

Great Theorists of Central European Integration in the Czech Republic

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ABSTRACT

The chapter examines five prominent Czech thinkers whose works contributed to the issue of Central European integration. These key figures are discussed chronologically. First, the life and work of František Palacký (1798–1876) is presented. A politician, writer and the founder of modern Czech history, Palacký contributed significantly to the political life of the nineteenth century through the question of cooperation between the Slavic peoples of the Habsburg Monarchy; the relationship of the Czech lands to German integration; and later to the Compromise of 1867. Another important figure is the politician and Czechoslovak Prime Minister Karel Kramář (1860–1937), who based his ideas on close cooperation with Russia and developed the concept of the Slavic Empire. Although the Czechoslovak President Edvard Beneš (1884–1948) is often mentioned primarily in connection with the events of 1938 (Munich Agreement), the expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia and 1948 (Communist putsch), Beneš had advocated the unification of the European area as a barrier against the hardships of war. These concepts were manifested not only in the Paris Peace Conference and proposals within the League of Nations, but also in the formation of the Little Entente during the interwar period and negotiations for the Czechoslovak–Polish Confederation during the Second World War. However, Beneš’s ideas ultimately failed thanks to France’s incompetence and the expansionism of the Soviet Union, which he underestimated. Another prominent integrationist theorist was the politician and national economist Jaromír Nečas (1888–1945), who developed the United States of Europe thesis and whose efforts at a peaceful solution to the Sudeten crisis are often overlooked. Czechoslovak and Czech president, playwright, and dissident Václav Havel (1936–2011) provided a philosophical dimension to the integration issue. Havel actively sought the early integration of Eastern Europe into Western European structures and was also the main initiator of close cooperation with Hungary and Poland, understanding the Euro-Atlantic orientation of the former socialist countries as a necessity. He simultaneously pointed out the mistakes that were gaining negative assessments, especially for the European Union. This chapter presents the aforementioned thinkers’ life stories and summarises their crucial works and speeches, illustrating their contribution to Central European integration.

KEYWORDS

Integration, Czech Republic, Czechoslovakia, František Palacký, Karel Kramář, Edvard Beneš, Jaromír Nečas, Václav Havel

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Introduction

The Czech lands are in the Central European area, where clashes of different civilizational circles, cultures, opinions, and spheres of influence have occurred. Since the 18th century, the period has been marked by a national self-consciousness, based on defining oneself against others. Over the centuries, however, it has become clear that many Czech opinionmakers, in their political or literary work, have considered the need to form broader units for cooperation and development within the region. The focus of such interest was primarily Central European cooperation.

The five most significant thinkers who dedicated their entire efforts to cooperation have been examined below. They include: the historian and politician František Palacký; politician Karel Kramář; sociologist, diplomat, and President Edvard Beneš; politician Jaromír Nečas; and the playwright, writer and President Václav Havel. Their biographies summarise the cardinal events in their lives, focusing on the scrutinised issue of integration. Their key works and related significant publications are discussed.

1. František Palacký (1798–1876)¹

František Palacký was born on 14 June 1798 in Hodslavice near Nový Jičín in Moravia. The Palacký family followed the Czech Brethren religion and during the Counter-Reformation, Palacký's ancestors kept old Czech Brethren books in front of the Jesuits. When Emperor Joseph II's Patent of Toleration permitted religions other than Catholicism, Palacký's father Jiří (1768–1836) subscribed to the Augsburg Confession. Palacký's father was one of the founders of the evangelical community in Hodslavice and following the founding of the school, became its teacher. Prior to that, he was a tailor by profession.²



¹ František Palacký, Czech philosopher, historian, publicist and writer, lithographie von Adolf Dauthage, source of the picture: https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franti%C5%A1ek_Palack%C3%BD#/media/F%C3%A1jl:PalackyLitho.jpg.

² Dozens of books and hundreds of articles have been published about František Palacký in the last 150 years. For a detailed account of his life, we can refer to the following biographies: Rieger, 1867; Riegrová-Červinková, 1885; Pekař, Tošner, 1902. Palacký's life is best monographically treated by Jiří Kořalka in his book (Kořalka, 1998). In German, see Kořalka, Rumpler and Urbanitsch, 2007.

In 1807, František Palacký entered a private school in Kunín to learn German. Palacký inherited his father's diligence, which manifested itself, among other things, in the fact that he had read the entire Bible at the age of five. Between 1809 and 1812, Palacký attended the Evangelical Latin School in Trenčín, Slovakia. His father wanted him to become a Protestant preacher.³ However, Palacký dreamed of becoming a missionary in distant lands and converting pagans to the faith. In 1812–1818, Palacký studied at the Higher Evangelical Lyceum in Bratislava, the best evangelical school in Hungary for the education of evangelical priests. In addition to German and Latin, which he already knew perfectly, he learned several other languages there: English, French, Italian and Spanish. He also learned to understand South Slavic languages and Russian. During his studies in Bratislava, Palacký's personality took a nationally conscious turn. He also met the Slovak-Czech writer, Slavist, literary historian, ethnographer, and linguist Pavel Josef Šafárik (1795–1861), who greatly influenced him. In fact, Palacký maintained lifelong friendship with Šafárik.

Following his studies, Palacký did not assume the career of a priest, as his father wished, but became a tutor to several Hungarian noble families. This introduced him to higher society, giving him access to culture and opportunity for further self-education (in philosophy and aesthetics or the study of other foreign languages). He also gained a good overview of Austrian politics and political events.

In 1823, Palacký moved to Prague, where he wished to become a Czech historian and devote himself primarily to the history of the Hussite movement, a religiously – and in some respects also ethnically, socially and politically – motivated action in the Czech lands during the first half of the 15th century, which emerged from the Czech Reformation and sought a far-reaching reform of the Church. The Hussite movement matter followed Palacký throughout his life.

In Prague, Palacký found himself in the company of Czech national revivalists who, during the first half of the nineteenth century, attempted to raise the Czech language to the language of the educated and motivate Czech inhabitants to become nationally aware. The national revival took place simultaneously with the process of transformation of the state into civil society. Josef Jungmann (1773–1847) and Josef Dobrovský (1753–1829) were primarily responsible for teaching Palacký how to approach historical sources. With Dobrovský's help, Palacký also managed to permeate the circle of Czech patriotic nobility. The Sternberg noble family appointed Palacký as the family archivist. In 1827, he became editor of the newly established *Časopis společnosti Vlasteneckého muzea* [Journal of the Patriotic Museum in Prague].⁴

The same year, Palacký married Terezie Měchurová (1807–1860), the daughter of a wealthy Prague lawyer and landowner. The marriage assured financial security for Palacký for the rest of his life, allowing him to devote himself to historical

3 Rieger, 1867, pp. 24–25.

4 Kosatík, 2010, p. 11.

science and politics. However, as his wife hailed from a strict Catholic family, Palacký was required to commit, in writing, that his children would be raised as Catholics. Palacký had two children: Jan (1830–1908), who was a professor of geography at the University of Prague; and Marie (1833–1891), who was married to the prominent Czech politician František Ladislav Rieger (1818–1903). Rieger was one of the founders of the National (Old Czech) Party after 1848 and one of František Palacký's closest collaborators.

At the end of the 1820s, Palacký was appointed as a provincial historian, whose task was to prepare the history of the Czech lands. He began to travel to the Czech and Moravian archives and those in Austria, Germany, and Italy to collect source material for his book. This book was published successively between 1836 and 1867, first in German as *'Geschichte von Böhmen'* [History of Bohemia] and later between 1848 and 1872 in Czech as *'Dějiny národu českého v Čechách a v Moravě'* [History of the Czech Nation in Bohemia and Moravia], and described Czech history from the beginnings of the Czech state until 1526 when the Habsburgs ascended the throne. Palacký's publications introduced the concept of national history and thus the idea of the Czech nation. The fundamental postulate of Palacký's history, and therefore Czech history, was the 'encounter and struggle' of the Czech nation with the Germans and the attempt to distinguish itself from Germanism. For Palacký, Slavicity symbolised democracy, whereas he associated Germans with the authoritarian principle. Palacký considered the Hussite period to be the peak of Czech history. Therefore, Palacký's history became the foundational work of modern Czech history and the ideological underpinning of the national revival and later Czech statehood demands.

Prior to 1848, the concept of Austro-Slavism began to gain ground among Czech liberals.⁵ This programme aimed to solve the problems of the Slavs living in the Austrian monarchy. Among its first promoters was the writer and journalist Karel Havlíček Borovský (1821–1856), who introduced it in 1846 as a counterproposal to Pan-Slavism. Palacký later developed it into a coherent political programme. Austro-Slavism was not only a question considered by Czech politicians but was also partially supported by other Slavic nations within the Austrian monarchy.

Austro-Slavism assumed peaceful cooperation between the smaller Slavic peoples of Central Europe living in the Habsburg Monarchy territory, which German-speaking elites would not dominate. It was about overcoming the traditional notions of pan-Slavic reciprocity and, on the contrary, promoting a pragmatic alliance based on standard criteria and shared interests. For Bohemia, it meant a beneficial partnership with the southern Slavs living within the Austrian monarchy. Czech intellectuals thus defended the existence of Austria and its statehood in the period immediately preceding the Revolution. They began with the idea of the Austrian Empire as an ideal state framework under the Habsburgs for the coexistence of different peoples. The peoples living in the Austrian monarchy were

5 On the concept of Austro-Slavism, see Moritsch, 1996; Šimeček, 2001; Hahn, 2008; Žáček, 1968 and Šesták, 2009.

to be given sufficient space for their autonomous development. If all nations were equal, the Slavic peoples would stand out against the hitherto socio-economically and politically better-equipped Germans and Hungarians. Within a strongly federalised Austria, where the Slavs constituted the majority of the population, the Czechs were to assert themselves.⁶

In the spring of 1848, when the Frankfurt Diet was being prepared to unify the German lands, Palacký was invited to become a member of the preparatory committee of the parliament, on behalf of the Czech lands. However, on behalf of the Czech political nation, Palacký refused the notion that the Czech lands should become part of a constitutionally rebuilt and united Germany. He outlined this refusal in a public letter (the so-called '*Psaní do Frankfurtu*' [Writing to Frankfurt]),⁷ published in the newspaper 'Národní noviny' [National Newspaper] on 11 April 1848. He justified his refusal, stating that the Czechs would play a subordinate role within a united Germany. On the contrary, Palacký envisioned the protection of the Czech nation within a federalised Austria under the rule of an enlightened monarch, where all the smaller nations of Central and South-eastern Europe would live safely and together.⁸ He also rejected a republican form of government for mixed nationality. Palacký pointed out no legal obligations from the past (the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation) existed any more as to why the Czech lands should become part of a united Germany. Palacký saw Austria as the protector of the small Slavic nations against the expansionism of their powerful neighbours (Germans and Russians). With a united Germany, a federalised Austria could form a customs union and a military association. Palacký's 'Writing to Frankfurt' was the essential document of Czech Austro-Slavism.⁹

The cooperation of the Austrian Slavs was to be coordinated at the Slav Congress, which was convened in Prague in early June 1848. Palacký was the chairperson of the Slavic Congress, and promoted the programme of Austro-Slavism as a defence against Pan-Germanism (the political effort to unite all German lands into one state unit). However, considering that the Slavic Congress was prematurely terminated due to the outbreak of the revolution in Prague, Palacký failed to use it as an avenue to promote his Austro-Slavist conception. By refusing to attend the Frankfurt Diet, Palacký came into conflict with the interests of Czech and Austrian Germans, who, on the contrary, saw their future existence within a united Germany.

