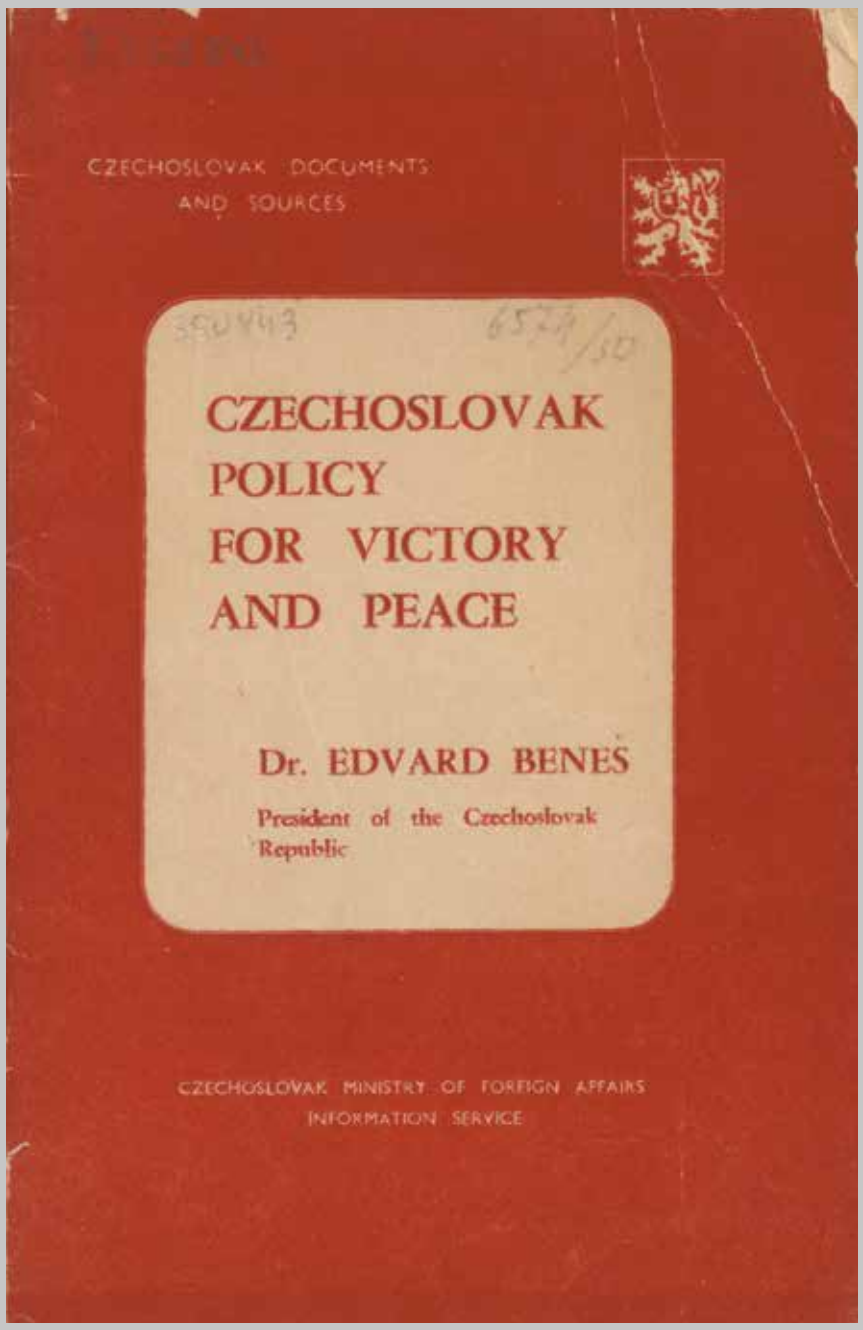

Edvard Beneš, *Czechoslovak policy for victory and peace : the 4th message of the President of the Republic to the State Council on February 3, 1944* – an official account of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile policy in 1943, encompassing i.a. a record of E. Beneš's visit to Moscow in 1943, and the general features of the Czechoslovak political attitude to the Soviet Union.
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CZECHOSLOVAK--SOVIET RELATIONS, 1938–1945 – AN OVERVIEW

Abstract
This article examines the twists and turns of the relationship between the Communist Great Power and the political representation of an occupied country that was gradually establishing its provisional state apparatus in exile. The analysis proves that by the time the Second World War ended, Czechoslovakia had become a part of the emerging Soviet sphere of influence. That happened through a combination of concessions resulting from the Soviet pressure, and the conviction, on the part of the leading Czechoslovak political representatives, that Czechoslovakia, with its Munich experience, had to seek a new powerful strategic ally capable of providing a security guarantee against any repetition of German aggression.

Keywords: Czechoslovakia, Soviet Union, international relations, World War II, Munich Agreement, spheres of influence, Polish-Czechoslovak Confederation

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Introduction

Czechoslovak-Soviet relations underwent a tumultuous development between 1938 and 1945 – from cordial to fairly cold to much better than standard. Yet, there was a constant clear will on the part of the Czechoslovak representatives to have the best possible relations with the Soviet Union. Their real nature thus depended mainly on the overall orientation of Soviet foreign policy.

