Masaryk. On a study trip to Russia in 1890, he met his future wife, Nadezhda, and, after a scandalous relationship, married her in 1900 in Crimea, where the couple built their summer residence.

Before the beginning of the First World War, apparently in May 1914, Kramář prepared an extensive Constitution of the Slavic Empire that assumed the unification of the Slavs under the tsar's rule in the event of a victorious war. The Czech state (Czech Czardom) should have been part of a sort of loose federation, affiliated not only with Slovakia, but also German Lusatia and a part of Silesia. This document was relatively elaborate, but many naive ideas were evident; for example 'The population of the Czardom is 15 million, of which 10 million are Czechoslovaks, 1 1/2 million Hungarianized Slovaks and Germanized Czechs, able to re-apply for their breed, 3 million Germans and about 1/2 million Jews.'[19] The idea of an easy return to the ancestral nation was almost absurd, as shown by the development after the Second World War, when the so-called re-Slovakization of the Hungarians took place in Slovakia. As soon as anti-Hungarian pressure eased, almost everyone returned to their original nationality.[20] He also sent the document to Russia, where, however, it apparently did not arouse interest. During the First World War, Kramář was imprisoned and sentenced to death in Austria, but in the new Czechoslovakia, except for the first months, he was not even a 'national martyr.' Other than during the first months when he was prime minister and led a delegation to a peace conference,[21] he had little impact and

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19 Galandauer, 1988, p. 248.
20 Petráš, 2007, pp. 100–102.
21 Petráš, 2015, pp. 34–44; Kuklík and Petráš, 2017, pp. 50–54.

was one of the voices of opposition until his death. During the civil war in Russia, he enthusiastically supported the Czech intervention and hoped for the fall of the Bolsheviks.[22]

4. Period between world wars

The disintegration of the traditional state system that had existed since 1526 (and in some elements, even longer), significantly complicated the situation in Central Europe at a time when Balkanization was spoken about pejoratively, that is, as the problem of small mutually hostile states as was common in the Balkans, especially after 1878. More capable politicians were well aware of this problem and sought to develop international cooperation, both global and regional. Interwar Czechoslovakia was primarily economically, but to some extent also in population, one of the largest successor states; perhaps even more important was its considerable political stability. Despite the usual permanent political bickering in the only democracy that remained in the region, the state's foreign policy remained in the hands of its creators, that is, in foreign exile during the First World War. Almost until their death, Tomáš G. Masaryk (1850–1937) and Edvard Beneš (1884–1948), the first and second presidents, remained key figures. Beneš had been a key creator of foreign policy since the time of the foreign resistance during the First World War; in the interwar era, he became the longest-serving Minister of Foreign Affairs in the world, and, even as president, he controlled foreign policy.[23]

Masaryk was the creator of theoretical concepts of international relations, while Beneš adhered to real politics. In the exile during the First World War, Masaryk prepared a fundamental publication, New Europe (Nová Evropa), where he justified the fight against Austria-Hungary. He recommended transforming Europe into a federation of democratic states. However, such a drastic reconstruction was hardly realistic at the time, so he also supported less radical integration efforts. Czechoslovakia, as a state closely tied to the conditions created after the First World War, supported the first real international organization that was to ensure stability, the League of Nations.

One of the key organizations initiating later European integration was the Pan-European Union founded in 1922–1924 on the estate of Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi in Poběžovice near Domažlice. Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi (1894–1972) of Austrian-Japanese origin was one of the main supporters of European integration, having Czechoslovak citizenship and specific support from Prague. At the beginning, he was a young and completely unknown politician, so as early as 1919, he met with president Tomáš G. Masaryk, whom he wanted to convince to become the 'Washington of United Europe.' Masaryk greatly appreciated his activities but believed that the time was not yet right. Masaryk recommended him to important personalities and secured

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22 Kuklík and Petráš, 2007, pp. 60–61.
23 Pichlík, 1991. Petráš, 2009.

a Czechoslovak diplomatic passport for him but refused personal leadership due to his busy presidency and advanced age, as he considered these activities long-term. In contrast, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs assumed that the Pan-European movement would not develop in Czechoslovakia.[24]