With the occurrence of the revolution in Vienna and other significant changes, Palacký was offered the position of Minister of Education. When elections for the constituent Reichstag were called under the new Octroi 'Pillersdorf Constitution', he was elected a deputy. This parliament met first in Vienna and later in Kroměříž (Kreims) in Moravia. Palacký was a member of its constitutional committee and

6 Doubek, 2019b.

7 Palacký's letter is reprinted in Schelle and Tauchen, 2013, pp. 208–211.

8 Kosatík, 2010, p. 12.

9 On Palacký's invitation to Frankfurt, see in detail Kořalka, 1990a.

actively participated in drafting the new Austrian constitution (the so-called ‘Kremsier (or Kroměříž) Draft’).

Palacký embodied his federalist ideas in two (internally contradictory) constitutional proposals¹⁰ that he subsequently presented to the Constituent Reichstag. The thrust of his constitutional proposal was how best and rationally to divide the Austrian Empire territory into smaller self-governing units, how to determine the relationship between the Empire and individual countries or groups of countries, and how to distribute legislative power among them. The fundamental innovation of Palacký’s proposal was that the federal organisation of the Austrian monarchy was not based on the land principle, but on its division into four groups of countries, according to the nationalities of the populations living in those countries. It was thus a federation of larger districts and territorial groups, based on the national or ethnographic principle.¹¹

Palacký’s first constitutional draft was dated September 1848.¹² Palacký’s draft distinguished four groups of provinces: the Polish (Cracow, Galicia, Bukovina), the Czech (Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia), the German-Austrian (Austria, Salzburg, Tyrol with Vorarlberg, Styria) and the Illyrian (Carinthia, Krajina, Littoral and Dalmatia). The constitutional division was based on ten larger Gubernia districts. Each district was the seat of the provincial government (Vienna, Prague, Brno, Lviv, Linz, Innsbruck, Graz, Ljubljana, Trieste, and Zadar). The districts were to be further subdivided into regions, counties, and municipalities.

Legislative power at the imperial level was vested in the Reichstag, convened by the emperor in Vienna each spring. The members of the Reichstag were not to be directly elected, but delegated by the provincial assembly (*Landtag*), in the ratio of one deputy per 150,000 citizens per Land. One-third of the Reichstag members were to be replaced at annual intervals. Legislative power in the individual provinces was vested in the Landtags, whose seats were the capitals of the province where the provincial governments were based. The members of the provincial assemblies were to be elected for three years. For every 15,000 inhabitants of the country, there was to be one member of the Landtag. However, Palacký did not set the conditions for exercising the right to vote in his constitutional proposal.¹³

He also sought to divide powers between the central government in Vienna and the individual provincial governments. Matters of provincial administration, provincial finance, education, justice, and industry were to fall under the authority of the provinces.

However, Palacký failed to get his ideas through the Kroměříž Diet (*Reichstag*), and encountered opposition from the majority, who demanded the most significant

10 On Palacký’s two constitutional proposals from 1848–1849, see in detail: Rieger, 1898; Šesták, 1998 and Kořalka, 1990b.

11 Adamová and Sýkora, 2016, p. 485.

12 Palacký’s proposal of September 1848 is reprinted in Schelle and Tauchen, 2013, pp. 219–223.

13 Schelle, 2020, p. 444.

possible powers for the central imperial authorities and opposed both, autonomy and federalisation, which Palacký had advocated. Under the pressure of the unfavourable situation in the Kroměříž Reichstag, Palacký decided to modify and refine his September 1848 proposal. In January 1849, he submitted his second proposal,¹⁴ in which he dealt with the power of the government and the executive, i.e. the position of the emperor and the government. It was newly stipulated that the administration of each province was to be headed by a responsible minister-governor. In the Kroměříž Diet Constitutional Committee, Palacký demanded that, in addition to the groups of Polish, Czech, German-Austrian, and Illyrian provinces, four more groups of provinces should be created: Hungarian, South Slavic, Wallachian and Romanian. These eight groups of provinces were to form a federation in which all entities would have equal status and the same inalienable rights. Thus, no nation would fear for its national existence.¹⁵

However, Palacký stumbled with his federalist proposals, and on 3 February 1849, attended the Constitutional Committee of the Kroměříž Diet for the last time, although he had been highly active in it before. He wanted to defend his proposal at the plenary parliamentary session, but was unable to do so.¹⁶ On 7 March 1849, the Diet was dissolved, and the emperor imposed a new 'March Constitution,' which was built on the principles of centralism and was in direct contradiction to the federalism that Palacký had advocated for until then.

In December 1849, Palacký presented his project for the federalisation of the Austrian monarchy to public in the press. However, this met with the disapproval of the Viennese government, leading to his retirement from public life. During the 1850s, also known as the period of neoabsolutism, when civil and political rights were suspended, Palacký devoted himself to historical research.

Palacký returned to public life in 1860 in connection with the abolition of neoabsolutism. He was revered by the public as the 'Father of the Fatherland', just like Emperor Charles IV, who had been immensely popular among the Czechs in the past. Following the restoration of constitutionalism, Palacký was elected a member of the Bohemian Provincial Assembly. In April 1861, the Emperor appointed him a life member of the House of Lords of the Austrian Parliament. However, Palacký had not been active in Viennese parliament for a long time. Dissatisfied with the constitutional conditions in the Habsburg Monarchy, which were introduced by the 'February Patent' of 1861, he criticised above all, the fact that federalist ideas were not implemented in the non-Hungarian countries. In September 1861, he declared passive resistance to the House of Lords and did not return to it until his death.

In 1865, Palacký published another of his seminal works – *'Idea státu rakouského'* [The Idea of the Austrian State],¹⁷ in which he presented the Czech nation with his

14 Palacký's proposal of January 1849 is reprinted in Schelle and Tauchen, 2013, pp. 214–227.

15 Adamová, 2016, p. 486.

16 On the activities of František Palacký in the Constitutional Committee of the Kroměříž Diet, see Kameníček, 1929.

17 For an analysis of Palacký's 1865 federalist conception, see in detail Šesták, 1976.

idea of the future organisation of the Austrian Empire. Through this book, he warned against the prevailing centralism and threat of dualism. He once again called for a federal system and equality of the individual nations, but in some respects, corrected the views that he had advocated for in his 1848/49 proposals. Thus, he adapted his submissions to the new circumstances.¹⁸

Palacký strongly opposed the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 and the ‘December Constitution’. In August 1868, together with 80 other deputies of the Bohemian Provincial Assembly, he submitted a declaration of state law in which the Czech political representation opposed the constitutional direction of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and demanded respect for Czech state law.¹⁹ However, the policy of passive resistance proved to be ineffective and did not lead to the promotion of Czech interests. As such, Palacký failed to push through the programme of federalisation of the Habsburg Monarchy during his lifetime.

The ‘Father of the Fatherland’ František Palacký died on 26 May 1876.

2. Karel Kramář (1860–1937)²⁰



Karel Kramář was born on 27 December 1860 in Vysoké nad Jizerou in the Podkrkonoší region, to the family of the bricklayer Petr Kramář.²¹ Kramář liked the Giant Mountains and often returned to them. Later, he built a magnificent summer residence there. The foothill environment in which Kramář grew up also shaped him in many ways.²² Kramář had five siblings, but none lived to adulthood except him. Since Kramář’s family was financially well-off, he was provided with a good education. From the fifth grade he attended a German school in Liberec to improve his German. This benefited him during his many years as a member of the Viennese

18 Adamová, 1999, p. 237.

19 For an explanation of the concept of ‘Czech state law’ which was key to Czech politics in the second half of the 19th century, see Kwan, 2005.

20 Karel Kramář, Czech politician, source of the picture: Medek, Rudolf (ed.), *K vítězně svobodě 1914-1918-1928: (album fotografií z dějin zahraničního i domácího odboje československého: k oslavě prvního desetiletí ČSR)*. Prague: Pěčí a nákladem Památníku Odboje, 1928, p. 5., public domain, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karel_Kram%C3%A1%C5%99#/media/File:Karel_Kram%C3%A1%C5%99_1920s.jpg.

21 For the life and work of Karel Kramář, we can refer to the following books: Lustigová, 2007; Bílek and Velek, 2009; Sís, 1930. Kramář’s memoirs (Kramář, 1938) can also be used as a basis.

22 Lustigová, 2007, p. 11.

parliament, where he conversed in German. He received his secondary education at the 'Gymnasium' [secondary school that prepares for higher education] in Prague, where students were educated in the Czech national spirit and patriotism. His classmates included students from the Balkan states and Poland, thereby influencing his Slavic sentiments. Throughout this education, Kramář performed well, earning distinction and soon became politically involved. He participated in political rallies and followed the political press.

Kramář successfully passed his matriculation in 1879 and took his next steps towards legal study. However, he was not admitted to the Prague or Vienna law faculties, but due to his favourable financial situation, could afford to study at the University of Berlin. Here he attended the lectures of the economist Adolph Wagner (1835–1917), who enthused him about the national economy and financial science fields. Kramář spent a summer semester at the University of Strasbourg, where he enrolled in lectures by another national economist, Gustav Schmoller (1838–1917). He graduated in law in 1884 at the Prague Law Faculty and received his doctorate. However, although Kramář influenced the law in a significant way, having authored several bills and passed laws as a member of several legislatures over several decades, he never actually practised law.