The Shadows of Munich

Stalin's intentions in the period preceding the Munich Agreement of 29 September 1938 are not quite clear to this day, and interpretations of the Soviet intentions and policy range from "treason" to far-reaching plans to Sovietize Czechoslovakia (see Pfaff 1996, Lukes 1996, 198–201). However, it seems more likely that Stalin was prepared to keep his commitment exactly in accordance with the Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty of 1935, i.e. depending on whether France fulfilled her obligation to Czechoslovakia; if not, he was not willing to risk an isolated war alongside Czechoslovakia against Germany (see Sluch 2009, 114–144; Carley 2010 (1); Carley 2010 (2)).

Although Edvard Beneš (who had resigned from the presidency a few days after Munich and had left his country on 22 October 1938, first for London and three months later for the United States) in the subsequent years repeatedly disputed the alleged Soviet willingness to come and help Czechoslovakia *in any case* in September 1938, the fact is that securing a common border and a close alliance with the Soviet Union soon became an important part of his program of *redressing Munich* (see Klimek 1993, 155–241; Beneš 2007, 16–20). With his Munich experience, he saw only two basic options for the future of his country – either German dominance, or a close alliance

with Russia. Promoting the latter option became a constant of Beneš's policy in the last decade of his life. And it was shared by an increasing number of Czechoslovak politicians.

Immediately after 15 March 1939, the Soviet attitude toward Czechoslovakia and its exile representatives seemed to be very friendly. Three days after the German occupation of Bohemia and Moravia, the Soviet government protested against the German aggression (*Dokumenty vneshney politiki*, hereinafter: *DVP*, vol. 22, 1992, no. 151, Litvinov's note for Schulenburg, 18 March 1939, pp. 202–204). Beneš's determination that Czechoslovakia had to "push eastwards" was further strengthened by the Soviet backing of his protests before the Council of the League of Nations against the German aggression and Hungarian occupation of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia. Beneš was also maintaining contacts with the Soviet Ambassador to Washington, Konstantin Umanskiy, throughout his stay in the United States in the first half of 1939 (Němeček 2001, 315–316).

The Nazi-Soviet Pact, signed on 23 August 1939, was soon reflected in Soviet-Czechoslovak relations, although this was not immediately apparent. When Beneš's hopes of achieving French and British recognition for his hastily composed exile government were dashed in the autumn months of 1939, in two talks with the Soviet Ambassador in London Ivan Mayskiy, he went so far as to offer Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia to the Soviets, as an acceptable price for reaching a common border with the USSR and thus security for his country's future. According to Mayskiy's record, he even talked about a possible federative bond between the two countries and expressed "no objections against the establishment of the Soviet system in Czechoslovakia" which he saw as definitely preferable to German dominance (*Ivan Mikhaylovich Mayskiy* 2009, pp. 20–21, 65–66, entries of 22 September, and 21 November 1939; *Československo-sovětské vztahy v diplomatických jednáních 1939-1945. Dokumenty*, hereinafter *ČSSVDJ*, vol. 1, doc. No. 26, pp. 86–87, Beneš's record of his talk with Mayskiy, 22 September 1939; The Czech record of the second talk has never been found). Whether these were really Beneš's words or not, the Czechoslovak exiles – unlike the British, French or Poles – indeed perceived the Nazi-Soviet Pact positively, as an encouragement inviting Hitler to start a war. And the war was considered to be the only hope for a future reconstitution of Czechoslovakia (see e.g. Edvard Beneš's memoirs, Beneš 1948, 131, 202–203).

Of course, it was displeasing when the Soviet Union recognized Slovakia *de iure* toward the end of 1939 and closed down the Czechoslovak Legation in Moscow, but this was less important in comparison with the impulse to an all-European war, which Moscow had provided. Still, Edvard Beneš, whose leadership of the Czechoslovak exile action (in competition with his major rivals Štefan Osuský, Milan Hodža or Lev Prchala) was solidified by July 1940 when the Czechoslovak provisional government was recognized by Britain, continued to maintain a connection with Moscow also throughout 1940 and in the first half of 1941. And this paid off: while thousands of Polish officers were shot by the NKVD in the spring months of 1940, Czechoslovak soldiers, detained after the Soviet invasion of Poland, were released in several waves from internment camps, and transferred initially to France and later to the Middle East where they could fight against the Axis powers (Maršálek 2017, 292–295, 357–358; Mar'ina 2007, 228–229; see also Plachý 2023, 312–345). Meanwhile, Colonel Heliodor Píka, head of Czechoslovakia's intelligence network in the Balkans, was invited to the Soviet Union in April 1941, as a "Czechoslovak military representative in the Soviet Union and Turkey," and he was given an opportunity to have an unofficial meeting with high-ranking Soviet officers even before 22 June 1941 (*ČSSVDJ*, vol. 1, doc. no. 45, p. 117, note 1; doc. no. 73, pp. 178–181, notes 2, 3; Brod 2002, 47–50).