Coudenhove-Kalergi antagonized numerous Czech politicians by supporting the German-Austrian Customs Union in 1931, which was considered a threat of partial occupation of Austria and thus the siege of Czechoslovakia. He also supported various concepts of the Danube Federation, about which Prague often had little enthusiasm. The Czechoslovak section of the Pan-European Union, founded in 1926, supported the activities of the French politician Aristide Briand (1862–1932), but at other times even reflected on the Central European economic area, dominated by Germany.[25]

Although Czechoslovakia's official policy supported stability and thus the activities of the League of Nations, it was cautious in its plans for wider integration of states, because especially in the union with Austria or even Germany, along with the influence of German minorities, a group promoting Berlin's interests could be easily aroused. At the same time, Prague had to look at the complex interests of France, an ally without whose support the survival of the state would be uncertain. Czechoslovakia also feared Germany's occupation of Austria, which the locals wished for, but there was a risk in strengthening a dangerous Germany. It repeatedly opposed attempts to restore the monarchy and the return of the Habsburgs with threats of war. The so-called Little Agreement—cooperation with Yugoslavia and Romania—was to serve against Hungarian nationalism.

From the foreign resistance during the First World War through 1948, Czechoslovakia's foreign policy was largely dominated by Edvard Beneš (1884–1948), Minister of Foreign Affairs and, from 1935, President. He was a supporter of European stability and a promoter of collective security, focused on France, and later, on the USSR. Other concepts did not stand a chance, whether it was the above-mentioned efforts of Karel Kramář (1860–1937) to defeat the Bolsheviks and cooperate with liberated Russia, or the efforts of the first Slovak as Prime Minister in 1935–1938, Milan Hodža (1878–1944), to the so-called Danube Federation with Austria and Hungary cooperating with Italy.

5. After the Second World War and during socialism

The Second World War created fundamentally different conditions in many ways, which were crucial for the Czech lands. These have been under long-term pressure from the Germans, in fact, since the construction of the Holy Roman Empire and the extensive medieval German colonization. However, this process, described by German nationalists and their sharp opponents as the pressure to the east, 'Drang

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24 Veber, 2004, pp. 128–133.
25 Moravcová, 2001, pp. 258–270.

nach Osten', suffered a crushing blow during the world wars and with the expulsion of the Germans.[26] On the contrary, the Soviet Union penetrated Central Europe, so that ties to Russia (Pan-Slavism), which in the 19th century were more of a theory against the power of Austria and its allied Germany, had now became reality. The original ideas during World War II, supported by President Beneš and his exile in London, were that Czechoslovakia would become a kind of bridge between the West and the USSR. This was indicated by promoting the welfare state and extensive nationalization in Western Europe; in the USSR, it was hoped for democratization, where Slavic Czechoslovakia with a democratic tradition could be a model. However, within a few years, Czechoslovakia became a satellite of Moscow, and the world disintegrated into vigorously separated blocks divided by the so-called Iron Curtain.

During World War II, a regional integration plan was also considered that involved thoughts on a Polish-Czechoslovak union.[27] The two states that had been liquidated by Nazi Germany, which, however, followed the long-term negative attitude of German politics toward the Slavic countries in the east, considered their union to permanently defend against the famous German pressure to the east. However, the issue of integration proved more complicated, and the whole plan completely failed. The traditions and problems of Poland and Czechoslovakia differed significantly, and relations between Prague and Warsaw were usually very tense in the interwar era. This may come as a surprise, given that these were two new Slavic states threatened not only by German nationalism, but also by Bolshevism. Despite this closeness, the real ties between them were limited and, for example, interest in the culture of the second nation had been surprisingly low for a long time. Especially among the less numerous Czechs, there was often minimal interest in science, literature, or the films of its relatively large neighbor, although the qualities of many segments of Polish production were not denied and there was no chauvinistic resistance to the other nation. From the Polish culture, the attention of the Czechs was attracted only by what became renowned in the world or at least in Central Europe.