After graduating from the Prague Law Faculty, he went abroad, to Berlin, Paris, London, and Vienna, as he was thinking of habilitation in the national economy and financial science. While this intention was never ultimately realised, Kramář's first book was published in Leipzig in 1886, entitled '*Das Papiergeld in Österreich seit 1848*' [The Paper Money in Austria since 1848] and based on his studies in the Viennese archives and in which Kramář dealt with paper money, dates from this period.

In Prague, Kramář became close to the Czech economist Josef Kaizl (1854–1901), who introduced him to the university professor and politician Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850–1937). Along with the latter, Kramář formed the political circle of the so-called Realists. This group sought to modernise cultural life, overcome Czech provincialism, and formulate a new Czech politics. The Realists rejected the existing nationalism based on romantic notions of a 'glorious Czech past' as a programmatic opposition to everything German. They knew that a successful Czech policy had to set primarily positive goals in order to reach the level of the more advanced European nations. They demanded Austrian decentralisation and national equalisation in the Czech lands.

In 1890, Kramář, Masaryk and Kaizl joined the Young Czech Party (the National Liberal Party) that ruled Czech politics then, marking Kramář's entry into active politics, where he remained for an incredible fifty years. Kramář became a professional politician and experienced difficulties during his political career. In the 1891 elections, at the age of 31, he was elected to the Chamber of Deputies, where he remained until the fall of the Habsburg Monarchy. In 1894, Kramář was also elected a member of the Bohemian Provincial Assembly. He held this position until 1913, when the Bohemian legislature was dissolved. In 1897, he became the second and, a few years later, the first deputy chairperson of the Chamber of Deputies of the *Reichsrat*.

As an expert on finance and the national economy, he was a member of several parliamentary committees within the Austrian Parliament. Additionally, Kramář was regarded as an expert on the Austrian state's constitutional issues. Due to his knowledge of several world languages (German, French and English), he also addressed and commented on foreign policy issues. Kramář was an excellent speaker, whose speeches in Parliament were widely reported in the Czech and German press.²³ He spoke fluently without written preparation or any sign of anxiety.

Throughout the 1890s, Kramář worked in the Young Czech Party in the shadow of his teacher Josef Kaizl, becoming his closest collaborator. In 1897, Kramář was appointed the chairperson of the Young Czech Party, becoming its most influential personality. He belonged to a moderate movement within the party, which tried to assert 'Czech state demands' (Czech state law) through economic prosperity and political cooperation with the Germans as equals. Unlike the politicians of the previous decades, Kramář represented the so-called 'positive politics', that consisted of the Czech nation gradually regaining its economic and political power. Although he criticised numerous aspects of Austria-Hungary, he was reconciled to its existence. In the case of good projects, he supported the Austrian government, but at the cost of benefits and concessions for the Czech lands.²⁴ Kramář also advocated that the Czech element should be more assertive in towns and cities in the German borderlands, thus expanding Czech autonomy. However, his efforts to decentralise the Austrian monarchy were met with considerable resistance from the Bohemian Germans.

Initially, the Young Czechs were embarrassed by the idea of universal suffrage, as it was evident that the workers and rural political parties (the Social Democrats and Agrarian Party) would benefit much more than them.²⁵ Under Kramář's influence, the Young Czechs eventually supported a proposal to reform the electoral system (Badeni's electoral reform). In 1897, Kramář was involved in a momentous change in the official status of the Czech language (Badeni's language regulations). At that time, the Young Czech Party functioned as openly pro-government. However, with the fall of the Badeni government, the Party's demands remained unfulfilled. The 1907 elections were held under universal, equal, direct, and secret suffrage (among men) for the first time in Austria-Hungary. The elections spelled defeat for the Young Bohemian Party, which was in crisis.

From the 1890s (over the next 40 years), Kramář had become a tireless promoter of Russophilism and cooperation with Russia. He visited Russia for the first time in 1890, and on his repeated trips, made countless contacts with Russian intellectuals and elaborated with them the idea of Slavic reciprocity. On his first visit to Moscow, Kramář met the manufacturer Alexei Alexeyevich Abrikosov and his wife Nadezhda Nikolayevna (1862–1936), with whom Kramář fell in love. He subsequently invited her to Vienna, where Nadezhda underwent gynaecological surgery. With her four

23 Kvaček, 2011, p. 12.

24 Lustigová, 2011, p. 36.

25 Kosatík, 2010, p. 107.

children, Nadezhda left her husband and began to live with Kramář in Vienna. Considering that Nadezhda's divorce was not finalised until 1898, Kramář maintained an intimate relationship with her that was scandalous for the time. The wedding did not take place until 17 September 1900 in Crimea according to the Orthodox rite. In Crimea, the newlyweds built their summer residence, the sumptuous 'Villa Barbo', where they spent every parliamentary holiday until the outbreak of the First World War. Following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, this villa was confiscated from the Kramář family.

After losing the 1907 elections, Kramář began to support the policy of Neo-Slavism, which consisted of economic and cultural rapprochement with Tsarist Russia. To some extent, he revived the old concept of the so-called Austro-Slavism of František Palacký. According to Kramář, Austria was a strong state that relied on the Slavic nations and represented the second largest Slavic power cooperating with Russia, i.e. it was the most considerable Slavic power. To fulfil his idea of bringing Austria-Hungary and Russia together through the cooperation of Slavic nations, he tried to influence Austrian foreign policy, heading parliamentary delegations, and organising and chairing congresses of Slavic nations (in Prague in 1908 and in Sofia, Bulgaria, in 1910). This Neo-Slav Movement was most active in 1907–1908. However, in his texts, Kramář demanded only economic and cultural rapprochement with Russia and did not proclaim political or state-law goals.²⁶ Thus, Kramář's Neo-Slavism was not directed against the Monarchy and the Austrian state.

However, international developments in the 1900s took a completely different direction, as Austria-Hungary's annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austria-Hungary in 1908 marked the breakdown in ties between the Danube Monarchy and Tsarist Russia. In line with his 'positive politics', Kramář defended the Austrian annexation, envisioning an increase in the share of the Slavic element within the Monarchy.²⁷

Immediately preceding the outbreak of the First World War, Kramář developed an extremely ambitious project for the Slavic Empire, drawing up its constitution.²⁸ However, the constitution could not be publicly published or discussed at that time, as it would have been considered treason. In May 1914, Kramář managed to present his constitutional draft to the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Dmitryevich Sazonov (1860–1927).

Kramář was based on the ideas of Pan-Slavism and Russophilism, which had comprised a prominent place in the Czech lands since the national revival. According to the proposal, an all-Slavic federation was to be created, which included the Russian Empire, Tsardom (Kingdom) of Poland, Tsardom (Kingdom) of Bohemia, Tsardom of Bulgaria, Kingdom of Serbia, and Kingdom of Montenegro.²⁹ In his

26 Doubek, 2019, p. 661.

27 On Kramář's Slavic politics, see Herman and Sládek, 1971; Herman and Sládek, 1970; Lustigová, 2004 and Lustigová, 2006.

28 For Kramář's constitution draft, see Schelle and Tauchen, 2013, pp. 354–358.

29 Schelle and Tauchen, 2013, p. 342.

proposal, Kramář detailed the territories that would belong to the various parts of the Slavic Empire. In doing so, however, he proposed the boundaries without regard to the political situation at the time, with the assumption that all Slavic nations would want to join the empire. This revealed Kramář's political naivety and unwillingness to work with facts.³⁰

The Slavic Empire was intended to be a constitutional monarchy. However, in his proposal, Kramář assumed a federal (federative) arrangement of the state on the German model (*Deutsche Bundesakte*). The position of the individual member states within the federation was also like the role of the federal states in the German Empire, i.e. the member states had only minimal autonomy and all decisive power belonged to the federation. The elements of federalism were only formal, and the association could be regarded as a unitary centralised state rather than a union of autonomous states.

The Slavic Empire was to be headed by the Russian Tsar, who was also the King of Bohemia and Poland, while the Balkan countries would be ruled by their local monarchs. The function of the government was to be exercised by an Imperial Council of 42 members, hailing from the member states. The Tsar appointed 25 members from Russia, four from the Czech lands and five from Poland. The Balkan monarchs appointed the members of the Imperial Council from the Balkan states in the following order: four from Serbia, three from Bulgaria, and one from Montenegro.

Kramář's proposal differentiated between the imperial and provincial legislatures. The imperial parliament should have authority over fundamental matters such as trade contracts and tariffs, the army, post office, railways and imperial budget. The legislature was to be the Reichstag, and approve the imperial laws. However, it was not given any legislative initiative and could only submit draft laws to the Imperial Council. The parliament comprised 300 deputies, the highest number of which Kramář attributed to Russia (175). The other states had a disproportionately smaller number of representatives in this legislature: Poland (40), the Czech Lands (35), Serbia (30), Bulgaria (20) and Montenegro (5). As such, Russia occupied a privileged position in both bodies of the association, and could easily assert its interests at any time. Thus, Kramář's constitutional proposal assigned the Russian nation with strong position at the expense of the other Slavic nations.

Russian was to become the official language in all parts of the Slavic Empire, be taught compulsorily in schools, and be the language of command in the army. The individual states could be compelled to execute and conduct the decisions of the imperial authorities, with the execution of the compulsion being the right and duty of the Tsar.

The Slavic Empire was to be a single trade and customs territory, i.e. the transport of goods from one federal state to another would not be subject to customs duty.

| 30 Lustigová, 2007, pp. 116–117. |

Kramář's project was evidently unfeasible for many reasons. First was the de facto semi-absolutist form of government, given that most of the crucial powers were concentrated in the hands of the Tsar. Considering the Balkan peoples' recently hard-won independence after centuries of Ottoman occupation, it was not easy to imagine them giving up their freedom. In his proposal, Kramář also did not specify the manner in which he intended to bring about the change that would lead to the creation of the Slavic Empire.³¹ He also did not consider the historically tense Polish–Russian relations. As such, the Slavic Empire project was based on Kramář's completely unrealistic ideas, although he never admitted its impossibility.³²

Over time, Kramář became one of the most symbolic leaders of the Czech nation. He abandoned many of his previous views and loyalty to Austria–Hungary at the beginning of the First World War and joined the anti-Austrian resistance. From the beginning of the war, Kramář was followed by the Austrian police because, as a supporter of Russia, he was considered an enemy of the Austrian state. Kramář was arrested in May 1915 and, together with another prominent Czech politician Alois Rašín (1867–1923), was charged with treason. The investigative detention lasted half a year. A formal accusation was drawn up, based on analyses of the Czech press, Kramář's speeches and appearances, and police reports, as well as Austrian intelligence and counter-intelligence information.³³ The trial began on 6 December 1915, before Vienna's military Divisional Court, and the proceedings were held in Vienna in secret. As such, the news of the trial did not reach the press. The verdict was handed down on 3 June 1916, and Kramář and Rašín were sentenced to death. In the judgment, Kramář was described as

the leader of the Pan-Slavist propaganda in Bohemia and of the Czech Russophile movement, who consciously sought to fragment the monarchy before and after the outbreak of war and worked against his state. As a result, organised revolutionary propaganda was to begin both in hostile foreign countries and in neutral states, to fragment the monarchy, of tearing Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and Hungarian Slovakia and other territories inhabited by Slavs away from the monarchy.³⁴

Kramář's appeal against the verdict was rejected, but the death sentence was not carried out, as Emperor Franz Joseph I did not sign it. The new Emperor Charles I commuted Kramář's death sentence to 20 years in prison. In July 1917, Kramář was released on grounds of amnesty.³⁵

31 Doubek, 2019, p. 662.

32 On Kramář's proposal for the constitution of the Slavic Empire, see more at Schelle et al., 2013, pp. 55–60.

33 Kosatík, 2010, p. 111.

34 Slušný, 2016, pp. 204–205.

35 The court records of the trial of Karel Kramář were published in print after the end of the First World War see Tobolka, 1918–1920.