Between Confederation with the Poles and Alliance with the Soviets

The German invasion of the Soviet Union significantly modified the nature of Soviet-Czechoslovak relations. On 8 July, Mayskiy announced to Beneš that the political program of the Soviet government called for an independent Czechoslovakia with a Czechoslovak national government, that Moscow would not interfere in domestic matters of Czechoslovakia, would receive a Czechoslovak ambassador, and would enable the formation of a Czechoslovak unit on the Soviet territory (*ČSSVDJ*, vol. 1, doc. no. 88, pp. 201–205, Beneš's record of his talk with Mayskiy, 8 July 1941). The fast approaching Soviet recognition also made the British government take a hasty definitive decision to upgrade the previous, provisional recognition of the Czechoslovak government from July 1940 to a full *de iure* recognition with Beneš as the President of the Czechoslovak Republic. Still, for four hours

Edvard Beneš and Winston Churchill during a visit to Czechoslovak troops at Morton Morrell, near Leamington, UK, on 20 April 1941. Imperial War Museums, ref. no. HU 90343. © Crown copyright. Imperial War Museums.

on 18 July 1941, the Soviet Union was the only power recognizing the Government of the Czechoslovak Republic (Táborský 1993, 173; Smetana 2008, 200–243; Żurawski vel Grajewski 2008).

During the months and years that followed, Edvard Beneš repeatedly declared to his collaborators that his policy would be "both East and West" or "50 per cent orientation towards the East, 50 per cent towards the West." (*Dokumenty z historie československé politiky 1939–1943*, hereinafter *DHČSP*, vol. 1, doc. no. 298, 362, Jaromír Smutný's diary entry for 22 August 1943). However, the difficult negotiations with the British Foreign Office, which he had had to undergo to achieve practically any of his foreign policy goals – compared to the easiness with which he was granted Moscow's consent with cornerstones of the program to redress Munich since the summer of 1941 – ultimately brought the president to decisions, the consequences of which meant a prevailing orientation to the Soviet Union long before the war ended. His attitude was shared by a growing segment of the exile representation, including the key ministers (Hubert Ripka, Jan Masaryk and others). The extreme case was Zdeněk Fierlinger, the reinstated Czechoslovak

Minister to Moscow, who intended to comply with Soviet wishes as much as possible, literally begging Soviet diplomats in the People's Commisariat of Foreign Affairs (*Narkomindel*) to regard him as "their man" who would do his best to assist them and even questioning the legitimacy of his own government, repeatedly criticizing its ministers as well as the president or suggesting that Russian should also become a state language in Czechoslovakia after its liberation (Arkhiv vneshney politiki in Moscow, hereinafter AVP, collection Vyshinskiy's Secretariat, op. 5, pap. 31, d. 53, Vyshinskiy's diary entry from 19 August 1941; *Dokumenty vneshney politiki SSSR*, hereinafter *DVP*, Vol. 25/1, doc. no. 26, pp. 77–80, Novikov's record of his talk with Fierlinger, 15 January 1942, No. 44, pp. 108–109, Vyshinskiy's record of his talk with Fierlinger, 22 January 1942; AVP, collection Molotov's Secretariat, op. 5, pap. 3, d. 400, Korneichuk's report for Molotov, 26 December 1943).

These preferences were naturally soon reflected in the ongoing negotiations with the Poles on the Czechoslovak-Polish confederation – a hopeful project that impressed the British as an evidence of readiness of both nations (or at least their representatives in exile) to overcome the old animosities and to embark on serious planning for stabilizing the unsettled region of Central Europe. This promising tendency reached its apogee in the signing of the Declaration of the Czechoslovak and Polish Governments on the agreement in the basic questions of confederation on 19 January 1942 (*Czechoslovak-Polish negotiations* 1995, doc. no. 86, pp. 172–173). However, the development of the Polish-Soviet relations had been a long way from ideal and Moscow was showing its displeasure over the confederation project. As early as February 1942, *Narkomindel* produced a memorandum claiming that both the Polish-Czechoslovak and the Greek-Yugoslav confederations were intended as a barrier not only against Germany, but also against the Soviet Union, their purpose being to prevent spreading of the Soviet influence in Europe and, in the event of Germany's collapse, a Soviet westward march (Gibanskiy 2003: 109). In the early months of 1942, comments of Soviet diplomats in London on the Czechoslovak-Polish confederation were similarly reserved (*ČSSVDJ*, Vol. 1, doc. no. 136, pp. 288–291, Hejret's record of Ripka's talk with Bogomolov, doc. no. 141, pp. 301–302, Ripka's record of his talk with Bogomolov, doc. no. 151, pp. 315–316, Beneš's record of his talk with Bogomolov, doc. no. 154, p. 319, Ripka's record of his talk with Mayskiy and Bogomolov, 15 April 1942, doc. no. 163, pp. 331–333, Ripka's record of his talk with Bogomolov, 15 May 1942).