Many historians and political scientists point out how surprisingly different the development was in these neighboring countries, the two states of the Western Slavs, whose languages have long been mutually intelligible. Quite commonly, they differ greatly in different historical stages, with stability in one country and conflicts in another, which switches in a few decades or even years. At the end of the millennium in the 1980s, communist Poland was in a deep economic crisis and almost defeated by Solidarity; by contrast, Czechoslovakia was remarkably stable, the opposition was innumerable, and the population believed in socialism.[28] In the 1990s, democratic Poland was now politically unstable, while the Czech Republic had a stable, strongly right-wing and pro-Western government and was building an unrestricted market led by the ODS and Václav Klaus, which even endured the disintegration of Czechoslovakia

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26 Petráš, 2017, pp. 191–198.
27 Kuklík and Petráš, 2007, p. 137.
28 Vykoukal, Litera and Tejchman, 2000, pp. 558–570, 687–699. Petráš, 2007.

without any problems. Such aspects prevent integrating multiple states (or nations) that are seemingly close culturally and linguistically, as illustrated here with the example of the Poles and Czechs.

These differences became apparent even in the efforts to integrate during World War II. The Polish plans were far-reaching and difficult for Czechoslovak politics to accept. The Poles assumed their own dominance in the planned state system, which corresponded to approximately twice the population number of the Czechs and Slovaks, but logically did not attract representatives from Czechoslovakia. Even more troubling was the highly anti-Soviet character of the union under the Polish plans, as Czechoslovak President Beneš was aware of the USSR's strength. He had tried to reach an agreement with the USSR and use it as support after being disappointed by France and Britain at the 1938 Munich Conference. Poland also considered including other states, especially Lithuania, which was occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940; this would have hindered relations with Moscow.[29]

During the communist regime of 1948–1989, Czechoslovakia was part of the Soviet bloc and thus a Soviet satellite; the situation had been heading toward this since its liberation in 1945. This dependence increased greatly after the Soviet occupation, which suppressed the 1968 reform efforts. After 1970 came the so-called era of normalization; the key pillar of the regime was fear of another Soviet intervention. The possibilities that Czechoslovakia could initiate or at least participate in integration attempts without support from Moscow were therefore minimal. While Yugoslavia completely freed itself from dependence in 1948, Romania pursued a partial independence policy from the 1960s. The USSR feared a relatively large Poland (with a strong tradition of anti-Russian patriotism), and Czechoslovakia had been a clear satellite of Moscow since 1948, especially in 1968.[30]

Notably, the period following the Second World War was literally the golden age of integration in Europe.[31] This was conditioned by the catastrophic weakening of the Second World War and fear of the USSR. There were three key tendencies: keeping the USSR out, keeping the US in Europe as a key shield against Moscow's military superiority, and preventing Germany's new aggression. Logically, according to the Soviet line, communist Czechoslovakia was sharply critical of Western European integration tendencies when, for example, the European Communities described NATO as an economic base—and therefore, according to Moscow's official propaganda and thus Prague, an offensive aggressive pact serving the interests of capitalism.

As an analogy of Western European integration, organizations in the Soviet bloc also emerged, but their real significance was minimal for a long time, because the integration here—rather Soviet dominance—functioned even without contractual obligations. This was especially the case with the military organization of the Warsaw Pact, which was always in fact subject to Soviet command. The development of the

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29 Veber, 2004, pp. 168–170.
30 Nálevka, 2000, pp. 21–36.
31 Kuklík and Petráš, 2007, pp. 158–163.

economic organization was more complicated; for example, in the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (RVHP in Czech – COMECON in the West), the interests of individual countries and even interest groups such as huge industrial enterprises were already manifested.[32]