In early 1918, Kramář laid out another unrealistic goal: he sought to build a national party that would overthrow the Austrian monarchy and rule the country under his leadership. This became the Czech State Democracy. In the summer of 1918, Kramář was elected head of the National Committee, the central body of Czech politics. Shortly before the establishment of Czechoslovakia, Kramář and a delegation of other Czech politicians went to Geneva to meet with Edvard Beneš (1884–1948) as the representative of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile, in order to discuss the future state system and the establishment of an independent Czechoslovak state.

On 14 November 1918, the first Czechoslovak parliament elected Kramář as the chairperson of the government of national unity. In early January the following year, Kramář survived an assassination attempt by a young communist. When the Paris Peace Conference negotiations began at the Chateau of Versailles in January 1919, Kramář, as Prime Minister, left Czechoslovakia, which was in virtual chaos in the first months after its creation, to influence the outcome of the Peace Conference as head of the Czechoslovak delegation. Here, he promoted the view that the victorious powers should intervene against the Bolshevik government in Russia. In Paris, however, Kramář was overshadowed by Edvard Beneš, who had considerable previous foreign policy experience. Considering that the representatives of the victorious powers primarily took decisions at the Paris Peace Conference, Kramář's ideas for a new order in Europe could not be implemented.³⁶

In the summer of 1919, when Kramář's party lost the local elections, it had consequences at the government level; Kramář's government fell on 8 July 1919. Kramář remained a member of the Czechoslovak parliament during the First Czechoslovak Republic until his death. At this time, he held conservative and nationalist views and supported the idea of a nation, not a nation-state. He actively criticised the Soviet Bolshevik state and supported Russian emigrants who fled to Czechoslovakia to escape the Bolshevik regime. Kramář was critical of Edvard Beneš's foreign policy as well as the policies of President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. For example, Kramář explicitly rejected the establishment of diplomatic relations between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union in the first half of the 1930s.

During his lifetime Karel Kramář authored several books, among which are *‘České státní právo’* [Czech State Law] (1896), *‘Česká politika. Dějiny české politiky nové doby’* [Czech Politics. A History of Czech Politics in the New Era] (1909) a *‘Ruská krise’* [The Russian Crisis] (1921).

During the First Republic, Kramář lived in a magnificent villa in Prague, which he had built prior to the First World War. This villa now serves as the residence of Czech Prime Ministers. Karel Kramář died on 26 May 1937 in Prague and is buried in the crypt of the Orthodox Church in Prague's Olšany Cemetery.

| 36 Dejmek, 2011, p. 58. |

3. Edvard Beneš (1884–1948)³⁷



Eduard Beneš was born on 28 May 1884 in Kožlany near Pilsen. From 1904, he studied at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Prague. From 1905 he continued his studies at the Sorbonne in Paris, at the *École libre des sciences politiques* and at the Faculty of Law in Dijon, where he graduated as a Doctor of Law in 1908. Two years prior to this, he changed his name to Edvard. Following his graduation, he spent a year studying in Berlin. In 1909, he became a Doctor of Philosophy, after graduating the University of Prague. Following his return home, Beneš married Hana Vlčková (1885–1974) in Prague on 10 December 1909; their marriage was childless.³⁸

In 1911 he lived in in Paris and London, and in 1912 published his habilitation thesis *‘Stranictví’* [Partyism], in which he dealt with the action and functioning of political parties in modern society according to German and French sociological findings. Ideologically, during this period, Beneš subscribed to social democracy and was critical of Marxism’s class struggle and underestimation of individualism.³⁹ He regarded class hatred as senseless and absurd.⁴⁰

In 1912, he was appointed associate professor of sociology at the University of Prague and a year later at the Technical University as well. He was active as a journalist (focusing on the political conditions of Western Europe), translator (Zola’s *‘L’Assommoir’*, Volney’s *‘Les ruines ou Méditation sur les révolutions des Empires’*) and scholar (*‘Le problème autrichien et la question tchèque’* [The Austrian Problem and the Czech Question], 1908; *‘Stručný nástin vývoje moderního socialismu’* [A Brief Outline of the Development of Modern Socialism], 1910).⁴¹

While still at the ‘gymnasium’ [grammar school], Beneš met Charlotte Masaryk (1850–1923) through a newspaper friend. She took a liking to Beneš and mentioned him to her husband, who later provided Beneš with translations for the periodical

37 Eduard Beneš, Czech politician and statesman, Unknown author. Transfer; United States. Office of War Information. Overseas Picture Division. Washington Division; 1944, public domain, source of the picture: https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edvard_Bene%C5%A1#/media/F%C3%A1jl:Edvard_Bene%C5%A1.jpg.

38 An extensive library of resources on Edvard Beneš is currently available, e. g. Werstadt, 1924; Papoušek, 1934; Eisenmann, 1934; Jakovenko, 1935; Hartl, 1937; Hitchcock, 1946; Mackenzie, 1947; Táborický, 1981; Havlíček, 1991; Klimek, 1992; Hanzal, 1994; Čapek, 2000; Dejmek, 2006; Dejmek, 2008; Zeman, 2009; Dvořák, 2021.

39 Beneš, 1924a, pp. 43–47.

40 Hník, 1946, p. 156.

41 Jakovenko, 1936, pp. 2, 72, 75.

'*Naše doba*' [Our Times] and noticed Beneš in his lectures on philosophy and sociology. Beneš was a student of Masaryk and eventually engaged with him politically as well. He was active in the Realist Party. Their joint activity in Czechoslovak Action indicates the closeness, as well as the fact that Masaryk appointed Beneš as executor of his will in 1917.⁴²

From the beginning of the First World War, Beneš was Masaryk's confidant. After the latter's departure abroad, Beneš became his deputy in the leadership of the revolutionary group (so-called '*Maffie*'). During this time, Beneš was in constant contact with Masaryk and provided funds for underground activities, while also acting as Masaryk's deputy in the editorial office of '*Naše doba*'. During this period, he also focused on the sociological study of war (*War and Culture*, 1915), and made several trips abroad. On 1 September 1915, he continued to live abroad following his last journey, that is, after a short stay in Switzerland, he settled in Paris. The beginnings of his foreign action were complicated; Beneš was arrested three times in England and twice in France during this time for suspicion of espionage.

From 1916 he was the chief secretary of the Foreign Committee, later the National Council, and conducted most diplomatic negotiations in Paris, London, and Rome. The result of these negotiations was the involvement of Czech patriot organisations from China to Argentina and the recognition of the National Council as the future Czechoslovak government. It was Beneš who, after a fortnight of negotiations in the summer of 1918, managed to persuade the vigilant British government to explicitly recognise the National Council as the Czechoslovak government, and through the Japanese ambassador in London, obtain a similar act from Tokyo. At the end of the First World War, Beneš remained in Paris, preparing for the Declaration of Independence, sending instructions to Prague, and declaring that final recognition of the government would only occur at home. After the conclusion of the agreement with France, he went to Italy as Foreign Minister to discuss recognition by Italy as well. However, he broke off his journey at Verona and went to the Alps to join the legionaries instead. However, he was recalled to Paris on 13 October 1918 by a telegram stating that the French Prime Minister had decided to make a deal with Austria-Hungary at the expense of the independent nations. On 26 October 1918, Beneš discussed with Marshal Foch the use of Czechoslovak troops for the Allied offensive. Two days later, he met in Geneva with representatives of the National Committee, with whom he discussed the constitution, foreign policy, economy, and administration of the future state.⁴³

During the First War, Beneš authored several political essays (for the review '*La Nation Tcheque*' [Czech Nation], which he had edited for two years) and a book '*Détruisez l'Autriche Hongrie!*' [Destroy Austria-Hungary!] (1916; Italian 1917, with a preface by Italian politician Andrea Torre) containing the main arguments of the Czechoslovak liberation programme. His activities during the First World War

42 Olivová, 1994, p. 53.

43 Czechoslovak Republic, 1928, pp. 50–101.

were described in his book '*Světová válka a naše revoluce*' [The World War and Our Revolution] (1927).

From October 1918, he was appointed as Minister of Foreign Affairs in both the Provisional Government, and the first government of Karel Kramář. However, he did not return to Prague until September 1919. In the meantime, he represented Czechoslovakia at the Paris Peace Conference. Beneš's image as a great political leader and diplomat and respect as one of the most outstanding personalities of his time began to develop in connection with this conference. For example, the politician Václav Klobučák (1868–1942) introduced Beneš as 'a great and directly world-historical personality'.⁴⁴ We can read in this a symbolic attempt by a small and undeveloped state to place itself, through its representative, alongside the tremendous developed countries of Europe and the world. If Beneš is accepted, so is Czechoslovakia.

Beneš asserted the establishment of a favourable southern border with Hungary and managed to resolve the problematic situation in connection with Těšín, where a military clash with Poland had provoked criticism from the Agreed Powers. Beneš based the peace negotiations on the concept of a balance of power, which would allow for the development of European friendship. Beneš's contribution thereby made it possible to recognise Czechoslovakia within its historical borders, defend southern Slovakia, and make Ruthenia a part of the new republic. These achievements, were significant tasks and challenges for the new state; however Beneš's success was a Pyrrhic victory, considering the developments of the late 1930s.

The individual participants admitted that Beneš's positions at the peace conference were not based on the national demands of the new state but on international reasons. Beneš understood the balance of power as a scientifically justified necessity, which would allow for the development of European friendship. Beneš's diplomatic skills were demonstrated in the context of the resolution of the Těšín crisis, when Czechoslovakia's actions raised criticism from the Principal Allied Powers.