To an ever-increasing extent, Beneš was facing a dilemma whether to proceed further with the "feudal" Poles or with the "progressive" Soviets. With his worldview in mind, his decision to choose the latter was not that difficult. Moreover, it turned out that some of the problems between Poland and Czechoslovakia, such as the future status of the Teschen region, were insurmountable, as were the differing attitudes towards the Soviet Union (on the topic of Polish-Czechoslovak relations see especially Němeček 2003; Kamiński 2005; Kamiński 2009). Thus, Beneš started abandoning the project – the more easily, since at the same time he obtained assurances from the Soviet government about post-war reconstitution of Czechoslovakia in state's pre-Munich borders (*ČSSVDJ*, Vol. 1, doc. no. 168, 170, pp. 341–347, Hubert Ripka's records of his talks with A.E. Bogomolov, 4 and 8 June 1942, Beneš's record of his talk with A.E. Bogomolov, 9 June 1942.). It was probably this gesture of supreme importance that led Beneš to tell the Soviet People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Molotov, during his visit to London in June 1942, that he would never sign a confederation accord that would be hostile to Soviet interests and "should he have to choose between Poland and the USSR, he would certainly choose the latter" (*Voyna i diplomatiya* 1997, doc. No. 118, p. 261, record of Molotov's talk with President E. Beneš, 9 June 1942. Beneš's record of the talk, written with a delay of at least two days and therefore less reliable, does not contain any note of this. See *ČSSVDJ*, Vol. 1, doc. no. 171, pp. 348–351).

A few weeks later, Moscow expressed its disapproval of the principle of a Polish-Czechoslovak confederation (the so-called "Soviet veto"). In the words of Alexander Bogomolov, the Soviet Minister to the governments-in-exile, the "Soviet circles" (*milieux soviétiques*) were convinced that the Czechoslovak-Polish confederation was intended as a tool against the Soviet Union (*ČSSVDJ*, Vol. 1, doc. no. 178, pp. 365–366, Foreign Ministry's record of a talk between Jan Masaryk and A.E. Bogomolov, 15 July 1942, doc. no. 177, pp. 362–365, Beneš's record of his talk with Bogomolov, 13 July 1942, doc. no. 182, pp. 371–376, Ripka's record of his talk with Bogomolov, 27 July 1942; Táborský 1993, 98-141). Beneš was trying to disprove this opinion and defending the Czechoslovak-Polish confederation when talking to Soviet representatives; at the same time, however, the president made repeatedly clear that if the Soviet Union disagreed with the confederation, there would simply be no confederation (*ČSSVDJ*, Vol. 1, doc. no. 183, 187, 199, pp. 377–381, 389–390, 407–408, Beneš's records of his talks with A.E. Bogomolov, 31 July, 27 August,

30 October 1942). The Czechoslovak government made even a mere anti-German treaty with Poland conditional on Soviet approval. The latter, however, did not arrive; on the contrary, Fierlinger conveyed to London in early January 1943 *Narkomindel's* unfavourable view of the new round of negotiations with the Poles, and advised Beneš to consult the Soviet side before making any proposals to the Poles (*ČSSVDJ*, Vol. 1, doc. no. 211, pp. 424–425, Masaryk's circular instruction to Czechoslovak legations, 30 December 1942, doc. no. 212, Fierlinger's report for the Foreign Ministry, 8 January 1943, and note 2).

According to the original Czechoslovak idea, the treaty with Poland was to become a part of a tripartite alliance with the Soviet Union. In the first months of 1943, however, Czechoslovak-Polish relations deteriorated and Soviet-Polish relations became even more strained. In such a situation, Beneš wrote off the possibility of a "more serious agreement" with the Poles before the end of the war (*ČSSVDJ*, Vol. 1, doc. no. 215, pp. 432–435, extract from Ripka's record of his talk with Bogomolov, 26 January 1943, doc. no. 217, pp. 438–440, Beneš's telegraphic report for Fierlinger, 15 February 1943).

Both the Soviet diplomacy and its leading proponent, Czechoslovak Ambassador to Moscow Zdeněk Fierlinger, stressed to Beneš that Czechoslovak security would be easiest to assure through a Soviet-Czechoslovak alliance treaty (*ČSSVDJ*, Vol. 1, doc. no. 218, pp. 440–442, Fierlinger's report for Beneš, 21 February 1943, doc. no. 219, pp. 442–444, Szathmáry's report for Beneš on his talk with Bogomolov, 6 March 1943). Its conclusion, in the spirit of the principles of the 1942 Soviet-British Treaty, was officially proposed by Beneš to Moscow via Bogomolov on 19 March 1943 (*ČSSVDJ*, Vol. 1, doc. no. 220, pp. 444–450, Beneš's record of his talk with Bogomolov, 19 March 1943). In *Narkomindel*, the proposal was found to be an appropriate instrument to definitively avert plans for the Czechoslovak-Polish Confederation, and generally a move that corresponded to Soviet state interests (Prečan 1995, 623). On 23 April, Bogomolov conveyed the official approval of the Soviet government and the call for the president to submit a draft treaty. Beneš was very satisfied and promised, according to the Soviet record, that "from now on, he will follow the prospects of a close rapprochement with the USSR in his policymaking" (AVP, collection Molotov's Secretariat, op. 5, pap. 34, d. 403, Korneichuk's analysis for Molotov, 5 September 1943; *DHČSP*, doc. no. 198, pp. 240–243, Jaromír Smutný's diary entry for 24 April 1943). Meanwhile, Czechoslovakia and Poland finally diverged: two days later, the Soviet government broke off diplomatic relations with