The COMECON was established in January 1949 but was initially a mere formal box. The USSR was more interested in its own direct economic control, operating through numerous advisers in individual states, and not real integration between the bloc states. It was not until 1954, after Stalin's death forced new methods, that the organization began to take off in real life, and key documents for its functioning were signed in 1959. However, efforts for deeper economic integration failed, especially in 1961. Attempts at transnational management of individual economies were supported by developed countries like the GDR and Czechoslovakia. However, less developed countries like Romania, Bulgaria, and Poland feared that integration would complicate their often just-beginning industrialization, so that they would become more like raw material and food suppliers for industrialized COMECON countries. In the seventies, integration made little progress, mainly based on the 1971 plan—a comprehensive program of further deepening and improving cooperation and developing socialist economic integration. After the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, the individual bloc countries realized that Moscow was willing to intervene even in states without a revolution (as in 1956 in Hungary) and would not tolerate fundamental policy deviations. In 1974, the bodies of the COMECON also changed. From a formal legal point of view, the COMECON did not fundamentally differ from other organizations aimed at economic integration; we do not find the USSR's de facto privileges in the relevant international treaties.[33]

Nevertheless, integration within the COMECON had not gone far compared to Western Europe, as individual economies had remained largely autarkic. Even in Czechoslovakia, there was official criticism that this not very large country had, for example, almost all engineering production, which in the West was common only in much larger countries such as Britain or West Germany. Limited opportunities to involve bloc countries in world trade remained a key issue. 'The COMECON has continued to be primarily a tool to facilitate bilateral barter trade, partly because it has never succeeded in establishing a currency that would be truly transferable between members.'[34] For Czechoslovakia, therefore, this organization could seemingly secure advantageous markets, but the reality was different. It was not surprising that the organization (like the Warsaw Pact) disappeared quickly after the fall of communist regimes.

In Czechoslovakia itself, especially after the 1968 Soviet troop invasion, the communist regime meant cultural disintegration and the so-called 'Biafra ducha,' according to the horrific war in Africa at the time. At least part of society, especially

32 Durman, 2004, pp. 189–200.
33 Kuklík and Petráš, 2007, pp. 219–221.
34 Plechanovová and Fidler, 1997, p. 157.

its more educated classes, was aware of the paradox that countries traditionally clearly west oriented fell to the east after the Iron Curtain. Probably best known are Milan Kundera's reflections; born in 1929, he is a Czech writer who has lived in France since 1975. These include *The Czech Destiny* (*Český úděl*, 1968), created soon after the Soviet occupation, which like Václav Havel, antagonized him, and especially *The Abduction of the West or the Tragedy of Central Europe* (*Únos západu aneb Tragédie střední Evropy*, 1983).[35]

6. Situation after 1989

The democratization of Eastern Europe, particularly in 1989, marked one of the key milestones in the world. However, the new democracies faced conditions with which they had no experience. Many of them lacked a strong or even any democratic tradition. On the other side of the fallen Iron Curtain stood countries that had been exclusively democratic since the mid-1970s when the last dictatorships of southern Europe ended. These countries had already been incorporated into integration structures for many decades. Even Czechoslovakia, a unique democracy in the region that supported integration attempts during the interwar period, had no experience, because its gradual development had begun only at the end of the 1940s.

Almost all of them quickly joined the organization of European democratic states—the Council of Europe—but its importance was limited. However, the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, which significantly developed the human rights protection system, was of great legal importance. Being included in this organization did not produce any major political discussions and generated no major response from the Czech public.[36]

Integration into politico-military and economic structures was much more difficult. These required complex internal discussions and had fundamental strategic aspects as they conflicted with Moscow's interests. While joining the European Union had substantial public support in the former Soviet bloc, it faced difficult economic conditions, so joining NATO was a major political problem. In countries with a traditionally good relationship with Russia (Bulgaria, partly Slovakia, later independent Montenegro), this was a contentious issue that is often addressed to this day.