The interwar Czechoslovak Republic was a unitary state of a fictional Czechoslovak nation, but Beneš considered himself as Czechoslovak and never sought the national subjugation or exploitation of Slovakia. Beneš was aware of the need for peaceful development throughout Europe in connection with the Czechoslovakia's peaceful development. He actively participated in the building of the League of Nations. He is particularly remembered for his role in the negotiations for Austrian financial rehabilitation in 1922.⁴⁵ It was Beneš who, within the League of Nations, sought in 1924 the adoption of the Geneva Protocol, which was intended to prevent wartime conflicts by an obligation to settle disputes through arbitration, disarmament, a commitment to mutual assistance and possible joint action against the aggressor. However, the Geneva Protocol, failed in Britain's position.⁴⁶ From

44 Urban, 1936, pp. 19–21.

45 Beneš and Krofta, 1934, pp. 242, 474.

46 Malypetr et al., 1938, pp. 303–304.

Beneš's perspective, the Little Entente with Romania and Yugoslavia was intended to prevent military conflicts. It was also Beneš who first formulated the principles of collective European security.⁴⁷

Beneš served as the Foreign Minister in other governments, and from 26 September 1921 to 7 October 1922, was even appointed as the Czechoslovak Prime Minister. This built the foundations and traditions of Czechoslovak foreign policy and ensured its stability. Beneš's foreign policy was based on a close interdependence with France. Its main principles were set out in the parliamentary speeches, forming the basis of the collection *'Problémy nové Evropy a zahraniční politika československá'* [Problems of New Europe and Czechoslovak Foreign Policy] (1924). In this collection's preface, Beneš emphasised the European character of his speeches, always trying to place Czechoslovak foreign policy in its European framework and abandon Czech provincialism. A certain irony because of the subsequent developments is Beneš's mention of his meeting with Italian Prime Minister Mussolini, who *'was engaged in our affairs before the war and helped our national cause during the war, so it was easy to agree on the general lines of our mutual policy'*, i.e. a policy of *'cooperation and loyal collaboration for peace and tranquillity'*.⁴⁸ The rift with Italy dates back to the aggression against Abyssinia, which Beneš resolutely condemned.

The representation of the Czechoslovak state was therefore oriented towards establishing good relations with Germany and supporting democracy there. However, an essential line of conflict was the question of the Sudeten Germans, who, at the end of 1918, attempted to create areas that would remain part of (German) Austria and be merged with Germany. In the 1920s, Czechoslovakia's positive development, compared to that of Germany meant a substantial improvement in the Czechoslovak-Sudeten-German relationship, illustrated by the entry of Sudeten Germans into the Czechoslovak government; later, the Great Depression impeded these relations.

In the 1920s, Beneš outlined the concept of a new organisation of wider Central Europe, which would lead to close political cooperation from confederation to federation. The Regional Central European community was then to be the basis for pan-European integration. The projection of Beneš's plans appeared to be a narrower model of the Little Entente. In 1929, Beneš once again advocated European rapprochement and cooperation, which was inevitable if Europe wished to avoid crises and conflicts. A system of civil liberties and democratic mechanisms, which had its origins in the French Revolution, was to be the essential condition for European integration, ensuring individual participants' political and national security. The 1930s was to be a phase of genuine reflection on European integration.⁴⁹

47 Goněc, 2000, pp. 164–165.

48 Beneš, 1924b, p. 264.

49 Goněc, 2000, pp. 164–165.

Beneš was elected President of the Czechoslovak Republic on 18 December 1935. He thus became head of state at a time of growing tensions in Europe, but believed in Czechoslovakia's alliance with France, the Soviet Union, and the Little Entente. A turning point came in 1938 with the unfolding of the Sudeten-German crisis. Hitler's instruction to make demands unacceptable to the Czechoslovak government was overcome by Czechoslovakia's decision to accept all German requests (the Fourth Plan). The Sudeten Germans, orchestrated from Berlin, used the clash in Ostrava to end the negotiations. Franco-British pressure led to the adoption of a plan to resolve the situation. This adoption was preceded by a shameless night visit by the French and British ambassadors, the impropriety of which was later explained by the so-called ordered ultimatum, i.e., that the Czechoslovak representatives called for the night visit, in order to make the adoption of the plan defensible to the public. Beneš referred to the ordered ultimatum as a perfidious lie. Recent research indicates that Prime Minister Milan Hodža intimated the necessity of such pressure on several occasions in 1938. Beneš sought to resolve the Sudeten-German crisis at the cost of territorial concessions. The so-called 'Fifth Plan' was represented in Paris and London by Jaromír Nečas (1888–1945). However, the acceptance of the Anglo-French plan did not satisfy the Nazis' demands. France and Britain indicated the advisability of mobilisation, with the British representative attempting to resolve the situation through Italian mediation— a pre-arranged course of action by the German Nazis and the Italian Fascists. In this context, Mussolini successfully pushed most German demands at the Munich Conference, while Czechoslovak representatives were not even invited to the negotiations. The Munich Agreement itself had many significant legal shortcomings, and its participants declared it null and void; as such, it could never be legally binding on Czechoslovakia. France presented its position at the conference itself. The Soviet Union held back its support until Czechoslovakia had already submitted to the Munich dictate under the threat of war, and the small-agreement allies assessed that if France had taken such a stance towards Czechoslovakia, they too were absolved of their obligations. Poland and Hungary also came forward with their demands against Czechoslovakia.⁵⁰

For Beneš, however, Munich was a shock, representing a lifelong disaster and a betrayal of his closest allies. On 5 October 1938, he abdicated as President under German pressure. In March 1939, the German Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was established. Beneš then became the most important person in the Czechoslovak exile movement. However, his role was quite tangled. First was the disapproval of Britain and France and conflict with the Slovak representatives. In the autumn of 1939, Beneš played a crucial role in the formation of the Czechoslovak National Committee, where disputes were also manifested. The Czechoslovak ambassador to France (of Slovak origin), Štefan Osuský, based the theory of continuity derived from the existence of Czechoslovak diplomatic representations.

50 Kolumber, 2022, pp. 361–369.

However, Beneš advocated a theory in which continuity was primarily derived from the president, i.e. Beneš (where the effects of his abdication in October 1938 were not recognised). Further developments were then aided by the military defeat of France, where, with the existence of Czechoslovak troops, Britain was willing to accept a Czechoslovak provisional establishment. This acceptance, however, was extremely reserved and conditional, often associated with questioning Beneš's constitutional position itself, and the position of the entire exile representation. The turnaround is associated with the German attack on the Soviet Union. Then, in July 1941, the Soviets unconditionally accepted Beneš's position and the provisional state system, and thus, Beneš's continuity theory. On the same day, the British authorities did likewise (albeit still with reservations in the context of the validity of the Munich Agreement).⁵¹

In 1941, Beneš concluded that the existence of supranational mechanisms would guarantee peace in Europe. The basis of the new Europe was to be larger political units. The Western European bloc should consist of Britain, France, Benelux and a transformed Germany, with a separate Prussia, and a strengthened role for the democratic (federal) German countries. The core of the Central European bloc was the Czechoslovak–Polish Federation (alliance). The Balkan bloc consisted of Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Albania. Austria, Romania, and (also transformed following the example of Germany) Hungary were not resolved. Scandinavian and Iberian cooperation was to be appropriate, and Russia was not to be excluded. The new European organisation's goal was to be a pan-European *community*. No local confederation was to be conceivable without a European framework. Beneš envisaged a gradual integration of the sub-blocs, and later, a pan-European organisation. However, success could also lead to setbacks, as with the League of Nations. Beneš assumed the necessity of guaranteeing citizen's human rights by a supranational power, with the duty of the pan-European authorities to stop any anti-democratic regime before it became a danger. Beneš then saw national centralisation as a precursor to dictatorship. His ideas were therefore pragmatic and sober.⁵²

The intensive mentioned cooperation with Poland was to be a means of a more lasting order in Central Europe.⁵³ The intended Czechoslovak-Polish federation had long been seriously discussed with the Polish exile representation. Beneš negotiations with Edward Bernard Raczyński (1891–1993) also advocated the involvement of Austria, Hungary and Romania, but excluded the coerced participation of Lithuania and Ukraine.⁵⁴ Ultimately, the Soviets terminated this project because they envisioned the existence of Slavic states on their border only as satellites.⁵⁵

51 The position of Beneš for Czechoslovak action during the Second World War was crucial, but at the same time, legally deeply complicated, see in detail Schelle et al., 2022, pp. 11–151.

52 Goněc, 2001, pp. 211–213.

53 Beneš, 1946a, p. 230.

54 Táborský, 1993, p. 104.

55 Brod, 1992, p. 123.

Beneš was the key representative of the exile and the bearer of Czechoslovak continuity. The 1920 constitution was not designed for such a situation. Therefore in exile, Beneš stipulated, in the form of a special decree, that during the absence of a parliament, he would issue decrees with the participation of the government and the so-called State Council (quasi-parliament). The exile representation realised its constitutional deficit. As the end of the war approached, they conceived the thesis of a ratification of these decrees, which was carried out in the Czechoslovak Provisional National Assembly in January 1946. In the Czech Republic, the decrees issued between the summer of 1940 and October 1945, when the parliament was summoned, are associated with the person of Beneš. These decrees dealt with a wide range of issues, with large number of them being issued even after May 1945. These include decrees of retribution, decrees coping with economic problems of the state, and decrees against Germans and Hungarians who were considered traitors (constitutional rights were not returned to Germans and Hungarians until 1968 in Czechoslovakia).⁵⁶

Beneš had already outlined most of his ideas on Europe's development with regard to the war and the new order after it in the late 1930s and early 1940s in his book *'Democracy Today and Tomorrow'* (1940 in English), which was based on a series of lectures he gave at the University of Chicago in 1939. This book introduced the concept of post-war development and made a strong impression on the ideological image of the reborn state. Beneš outlined the manner in which society should function politically, economically, socially, nationally, and rightly. Moreover, the old concept of Czechoslovakia as a bridge between the East and the West was presented in a revived form. Later, Beneš's vision of the new Czechoslovakia became more precise. He lost internal confidence in the Western powers and their willingness and ability to assist Czechoslovakia in future problem-solving. This was the background of Beneš's definitive geopolitical leaning towards the Soviet Union, supported by the notion of the need for the ultimate political liberation of Slavic nations. In his *'Nová slovanská politika'* [New Slavic Politics] (1946), he coped with 'new Slavism' as an expression of two great ideas, namely that of peoplehood (all-round political and social democracy) and the concept of humanity.⁵⁷ The main aim was the need to protect Czechoslovakia from Germany. Beneš had not positively assessed Germany's development and was deeply (but mistakenly) convinced about democratisation in the Soviet Union.⁵⁸

56 On the other hand, the Czech Constitutional Court (e. g. decisions of the Constitutional Court of 26 March 1996, Case No I. ÚS 29/94, or of 8 March 1995, Case No. Pl. ÚS 14/94) as well as European Court of Human Rights (Prince Hans-Adam II of Liechtenstein v. Germany, Application no. 42527/98) have not expressed a negative opinion on those decrees in recent years.