the Polish government-in-exile when the latter asked the International Red Cross to investigate the German-discovered mass graves of Polish officers in Katyń, which Moscow described as aiding Nazi Germany (see e.g. Sanford 2006, 95–111; on the British (and Czechoslovak) reaction see Hauner 2006, 82–99, esp. 94–97; Maresch 2010).

The British hosts attempted to distract Beneš from his plan. They regarded such a treaty as presenting an impetus for the partition of Europe into spheres of influence and the start of a Great Power competition to conclude agreements with "minor allies", that the British had attempted to prevent as early as mid-1942 by a "self-denying ordinance" with Moscow (*SSSR i germanskiy vopros*, Vol. 1, 1996, doc. no. 28, p. 165, Molotov's telegram to Mayskiy, 4 July 1942). Nevertheless, facing more or less a *fait accompli* and confronted with the *désintéressement* of his American counterpart Cordell Hull, the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, reluctantly agreed to the plan for a Czechoslovak–Soviet treaty during the Moscow conference of the three Foreign Ministers in October 1943 – though thus counteracting the previous decision of the Cabinet (Hrbek, Smetana, Kokoška, Pilát, and Hofman 2009, vol. 1, 65–68; Barker 1978, 264–267). However, to label his approval of the treaty as an accord of the Great Powers on allotting Czechoslovakia to the Soviet sphere of interest would be equal to confusing causes with results.

At the same time, it would be unfair to blame Beneš alone for Czechoslovakia's turn to the East. He was well informed about the strong pro-Soviet feelings within the home population and he was also pushed by the members of his government (representatives of democratic parties) to go to Moscow and sign the treaty even against the will of the British. This he refused to do until disagreements were settled on the Great Power level.

On the other hand, however, during his visit to Moscow in December 1943, Beneš did his utmost to align Czechoslovakia with the USSR. On 12 December, Molotov and Fierlinger signed the Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty, which was ratified in Moscow 10 days later. But the results of the negotiations between Beneš and Molotov went far beyond its wording. The president asked for coordination of Czechoslovakia's foreign policy with that of the Soviet Union and agreed with Molotov on the importance of such coordination (*ČSSVDJ*, Vol. 2, doc. no. 63, p. 155, Smutný's record of Beneš's conversation with Molotov, 16 December 1943). Beneš also called for a strengthening of the Soviet influence including the seizure of Hungary by the Red Army, and suggested to Stalin that the problems of still "feudal" Poland could not

be solved by the exile government, but by "some kind of a new one." One can agree with Vojtech Mastny that Czechoslovakia was essentially offering itself as a tool of Russian expansionism (Mastny 1979, 136). The Czechoslovak delegation further submitted a programme of close cooperation in the military field and adaptation of Czechoslovak plans to the Soviet ones. Despite the fact that Beneš carried through Article 4 on mutual non-interference in internal affairs of both treaty partners (and pointed to this article repeatedly when defending his policy towards the Soviets against sceptical voices), he actually insisted that immediately after the war the Soviet government should interfere by encouraging the Czechoslovak government to punish all Slovak transgressors (for Soviet and Czechoslovak records of Beneš's talks in Moscow see AVP, collection Molotov's Secretariat, op. 5, pap. 33, d. 401; *ČSSVDJ*, vol. 2, doc. nos. 58–70, pp. 121–189).

There was euphoria in the Czechoslovak camp after Beneš's return to London. It seemed that Czechoslovakia's security was finally assured for the future. And while British and American press, as well as a not insignificant portion of the political scene of both countries, embraced the treaty with more embarrassment as an anachronism and a decisive step towards the creation of a Soviet sphere of influence, even that criticism gradually lost its force, especially when the most visible alternative to the Czechoslovak route was the policy of the Polish government-in-exile, which seemed progressively more and more in impasse. Indeed, the Allied leaders (Churchill, Roosevelt, Eden) agreed that it would be appropriate to use Beneš as a conduit in the campaign to pressure the Polish leadership to meet Soviet territorial and other demands at least a little, and thus allow diplomatic relations to be re-established. It was, however, utterly unacceptable for the London Poles (*Churchill and Roosevelt* 1984, C-533, pp. 650-651, 6 January 1944; Barker 1978, 267–268; Michálek 1994, 847–859).