In the key 1990s, the Czech Republic had a significant advantage in society's majority desire to 'return to Europe,' which was symbolized by joining Western European organizations. Perhaps even more important was the decent economic situation (especially in comparison with the then poor Poland) and political stability that occurred from about June 1992 until November 1997 under the right-wing government led by Václav Klaus (born 1941). Of course, the advantageous geographical position of Czechoslovakia (later the Czech Republic) also played a role; it had no Russian

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35 Rákosník, Spurný and Štaif, 2018, pp. 227–230.
36 Kuklík and Petráš, 2007, pp. 186–189.

borders (as in Poland or the Baltic countries) or warring Yugoslavia (as in Hungary) and, on the contrary, bordered Germany and Austria. The reverse of this objectively very good position the Czech Republic held was often a somewhat arrogant tendency not to bind to other states of the former Soviet bloc and to enter integration groups without them. Possible deeper cooperation of the so-called Visegrad countries, therefore, did not arouse any enthusiasm from the key figure, Václav Klaus. Václav Havel, who was a supporter of this cooperation, also had less influence as president. Prague greatly underestimated the broader context, since the West was primarily interested in a much larger and strategically important Poland, whose rapid accession to the European Union was, however, hindered by economic weakness.

The Czech effort to quickly build a market economy and participate in Western structures also fundamentally contributed to the disintegration of Czechoslovakia. In the June 1992 elections, the right-wing pro-Western coalition won in the Czech Republic, albeit narrowly, while in Slovakia, Vladimír Mečiar with national, left-wing but also undemocratic tendencies became prime minister. The Czech national team quickly concluded that maintaining the federation would be very difficult and negotiated the division of the state by the end of the same year. When at the time of the fundamental progress of European integration at the conclusion of the Maastricht Treaty, the state fell apart right in the center of Europe, and despite great agitation and often even concern in Western Europe, the division took place without any problems. The parliament was elected in June 1992 and the then formed government of the Czech Republic became the body of an independent state. The division took place with the perhaps surprising disinterest of the Czech public, while for Slovaks it meant their own statehood. Most of the public showed enthusiasm mixed with concern.

In the following years, the economic transformation in the Czech Republic was quite successful. In Slovakia, there were obscure conditions; the state dropped out of real applicants for integration and became isolated in the region. It was no coincidence that in 1999, only the Czech Republic with Poland and Hungary were admitted to NATO. Later, however, Slovak conditions stabilized, and Slovakia together with the Baltics, Romania, Bulgaria, and Slovenia not only joined NATO in 2004, but also joined the EU the same year, together with the Czech Republic and other countries in the region. The significant difference in the Czech and Slovak orientation thus disappeared.

In the Czech Republic itself, the situation has become rather complicated. Although it was still one of the richest of the former socialist states and gradually economically overtook even older members of integration, Poland, for example, grew faster economically. More striking, however, is the complicated political situation characterized by several strong disputes and the frequent survival of governments with only close parliamentary support. The individual parties do not have mutual respect or even try to cooperate, and reluctance or disgust dominates even among their voters. In contrast to the optimistic period of (almost) all of society's support for the 'return to Europe,' the 'stupid mood' indicated by President Václav Havel (1936–2011) has been rather typical since the end of 1997.

These permanent political disputes, with society's prevailing disgust, of course undermine the possibilities of new integration concepts that require long-term consensus and a positive public attitude. Although the Czech Republic became part of the Western European integration (NATO in 1999, the EU in 2004), it happened with a notable lack of interest from the public, and society's mood did not improve. Since 2008, the global economic crisis has had a negative effect, demonstrating to the countries that were admitted in 2004 that the EU does not guarantee rapid economic and social growth. The migration crisis that culminated in 2015, the crisis of European integration symbolized by Britain's difficult departure, and the 2019 coronavirus epidemic further worsened the social mood.

The inhabitants of the Czech Republic are among the most Eurosceptic in the EU. In particular, pushier EU plans, such as the environmental or refugee friendliness in 2015, cause agitation, ridicule, or outrage in most of society. Foreign policy is typical in its prevailing support of the US and Israel. However, many influential politicians, such as former President Václav Klaus and the current Miloš Zeman (born 1944), are considered supporters of Russia or even China. The broader conception of Czech foreign policy is generally lacking, contributed to by the unstable political situation and the strong hostility of several parties. Perhaps only the effort for cooperation with Slovakia and sometimes with Austria can be mentioned, when in principle, since 2015, there has been talk of the so-called Slavkov cooperation.

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