57 Beneš, 1946b, p. 59.

58 Dvořák, 2021, p. 102.

Beneš's presidential term was due to end in 1942; the Constitution of 1920 provided some guidance in this context. Beneš was to remain in his office until a new president was elected, which presupposed the involvement of parliament. Beneš remained president until June 1946, when the Constituent National Assembly re-elected him.⁵⁹

Since the spring of 1945, the Communists had been the dominant force in Czechoslovakia. They liquidated all components of pre-monarchy Czechoslovakia (especially the local government) and the exile representation, of which only Beneš remained. Klement Gottwald (1896–1953) then confessed that this had enabled the communists to seize power.⁶⁰ The communists were also the authors of the political programme of post-war development of the first post-war government (the Kosice Government Programme). Sophisticated communist manipulation led to this programme receiving mass support and was espoused by Beneš, who underestimated the communists. The political life of post-war Czechoslovakia was conceived within the framework of the National Front, which until 1948 was viewed as a platform of permitted political parties. Only these political parties stood for election; the 1946 election was won by the Communist Party. Representatives of the other National Front parties also participated in the activities of the constitutional institutions, but over time, the Communists began to usurp power. Non-Communist ministers, therefore, left the government, in order to bring about fresh elections. However, Gottwald merely reconstructed the government in which most of the ministers remained. Beneš accepted the government's reconstruction after a meeting with Gottwald, during which he was informed of Soviet troops on the border. With this coup of 25 February 1948, the Communists seized power. Under their direction, work was completed on a new constitution, which was adopted on 9 May 1948; Beneš refused to sign this constitution, and abdicated instead.

The Communists justified his abdication on the grounds of ill health. The totalitarian state authorities feared Beneš's emigration, but his health deteriorated in August, and he died on 3 September 1948 in his villa in Sezimovo Ústí. In the evening, the Communists adopted a directive for the press and propaganda to positively highlight all that Beneš had done for the state.⁶¹ The reason for this was simple: Beneš had remained silent since his abdication and had not spoken out against the regime.

59 Schelle at al., 2022, pp. 48–54, 65–97, 137–138.

60 Bouček, Vartíková and Klimeš, 1975, p. 278.

61 Kaplan, 1994, pp. 71–73.

4. Jaromír Nečas (1888–1945)⁶²

Jaromír Nečas was born on 17 November 1888 in Nové Město na Moravě into the family of František Nečas, who was a clerk. Nečas had five siblings. He completed elementary school in his hometown and continued his studies at the Zemská 'Realschule' (a general secondary school focused more on natural sciences, technical subjects and living languages). Subsequently, he passed the school leaving exam at this school in 1905. After graduation, he moved to Brno, where he began to study civil engineering at the Imperial Czech Technical University of Franz Joseph. He simultaneously attended lectures at the 'École des Ponts et Chaussées' in Paris, which was a French civil engineering school.



In the spring of 1912, Nečas passed the state examination and received his academic engineering degree. The following year he began work as an assistant in the Department of general mechanics, conducting exercises. In 1913, he left Brno and became an employee of the State Construction Service in Bukovina and Ruthenia.

After the outbreak of World War I, Nečas joined the army. As an official of the State Construction Service, he constructed bridges and roads in the Ukrainian parts of Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Galicia, as well as military fortifications near the front lines.

During his time in these countries, Nečas became aware of the bleak social conditions of the local population, which awakened his social sensitivity and later led him to join the Social Democratic Party. The people of Ruthenia also grew remarkably close to his heart.⁶³ He became an active journalist during the First World War, his articles drew attention to the poor conditions prevailing in Ruthenia.

In 1919, when Ruthenia was integrated into the newly established Czechoslovak state, Nečas became a building commissioner there. As an expert on local conditions, he also served as a correspondent for the Czechoslovak government. His role involved ascertaining the mood of the Rusyns, informing them about the political situation and providing informative articles for the Czech press. However, Nečas did not devote himself to civil engineering for a long time. At the beginning of 1920, he was approached by the governor of Ruthenia, Gregory Zhatkovich (1886–1967),

62 Jaromír Nečas, Czechoslovak politician, Unknown author – čs. zvukový týdeník, public domain, source of the picture: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jarom%C3%ADr_Ne%C4%8Das#/media/File:Jarom%C3%ADr_Ne%C4%8Das.jpg.

Mikulka, 2000a, p. 203.

63 Ibid. p. 203.

who appointed Nečas as his secretary in Uzhhorod, because of his expertise in local conditions.⁶⁴

During his stay in Ruthenia, Nečas closely followed the Ukrainian struggle for independence, which many Czechs, given the deeply rooted Russophilia in the Czech nation at the time, viewed with suspicion as a product of German work and Austrian diplomacy (given the friendliness of the Galician Ukrainians towards Vienna during the Monarchy). Nečas attempted to break down the barriers between the Czechs and Ukrainians with a series of short manuals, in which he addressed the Ukrainian question. In July 1918, in the booklet *‘Ukrajinská otázka’* [The Ukrainian Question], he had already attempted to prove to the Czech reader the uniqueness of the Ukrainian nation, which was still commonly referred to as ‘Malorussian’, by describing the Ukrainian language, literature and culture. Nečas became an advocate for the Ukrainian nation in its struggle for independence.⁶⁵

Nečas was extremely gifted with languages. In addition to his knowledge of German, English and Serbo-Croatian, he also learned Russian and Ukrainian during his stays abroad and had a basic understanding of Italian and Romanian. This skill, among other things, was responsible for him being sent to Moscow and Kharkiv in May 1920. Here, he accompanied Volodymyr Vynnychenko (1880–1951), a leftist politician and chairperson of the five-member directorate of the defunct Ukrainian People’s Republic, which was in existence from March 1917 (or January 1918) until February 1919. Vynnychenko had been in exile and was to be assisted by the leadership of the Czechoslovak state in his return to his homeland. The Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry issued Vynnychenko a diplomatic passport. In Kharkiv, Vynnychenko was briefly appointed deputy chairperson of the Council of People’s Commissars and the Department of Foreign Affairs in August 1920. However, as the conditions in Soviet Russia disappointed him, he decided to emigrate again. During his visit to Russia, Nečas was shocked by the local conditions and summarised his observations on the economic situation and the position of the workers in Soviet Russia in his 1920 publication *‘Skutečná pravda o sovětském Rusku’* [Real Truth about Soviet Russia]. The mission to Moscow demonstrated President Masaryk and Foreign Minister Beneš’s confidence in Nečas. While in Soviet Russia, Nečas was able to gauge the nature of the Bolshevik power and its attitude towards resolving national issues.⁶⁶

In the spring of 1921, Zhatkovich left his post as governor of Ruthenia early and returned to the United States because of the failure of the Czechoslovak state to meet Rusyns’ demands for autonomy. Nečas quit as his secretary, and sought a new job in which he could use his previous experiences. After returning from his mission in Soviet Russia, it was even believed that Nečas would become Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; however, this appointment did not materialise.

64 Švec, 2014a, p. 11.

65 Švec, 2014b, pp. 18–20.

66 Ibid. p. 20.

Nečas had already been involved in the Jewish question during his studies in Brno, when he published several articles in the press devoted to this issue. In 1921, President Masaryk chose Nečas as his collaborator in the Office of the President of the Republic, where Nečas oversaw the Department of Ruthenia and Jewish Affairs. As part of his work in the President's Office, Nečas produced reports and analyses, travelled to Ruthenia and continued to be highly active in publishing.⁶⁷

Due to his social sentiments and left-wing orientation, Nečas participated in the activities of the Social Democratic Party. In Ruthenia, he ran for the party in the 1924 by-elections and the 1925 elections, and was elected to the Chamber of Deputies of the National Assembly. In his first speech in the Chamber of Deputies, Nečas outlined his view of Czechoslovak politics in Ruthenia, and analysed the problems that prevailed in this easternmost part of the Czechoslovak Republic. Nečas defended his seat in the 1929 elections, this time for the Mladá Boleslav constituency. Following his election, Nečas did not return to the Office of the President of the Republic but remained in contact with Masaryk.

In 1922, Nečas married Dr Marie Poubová (1888–1942), who was a professor of geography and history at secondary school, and later worked in the field of social welfare for young people. They had a daughter name Věra (1924–1943).

In the 1920s, Nečas became a respected functionary of the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party and, from 1936, was appointed as its vice-chairman.⁶⁸ The focus of his publications shifted from the issues of Ruthenia to economic and social problems. Nečas saw the gradual introduction of a planned economy as one of the tools for economic recovery. During the Great Depression, he advocated for the implementation of state investment construction projects in order to reduce unemployment and build public utility buildings and infrastructure. Nečas thus sought to overcome the effects of the economic crisis and alleviate unemployment by providing new jobs through large-scale public investment.

In 1926, Nečas published the book *‘Spojené státy evropské’* [The United States of Europe]. From his reflections, it was evident that he was undoubtedly influenced by the President of the Republic, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. Masaryk was aware that small and medium-sized European states could only function in a system that respected the right of nations to self-determination, with an organisational structure and instruments capable of effectively defending that right. Masaryk thus envisioned the future of the European order in a federation of democratic states. He supported Czechoslovakia's active participation in the League of Nations and proposals for its inclusion in regional international organisations. Masaryk developed his ideas in his book published in Czech in 1920 under the title *Nová Evropa, stanovisko slovanské* [The New Europe, the Slavic Opinion], in which he called for a peace congress and the formation of a Union of Nations. All the nations of Europe were to be represented in this international organisation, which would be based

67 Švec, 2014a, p. 18.

68 Mikulka, 2000b, p. 2.

on the principles of international reciprocity. Nečas built on Masaryk's ideas and developed them further. This was during the period in which the League of Nations that had existed since 1920, was suffering from its first major crisis. Nečas's book was 230 pages long and promoted close cooperation between European states. It was not a detailed proposal for a constitution or statute for an international organisation that would regulate its structure, but rather, an analysis of the conditions from which a new European order was to emerge. The new European community would be based on the League of Nations, which, according to Nečas, was to be open to the Soviet Union and Germany as well. These two states were, at the time of the publication of his book (1926), excluded from the international community.