Moreover, the "Czechoslovak" interpretation of the treaty, according to which the country became part of the Soviet *security* sphere without losing any of its freedom and sovereignty, was gradually promoted. All that Moscow supposedly demanded for guaranteeing Czechoslovak security were assurances that Czechoslovakia would not become part of another military structure posing a threat to the security of the USSR. The validity of these plausible-sounding propositions was repeatedly highlighted by President Beneš and other Czechoslovak as well as Soviet officials in order to reassure Western politicians and diplomats about them. They soon incorporated these conclusions into their own political concepts, according to which Czechoslovakia was

to become a "test case" or "litmus test" of the Soviet will to cooperate with the West and to respect the sovereignty of small nations (Masaryk Institute and Archives of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague, hereinafter AÚTGM, collection Edvard Beneš, box 153, Beneš's record of his talk with Harriman, 27 May 1944; National Archives and Record Administration, College Park (MD), (General Records of the Department of State), Records of the Advisory Committee on Post-War Foreign Policy, 1942–1950 (i.e. Harley Notter files), box 84, record of the 14th meeting of the Subcommittee on Problems of European Organisation, 3 March 1944; The National Archives of the United Kingdom in London, hereinafter TNA, FO 371/38931, C 1902/239/12, C 4882/239/12, Roberts' minutes, 15 February 1944, 19 April 1944).

Thus, in the spring of 1944, everything seemed to be on track, especially when Czechoslovakia managed to reach an agreement with the Soviet Union on 8 May on the relations between the Czechoslovak administration and the commander-in-chief of the Red Army after its entry on Czechoslovak territory (Beneš 1946, no. XVII, 475–477).

In the Soviet Sphere

The Soviets, however, viewed Czechoslovakia's role differently. An important memorandum by Ivan Mayskiy, then Molotov's deputy, on the international situation and the Soviet political strategy labelled Czechoslovakia a "bulwark" of Soviet influence in Central and South-East Europe as early as January 1944 (*SSSR i germanskiy vopros*, vol. 1, doc. 79, pp. 333–360, Mayskiy's memorandum, 11 January 1944). What further strengthened Czechoslovakia's drift to the Soviet sphere were statements that Edvard Beneš made during his conversations with a number of Soviet diplomats. There, he only confirmed Mayskiy's analysis – in particular through his repeated affirmations that Czechoslovakia would side with the Soviets in the next war, in which the West would employ Germany against them, and for which it was essential to be well prepared: in July 1944, he told the Soviet Ambassador to the Czechoslovak government-in-exile, Viktor Lebedev, that "the Soviets would have to start thinking about the future war, as much as he (the President) does." Beneš argued "that the future war will be directed against the Soviets, and that the West will use Germany against them. We shall, in any case, go with the Soviets" (*ČSSVDJ*, vol. 2, doc. no. 98, pp. 265–267, Ripka's record of Beneš's account of his talk with V.Z. Lebedev, 12 July 1944).

Similarly, during his last visit to Moscow in March 1945, he argued in Molotov's presence for the realization of a "pan-Slavic policy" and expressed his satisfaction that "the USSR will be on the other side of Carpathians and will become Hungary's neighbour. In 10–15 years the West may stand against the USSR and it is necessary to prepare for that." Beneš further reassured the Soviet People's Commissar: "...based on sober consideration, Czechoslovakia has to look to the support of the Soviet Union." When Molotov asked whether this time it would be without waiting for France, thus recalling the events of 1938, Beneš nodded and emphasized the necessity "to organize a Slavic policy so that the Germans could not become a threat again" (quoted in Mar'ina 2009, 316–326). These statements, which naturally did not reach the ears of British or American politicians, undoubtedly went beyond mere political far-sightedness. Beneš effectively played to Stalin's lifelong sense of insecurity and endangerment from the West. Yet, this undermined the very basis of his own political conception, which consisted in post-war cooperation of the Great Powers as an essential condition for the existence of truly independent and democratic Czechoslovakia (see Beneš 1948, 423, 430).

The first signals that the Czechoslovak model might fail started coming from mid-1944 onwards. In August, Beneš was bitterly disappointed to learn that the Soviet government had been secretly negotiating with the Slovak Minister of War, Ferdinand Čatloš (a man whom Beneš had claimed to "hang" before Molotov in December 1943) about his plan for a military coup in Slovakia, followed by the cessation of the state of war with the Soviet Union (Mar'ina 2013, 373). More disappointments followed the outbreak of the Slovak National Uprising at the end of August, when the Soviet side was considerably sluggish in preparing to help, while responding with dogged silence to the Western requests for approval for US and British aid deliveries. True, it was not comparable to the pointed decision to let the Warsaw Rising bleed to death. Still, the Soviet aid in the form of supplies of weapons and war material to the Slovak uprising fell short of the promises to supply infantry equipment for 50,000 men, made by the Soviet command in the spring of 1944. In reality, only a quarter of the promised amount was delivered to Slovakia in the whole of 1944 (Hrbek, Smetana, Kokoška, Pilát, and Hofman 2009, vol. 1, 274–283; Mar'ina 1996 (1), 100–130; Mar'ina 1996 (2), 112–123). The Germans thus suppressed the uprising by the end of October.