Nečas devoted a part of his book to the differences between Europe and the United States, which was to serve as a model for a new European order. He also critically analysed Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi's (1894–1972) Pan-Europe project, criticising the same for attempting to exclude Great Britain and the Soviet Union from Europe. He also presented a social-democratic attitude towards the United States of Europe and the League of Nations.⁶⁹

Nečas pointed out that critics in Czechoslovakia attacked the fact that Czechoslovakia was engaging world politics. However, Nečas was a supporter of the same. In his view, Czechoslovakia could benefit from such a world policy because it would be able to bring the interests and needs of the republic in line with world interests. Such a policy should also have paved the way for a sound trade policy, gaining the republic enormous sales opportunities, which was a matter of prime importance for interwar Czechoslovakia.

Nečas supported the League of Nations, distinguishing himself from many interwar Czechoslovak politicians who often ignored the ideas on which this international organisation was based. According to Nečas, it was the League of Nations that, for all its shortcomings, worked on a global scale to ensure political, national, and economic peace.

According to Nečas, a significant step towards realising the idea of a United States of Europe was to be taken as soon as Germany and the Soviet Union were admitted into the League of Nations. He also pointed out that it was necessary to avoid overemphasising continental interests, by some Europeans who could not spare the primacy that Europe had lost.

Nečas considered the League of Nations, which in 1926 consisted of 55 states from all continents of the world, as the world parliament. The world economy could not be efficiently regulated if the egoistic interests of the various continents were to be overly asserted and crossed within the framework of the League of Nations. However, a specific – not excessive – application of continental interests in the League of Nations and an appropriate reorganisation of the League of Nations could, according to Nečas, further the cause.

69 Schelle, Veselá and Vojáček, 2007, pp. 75–76.

Nečas regarded the United States of Europe as a stage towards the next higher goal, namely the unified organisation of the world. However, according to him, it is also necessary to remember that creating a new Europe requires not only an economic renewal and change in the political and state system, but also the building of a cultural foundation and re-education of entire nations. From 1935–1938, Nečas served as the Minister of Social Affairs in the Czechoslovak government. He also functioned as Czechoslovakia's representative to the International Labour Office in Geneva. This organisation was established under the Versailles Peace Treaty to develop labour legislation, introduce workers' rights, and increase their social protection. During this time, Nečas published professional articles on social issues and the fight against unemployment. He called for the introduction of a modern social welfare system. He also undertook numerous foreign trips, and during his visit to the USA in 1937, he met US President Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882–1945).⁷⁰

Nečas had extensive contacts a social democratic politicians in Western Europe, whom he tried to enlist to support Czechoslovakia in the crisis year of 1938. At the beginning of 1938, the German Nazis used the more than 3 million Germans living in Czechoslovakia for their aggressive policy. The Czech Germans increasingly escalated their autonomist demands against the Czechoslovak state, which the government could not meet, as fulfilling the same would be tantamount to breaking-up the state. The so-called Sudeten crisis culminated in September 1938, when Czechoslovakia's allies, France and Great Britain, held several negotiations with Adolf Hitler to resolve the German question in Czechoslovakia. According to the Allied treaties concluded between France and Great Britain, these countries were to enter the war alongside Czechoslovakia in case of an attack by Germany—an outcome that both countries were intent on avoiding.

Since Nečas already had diplomatic experience, he was commissioned by President Edvard Beneš in September 1938 to carry out a secret diplomatic mission.⁷¹ Nečas was sent to France to meet with the chairman of the French Socialist Party, Leon Blum, and to present him with a document in which the Czechoslovak party expressed its willingness to cede certain German-populated Czechoslovak territories to Nazi Germany. Nečas was not allowed to disclose that the proposal had come from Beneš, who later concealed this mission as well as its real purpose.⁷²

Following the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Germans on 15 March 1939, a group of Czech fascists attempted to seize power and paralyse the activities of the legal government. Nečas infiltrated the Czech National Committee set up by the fascists and slowed its activities. During the period of the newly established Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, Nečas was offered the position of chairperson of the newly established Supreme Price Office, whose task was to supervise the level of prices of goods and services. Nečas accepted the post, believing that he would

70 Švec, 2014a, p. 31.

71 On the secret Paris mission of Jaromír Nečas and its background see in detail Cholínský, 2009.

72 Mikulka, 2000a, p. 204.

be able to keep costs at a level that would not jeopardise the interests of workers. Considering that the chairperson of the Supreme Price Office was effectively of the Protectorate ministerial level, Nečas he made several successful interventions with the German authorities from his position.

Nečas joined the resistance and was threatened with arrest. Therefore, he decided to leave the Protectorate and reached France via Belgrade at the end of January 1940. In July 1940, when the first Czechoslovak government-in-exile was established in Great Britain, Nečas was appointed Minister of State. After the reconstruction of the government-in-exile, he was then appointed Minister for Economic Reconstruction. Following this, he prepared plans for the economic reconstruction of the war-torn Czechoslovak economy by introducing a centrally controlled economy and expropriating large enterprises, mines, banks, and insurance companies.⁷³

During his stay in Great Britain, Nečas was afflicted by severe health problems and was involved in political disputes with some crucial politicians of the government-in-exile. In November 1942, he asked President Beneš for his release from office. Nečas lived in rural Wales, where he died on 30 January 1945.

The Gestapo arrested Nečas's wife and daughter after he escaped from the Protectorate, and sent them to concentration camps, where they later perished.

5. Václav Havel (1936–2011)⁷⁴



Václav Havel was born on 5 October 1936 in Prague into the well-known business family of Václav M. Havel (1897–1979) and his wife, Božena, née Vavrečková (1913–1970).⁷⁵

Božena's father was Hugo Vavrečka (1880–1952), who worked as a journalist, writer, diplomat and later a high-rank Bata Concern manager and a minister during the 1938 Sudeten crisis. It was Vavrečka who shaped and influenced Havel. Havel's grandfather was one of Masaryk's students. Vavrečka himself, in his role as Czechoslovak ambassador in Vienna

73 Ibid. pp. 207–208.

74 Václav Havel, Czech statesman, author, poet, playwright and dissident, the International Monetary Fund, public domain source of the picture: https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/V%C3%A1clav_Havel#/media/File:Vaclav_Havel_IMF.jpg.

75 The Václav Havel Library, where the texts of all of Havel's speeches are publicly available, currently (2023) records a total of more than 15.000 contributions dedicated to the former president. The following can be mentioned in particular: Kriseová, 1991; 2014; Ramadan, 1991; Simmons, 1991; Ronfard, 1994; Symynkywicz, 1995; Keane, 1999; Sire, 2001; Kaiser, 2009; Putna, 2011; Kaiser, 2014; Žantovský, 2014; Kaczorowski, 2014; Wohlmutth Markupová, 2017; Marcelić and Lipovac, 2018 and Barton, 2020.

after WWI, promoted the concept of a united Europe. While his proposal for a Danube Union did not gain support in government circles, but his Europeanism certainly shaped Václav and his younger brother Ivan (1938–2021).⁷⁶

In 1942, Václav Havel entered municipal school and, due to family stays at his family residence in Havlovy, attended school alternately in Prague, and in Žďárec during spring and autumn. Havel, his brother, and his mother remained at Havlovy until the autumn of 1947, where they were accompanied by their grandfather Hugo Vavrečka, who took care of his grandchildren and taught them German. In 1947, Václav Havel entered the 'Jiří of Poděbrady College' in Poděbrady. It was a specific educational institution modelled on English boys' boarding schools. In 1950, Václav and Ivan Havel had to leave the school in Poděbrady. The reason for this was most likely an unsuccessful attempt by their uncle Miloš Havel to cross the border illegally. Because of their bourgeois origins, the brothers could not continue their studies at secondary school. Václav Havel was offered an apprenticeship as a carpenter, which he later changed to that of a chemical laboratory technician. He graduated in 1954 at least at the evening General Education Secondary School in Prague, Štěpánská Street. Because his mother wished for her sons to receive a university education, Havel entered the Czech Technical University (transport economics), which did not interest him much. After two years, he dropped out and hoped to enrol in the Film and Television Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (FAMU). However, he was unsuccessful, because of his family background.⁷⁷

From 1957 to 1959, Havel was enlisted in the army. During these years, he focused on literature and the theatre company, which kept his attention even after his service. In 1952, Havel began publishing. In 1956, he made his first public appearance at an activist meeting of young authors in Dobříš,⁷⁸ where he criticised the then-unfavourable conditions of young authors. During his military service, Havel also participated in cultural activities, and at the end of his service, applied to the Academy of Performing Arts, albeit unsuccessfully. He was not admitted until 1962, and even then, to a distance learning programme. After returning from the army, he worked as a stage technician at the ABC Theatre in Prague at the intercession of Jan Werich (1905–1980). In 1959, Havel wrote his first play. From 1960, he worked as a stage technician and then a dramaturg and assistant director at the Na Zábřehách Theatre. He simultaneously worked at the Municipal Theatres of Prague as an assistant to Alfréd Radok (1914–1976), one of the most important Czech theatre directors.

Havel's play *Zahradní slavnost* [The Garden Party] (premiered on 3 December 1963) made him one of the most prominent figures of the Czechoslovak cultural

76 Wohlmuth Markupová, 2017, pp. 22–44.

77 Ibid. pp. 42–48.

78 Havel's key speeches were published, see in detail Havel, 1999a; Havel, 1999b; Havel, 1999c; Havel, 1999d; Havel, 1999e; Havel, 1999f; Havel, 1999g; Havel, 2007.

scene. On 9 July 1964, he married Olga Šplíchalová in Prague;⁷⁹ their marriage was childless. In October 1964, his play premiered in West Germany. In 1966, Havel completed a distance study of dramaturgy at the Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts.

In June 1967, he gave a critical speech at the Fourth Congress of the Union of Czechoslovak Writers, in which he also expressed his views on political issues, especially censorship. Following an order of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, he was removed from the list of candidates for the presidency of the Union. In the spring of 1968, he stayed in the US, where he met with exile representatives. Then, in the summer of 1968, he voluntarily left the theatre to work as a freelance writer. He reacted to the occupation of Czechoslovakia by preparing statements for Czechoslovak Radio.

In the autumn of 1968, the era of dissent was underway. Havel joined the students' strikes and was gradually excluded from official culture (he had been a banned author since 1971). He was interrogated and accused of the crime of subversion of the republic, because of his role in the Ten Points statement, which rejected the policy of the so-called normalisation. The criminal proceedings were postponed. Havel, however, became a dissident living in Prague at his cottage Hrádeček near Trutnov. His works were banned in Czechoslovakia but were published and performed abroad. Havel became an internationally respected author and Hrádeček became a centre of culture and the struggle for civil rights. Between 1974 and 1975, he worked as a labourer at the brewery in Trutnov; his play *'Audience'* (1975) starring Ferdinand Vaněk is a reflection of this period of his life.⁸⁰

In the autumn of 1975, Havel founded the samizdat edition *'Expedice'* [Expedition]. The next year, he became close to the underground music community. When a criminal trial was brought against the music group *'Plastic People of the Universe'*, he organised protests supporting the accused. During this period, the personal circle of the future *'Charta 77'* [Charter 77] was born.

The *'Charta 77'* was published on 6 January 1977 as a manifesto for the observance of human rights in Czechoslovakia, to which the totalitarian state power formally pledged. Havel co-authored the text and one of its first spokespersons. From January to May 1977, he was detained in custody, and, in October 1977, was suspended for damaging the republic's interests abroad. In April 1978, along with other signatories of Charter 77, he founded the Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Prosecuted (VONS). The committee's task was to monitor and publicise cases of persecution in violation of effective Czechoslovak law, in cooperation with its Polish counterpart-, Committee of Social Self-Defence (KOR).

79 Kriseová, 1991, p. 44.

80 In October 1989, the Saturday supplement of the official newspaper of the Czechoslovak Communists, *Rudé právo*, published a birthday greeting to Ferdinand Vaněk, which included a photograph of Václav Havel (see *Rudé právo*, 237(69–70), p. 13).

In October 1978, in his essay *Moc bezmocných* [The Power of the Powerless], Havel analysed the situation and possibilities of political dissent. From December 1978, he was under the surveillance of State Security and in May 1979, was arrested along with eleven other members of VONS. During Havel's detention, the communist authorities offered him the opportunity to study in the US (forced emigration). In October 1979, he was sentenced to 54 months in prison for subversion of the republic; once again, the totalitarian regime again offered him the option of emigrating.⁸¹ Artists from various other countries opposed Havel's detention; intercessions came from Western politicians as well. At the time, Havel received honorary doctorates from universities of Toronto and Toulouse-Le Mirail. In prison, he worked as a labourer in ironworks and laundry. In February 1983, his sentence was suspended due to severe pneumonia and pleurisy, and in the ensuing period, he was followed and harassed by the secret police.

During the 1980s, Havel became the most prominent figure of dissent. In the subsequent period, he developed a concept of 'non-political politics' that required the communist state to respect formally enshrined civil rights and freedoms. Throughout 1988, he actively met with foreign politicians and diplomats. In December 1988, the French President François Mitterrand visited Prague, and shared breakfast with representatives of Czechoslovak dissent, led by Havel, at the French Embassy on 9 December 1988. The breakfast with the dissidents was instrumental in the first-ever official authorisation of an opposition demonstration on Human Rights Day on 10 December 1988 at Škroup Square in Žižkov, where Havel spoke.

During the January 1989 protests on the anniversary of Jan Palach's self-immolation (the so-called Palach Week), Havel was interned once again. On 21 February 1989, he was sentenced to nine months in prison for publicly inciting disrespect of the ban on public gatherings, in connection with the commemoration of Jan Palach and for taking part in the 16 February 1989 memorial. On 16 January, he participated in an unauthorised assembly, and illegally remained in the place even after the intervening riot police units of the Czech Armed Forces called for the area to be cleared. In March 1989, the Court of Appeal reduced his sentence to eight months. However, the communist regime gave in to international and domestic pressure and released Havel on parole on 17 May 1989.⁸² In June 1989, he participated in the petition *Několik vět* [Several Sentences], which called for the democratisation of Czechoslovakia. He was re-arrested in October 1989, but was released soon after, owing to health reasons.

The events of November 1989 caused the disintegration of communist rule in Czechoslovakia. Havel became the leading figure of the '*Občanské fórum*' [Civic Forum], for which he was elected President of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic by an unchanged parliament on 29 December 1989. Among his first acts in office was tendering an apology to the Sudeten Germans for their post-war expulsion,

81 Wohlmut Markupová, 2017, pp. 115–116.

82 Ibid. pp. 176.

and a large-scale amnesty,⁸³ for which he was criticised. Many released prisoners soon returned to prison, crime increased massively, and non-amnestied prisoners organised mass protests and riots (Brno, Leopoldov).

In February 1990, Havel appeared before both houses of the United States Congress.⁸⁴ Havel's speech mentioned the American security architecture that had encouraged Czechoslovak existence, characterised by its passivity. Czechoslovakia's symbolic return to Europe (what means the Euro-Atlantic structure) was to be coordinated with the Poles and Hungarians, so that Eastern European involvement would synergistically affect Western Europe.

In April 1990, Havel initiated a meeting of representatives of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland in Bratislava, which became the nucleus of the Visegrád Troika (after the division of Czechoslovakia, the Visegrád Four). In July 1990, after the first free elections, he was elected as President of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic. In November 1990, at the OSCE conference in Paris, he discussed the ideal of a European confederation of French President Mitterrand. According to Havel, the confederation's institutional basis could serve as the Council of Europe. Havel then advocated for faster European integration and multipolarity. He also recalled the unprecedented unity of the world community in its attitude towards the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait.

In March 1991, as the first president of a state of the former socialist block, he delivered a speech at the NATO headquarters in Brussels. Havel mentioned the self-liquidation of the Warsaw Pact and the French initiative for a pan-European confederation.⁸⁵ Havel pointed out that the old and imposed political, economic and security ties had collapsed, and warned that slow integration could create a dangerous political, economic and security vacuum. The absence of near integration could jeopardise existence of these young democracies. The Visegrád Group was then supposed to facilitate the return to a democratic Europe significantly.⁸⁶ In July 1991, Havel announced the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact during its summit in Prague.

However, the national situation in Czechoslovakia was complicated, especially with regard to the Slovak desire for independence. Havel's visits to Bratislava in 1991 were in a hostile spirit. Part of the Slovak public glorified the wartime Slovak state and considered Havel's attempts at contact as a provocation. The July 1992 parliamentary elections eventually marked the rise of forces seeking to split Czechoslovakia. Therefore, in July 1992, after adopting the Declaration of the Slovak

83 Kaiser, 2014, pp. 17–18.

84 Ibid. pp. 21–23.

85 Ibid. p. 179.

86 Havel encapsulated support for Eastern European integration into the European Union through a metaphor likening the feeling of some Western Europeans that two Europes, the old EU and periphery (without the right to join the EU), can coexist side by side, to the idea that a heated and an unheated half can permanently coexist in the same room (Havel, 2007, p. 58).

National Council on the sovereignty of the Slovak Republic, Havel announced his resignation. On the last day of 1992, Czechoslovakia ceased to exist.

On 26 January 1993, Havel was elected the first President of the independent Czech Republic. Although he was an internationally recognised authority, his domestic influence had waned. He strove to adhere to Euro-Atlantic structures and build the rule of law in the office, supporting the establishment of the Senate, the Constitutional Court, and the Office of the Ombudsman. In March 1994, in the European Parliament, Havel laid out the reasons for the Czech Republic seeking membership to the European Union and argued for the Europe-wide interest in seeing the European Union expanded. Havel understood the European Union as a systematically created space that would allow the various distinctive parts of Europe to develop freely and in their way, in an environment of permanent security and win-win cooperation, based on the principles of democracy, respect for human rights, civil society, and an open market economy. Havel called for a new and clear reflection on European identity and European responsibility, lamenting that the spirit of the European Union appeared to be hidden behind mountains of all necessary measures, which leads to a distorted understanding of the role of the European Union.

Since April 1994, Havel held meetings with representatives of Central and Eastern European and Balkan countries. As President, he sought good neighbourliness and reconciliation with the Germans and co-founded the Forum 2000 in 1996. His wife Olga was also a significant authority, but she died on 27 January 1996, following a severe illness.

Havel considered Europe not only from geograph point of view but also as a collection of politically stable countries (most of them were EU members) and as a shared destiny, a complicated common history, shared values, a common culture of life, space of sure will, specific behaviour, and particular responsibility. Europe was therefore supposed to be a space of values.

In December 1996, Havel underwent surgery to remove a malignant lung tumour. On 4 January 1997, he married Dagmar Veškrnová (* 1953). On 20 January 1998, he was re-elected President of the Republic, and in March 1999 his efforts bore fruit with the inclusion of the Czech Republic into NATO. Havel pushed for the further eastward expansion of NATO, as confirmed by the Prague NATO Summit in November 2002.

In February 2003, Havel returned to his profession of playwright and writer. Havel considered the Czech Republic's accession to the European Union in May 2004 to be one of the most significant moments in Czech history, when the Czech Republic became part of a sizeable supranational entity that was not the result of wars, and not based on the violent subjugation of one another. European integration was supposed to curb sour ideologies masquerading as supreme national interests.

Václav Havel died on 18 December 2011 at his cottage in Hrádeček. His services to freedom and democracy were recognised by a special law passed by the Czech Parliament in 2012.

Conclusion

The contribution of Czech theoreticians to (Central) European integration has been presented through their biographies, speeches and publications and political efforts. František Palacký attempted to push his projects politically but encountered difficulties in the real politics of the second half of the nineteenth century. However, his contribution to Austro-Slavism was responsible for shaping Czech (Slavs) attitudes towards Austria. While Karel Kramář's concept of the Slavic Empire failed to reflect Russia's actual situation and condition, his work served as a significant contribution to promoting the Slavic Brotherhood. More complicated is the approach to Edvard Beneš, which reflects the turbulent twentieth century. Finding a period in his life that allows for a straightforward interpretation is difficult. Beneš, who was the architect and guardian of European democracy after WWI, ultimately became a victim of his own peace efforts: first, by unsuccessful bonds with France, whose attitudes led to the Munich Agreement; and then the Soviet Union, which deprived the Eastern European states of their independence for decades. Jaromír Nečas brought forth a sophisticated concept of a United States of Europe, and pointed out the shortcomings of Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi's pan-European plan. Finally, Václav Havel's work, speeches and policy placed emphasis on the philosophical dimension and revealed his ability to call things out as they are.

As such, the great Czech theorists of Central European integration have shown, through their work, the need for peaceful and economic cooperation to aid the overall development of all concerned.

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