Soon afterwards, the Soviets exerted strong pressure upon Czechoslovak representatives to give up the territory of Sub-

Carpathian Ruthenia. The NKVD and other Soviet authorities organized "spontaneous" demonstrations of desire of the Sub-Carpathian population to join the USSR. This culminated in November 1944 when a congress of national committees met in Mukachevo and voted for the separation of "Trans-Carpathian Ukraine" from Czechoslovakia and adhesion to the Soviet Union. Czechoslovak governmental delegation led by František Němec, which arrived in the freshly liberated territory in October 1944, soon recognized that it was a mere powerless observer of events (for relevant documentation on developments in Ruthenia in the international context see *ČSSVDJ*, Vol. 2, pp. 316–525). Beneš was disappointed, and blamed Ukrainian nationalism, for he could not believe that this might be instigated by Moscow (see Hoover Institution Library and Archives, Stanford (CA), Eduard Táborský collection, box 2, Táborský's diary, 12 December 1944). Yet, in January 1945, he confirmed in a letter to Stalin his readiness to give up the territory (*ČSSVDJ*, Vol. 2, doc. no. 236, pp. 482–484, Beneš's letter to Stalin, 29 January 1945). Two months later in Moscow, Molotov demanded a written pledge for an immediate cession of the province. Beneš responded with another letter, written in a strange mixture of Czech and Russian, in which he expressed his agreement that in his view "Trans-Carpathian Ukraine should enter the composition [*vejít v sostav*] of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic" (*ČSSVDJ*, Vol. 2, doc. no. 258, pp. 526–527, Beneš's letter to Molotov, 26 March 1945, and note 3 containing the Russian answer). That happened in June 1945.

In late March 1945, western diplomats were suddenly refused permission to enter the Czechoslovak territory liberated by the Soviets, just before their scheduled departure to Košice via Constanţa, when their luggage was already on board of a ship. Neither western protests nor Czechoslovak pleas could alter this Soviet ruling, under the pretext of problems with accommodation (*Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, Europe*, Vol. IV, 1968, pp. 434–435, 436, Acheson to Harriman, 4 April 1945, Harriman to Stettinius, 7 April 1945; TNA, FO 371/47121, N 3797/650/12, Clark Kerr to Foreign Office, No. 1170, 8 April 1945, Foreign Office to Moscow, No. 1805, 13 April 1945, Clark Kerr to Foreign Office, No. 1342, 16 April 1945; TNA, CAB 120/737, Churchill's minute, 16 April 1945; Němeček 2011). The Soviet Ambassador, Valerian Zorin, did not suffer from such problems in Košice and therefore for a month became the only contact with the outside world for the new Czechoslovak government that had been recently set up in

Moscow. Characteristic for its composition was the fact that most of the key positions were held either by Klement Gottwald's Communists (ministries of interior and information) or by their close collaborators, such as the Minister of Defence Ludvík Svoboda and also the Prime Minister Zdeněk Fierlinger. The former was a pro-Communist "non-partisan" commander of the 1st Czechoslovak army corps on the Eastern front, while the latter a radical Social Democrat and a highly pro-Soviet Ambassador in Moscow. By 1944 the Czechoslovak government repeatedly asked President Beneš to replace him as it was less and less clear whose interests he was defending. But Beneš refused these requests, knowing how Moscow appreciated his services (see Němeček 2001, 332–333). In talking with Beneš in March 1945, Stalin questioned the wisdom of Fierlinger's nomination. But as the new Prime Minister was a Communist choice, the "leader of the world proletariat" had undoubtedly approved his nomination previously (Táborský 1993, 236).

By the time of the UN founding conference in San Francisco, Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk seemed a "depressed prisoner of the Russians" (Churchill College, Cambridge, Churchill Papers, CHAR 20/216, United Kingdom Delegation, San Francisco, to Foreign Office, 28 April 1945. See also Eden 1965, 532; Stettinius 1975, 340, 345). Masaryk personally complained to Charles Bohlen, over a glass of whiskey, about his bitter plight when he was getting written instructions from Molotov on how to vote and when to talk – accompanied by warnings that otherwise Czechoslovakia might forfeit the friendship of the Soviet government: "What kind of a way is that to behave to a country that is trying to be friendly?" mused Masaryk. "You can be on your knees and this is not enough for the Russians" (AVP, collection Molotov's Secretariat, op. 7, pap. 51, d. 820, exchanges between Masaryk and Molotov with Pavlov; Bohlen 1973, 214). Yet, he did not mention that back in Moscow, he had promised Molotov's deputy Maksim Litvinov that throughout the San Francisco conference he would always vote with the Soviets (AVP, collection Molotov's Secretariat, op. 7, pap. 51, d. 833, Litvinov's diary, 30 March 1945, "From the talks with Benes and Masaryk"; For further details see: Smetana 2014, 62). All these episodes signalled that Czechoslovakia would not be able to play the desired role of a "bridge between East and West", and that the Soviets could demolish the mythical structure any time they wished. In fact, they did so, on a symbolical level, as early as at the end of 1944. When Masaryk presented the "bridge" concept in interviews for the British magazine *The Illustrated* and the American journal *Nation*,

Moscow reacted fiercely. The journal *Voyna i rabochiy klass* (*War and the Working Class*) ironically congratulated Masaryk on the discovery of an "ingenious" way to defend a country against further aggression (Kosatík and Kolář 2000, 214; *Dokumenty československé zahraniční politiky* 2015, doc. no. 28, pp. 156–158, Fierlinger's telegram to the Foreign Ministry, 19 January 1945 and notes 1 and 2). Masaryk, who was also repeatedly criticized for his statements by the pro-Soviet Ambassador Fierlinger, reacted typically: in a New Year's address to his homeland, he dissociated himself from the bridge idea: "The famous Soviet Union and the large Western democracies do not need us as a bridge. People walk across bridges and that we do not find entirely convenient" (Masaryk 1990, 295).

The Moscow negotiations in March 1945 strengthened this unambiguously pro-Soviet post-war orientation of the country. Politicians of all the permitted parties competed to stress the vital importance of the alliance with the Soviet Union, while the Communists proclaimed an end of "all plays with a bridge." The program of the newly set-up government – which was based on the Communist draft, previously approved by the head of the Office of International Information of the All-Union Communist Party (bolsheviks) (the new cover for the *Comintern* since its "dissolution" in 1943) Georgi Dimitrov (Mar'ina 2009, 314) – preached an *alliance* with the Soviet Union and prospectively also with the other Slavic countries, and a mere *friendship* with the Western Powers. The program further proclaimed that the organisation, equipment and training of the new Czechoslovak armed forces would be the same as the organisation, equipment and training of the Red Army. The government bound itself to censorship against everything "anti-Soviet" in textbooks and in the entire field of education. From now on, Russian was to become the first foreign language in further education programs, while Czechoslovak youth should "gain sufficient knowledge about the creation, system, development, economy and culture of the USSR." The new government proclaimed that it would "from the beginning realize practical co-operation with the Soviet Union, in all respects – militarily, politically, economically and culturally" (*Program* 1945, 5–6, 9–10, 28).

An opportunity to at least slow down the process of Czechoslovakia falling under the thumb of the USSR came to the West with the advance of US troops towards the Czechoslovak border. However, the top US commanders, Dwight Eisenhower and George Marshall, refused to reflect the political arguments that liberation of Prague might have crucial importance for the future orientation of Czechoslovakia

(delivered by Churchill, the Foreign Office, as well as the US State Department) in planning their military operations, especially after the Soviet Supreme Command falsely informed Eisenhower on 5 May that the Red Army's Prague operation had already been launched and that the troops could become mixed. (see Pogue 1954, 495–508; Prečan 1994, 60-72; Hrbek, Smetana, Kokoška, Pilát, and Hofman 2009, vol. 2, 65-69). The political short-sightedness of the US command, together with the successful bluff by their Soviet counterparts, was to have dire consequences for the further development of Czechoslovakia. The Soviets harvested all the fame for the liberation of the bulk of the country, including its capital. And the story of the bleeding Prague uprising, when Prague was denied help by the West from the nearby town of Pilsen, whereas the Red Army came to its rescue all the way from Dresden, was skilfully used by the Communist propaganda machine in the following years. (Paradoxically, the Prague Uprising was significantly assisted during its crucial days, 6-7 May, by the Russian Liberation Army commanded by General Andrei Vlasov, that had previously supported the German war effort and now strove, in vain, to rescue itself by changing the sides at the last minute.) The alleged US – that is Western – indifference to the fate of the severely tried nation began to be equated to Munich 1938, leading to the only apparent alternative for Czechoslovakia in the imaginary equation, that is, to rely primarily on the Soviet Union in the future.

Conclusion

The process of fundamental change in the foreign-policy orientation of Czechoslovakia in the years 1938–1945 was thus completed. By the time the war ended, the country had become a solid part of the Soviet sphere of influence. This did not happen through any dirty Great Power accord, adopted in Yalta or anywhere else, but because of Czechoslovakia's own choice. By their unequivocal support of the Soviet "wishes", the leading Czechoslovak politicians substantially assisted the Kremlin rulers in creating their sphere of interest in East-Central Europe. Stalin and his collaborators could constantly rely on the Czechoslovak loyalty and even present the country as a display window of their alleged good will. It seems as if Beneš's political strategy was based on two premises: the importance of the Soviet security guarantee against any repetition of German aggression and the growing feeling that the country was at the mercy of the

USSR and the only way of preserving at least internal freedom was by fulfilling every Soviet wish. We now know that this policy could not succeed, as it was only regarded as a weakness and did not reduce the Soviet appetite for further concessions. Yet, its eventual failure became entirely clear only in February 1948.

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