

**SECURITY DIPLOMACY,
POLICY-MAKING AND PLANNING
IN POST-COLD WAR PRAGUE**

by Karel Tesar

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Security Diplomacy, Policy-Making and Planning in Post-Cold War Prague / by Karel Tesar

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The Centre for European Security Studies is an independent and non-profit foundation engaged in research, education and training on foreign policy and security affairs affecting the whole of Europe. A key mission is to promote democratic structures and decision-making procedures in this field, especially throughout Central and Eastern Europe where it works to support those organisations and individuals striving to establish civil societies under the rule of law. By facilitating a comprehensive process of learning, it aims to contribute to mutual understanding on all security matters, thus helping to build a stable all-European order.

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FOREWORD

By Peter Volten

When the Centre for European Security Studies (CESS) first approached the Volkswagen Foundation to seek funding for our European Fellowship Programme (EFP), we stressed two features of our scheme. One was the opportunity we wished to provide: for scholars from Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) to examine an aspect of their own nation's transition in the defence field, under our professional supervision and with a period of 'study abroad' in the Netherlands. The other was the results we could expect: authoritative, original research on *civil-military relations* and *security policy-making* in CEECs – the two themes on which we decided the EFP should focus – and hence valuable additions to an English-language literature on these subjects which had been dominated hitherto by general (and often superficial) essays by Western analysts.

In terms of these aims, the programme succeeded beyond our expectations. Some 25 fellows took part in it and most have seen their work published in this monograph series or elsewhere. For this success I have to thank all those members of my staff involved in the exercise. In particular, I must mention EFP Co-ordinator Sipke de Hoop, who was responsible for the selection of Fellows and overall management of the programme from early 1997; Joost Herman, who fulfilled this role at the start of the venture in 1996/97; and our administrators – Elena Herman and, later, Joke Venema – who provided office support for everyone and much practical help to the Fellows themselves.

Coming from CEECs, our Fellows faced the formidable challenge of writing-up their research in English, which for each of them was a second language (or even a third). All rose to this challenge, some impressively. Not surprisingly, however, their final submissions required careful editing prior to publication. The lion's share of this work has fallen to David Greenwood, Research Director at CESS. To him we owe a substantial debt for the effort he has expended in 'helping authors to say what it is they have to say' (in his own formulation). Thanks are also due to Sergei Malkin – and, latterly, Elzaline Schraa – for undertaking the final preparation of copy for our printer.

One last debt of gratitude I must acknowledge is to the Volkswagen Foundation, for providing the academic venture capital that made our programme possible. This was a courageous investment; but it has yielded regular dividends, of which this volume is the latest example.

Indeed, Karel Tesar's account of Prague's post-Cold War decision-making – for Czechoslovakia until 1993 and the Czech Republic thereafter – is one of the most impressive EFP studies. The author provides a meticulous record of how *Security Policy* evolved in the 1990s, from early enthusiasm for pan-European structures (like CSCE/OSCE) to later concentration on gaining early accession to NATO (even at the expense of close co-operation with neighbours).

He also provides a thoughtful analysis of how *military reorganisation and reform* proceeded, in difficult political and economic conditions. In addition, the surprisingly lukewarm attitude of the Czech public to defence affairs is noted, examined and explained.

Noteworthy, too, are Karel Tesar's concluding observations on 'four parameters for the security policy of the Czech Republic' in the future. These are wise judgements, rounding off a work of serious scholarship.

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I. INTRODUCTION

After the 1989 'Velvet Revolution' Czechoslovakia stood at the threshold of a new era in its history. Having toppled an oppressive totalitarian regime, the country faced the numerous challenges that newly-regained freedom and a return to democracy brought.

Following the fall of the 'Iron Curtain' and the quick dissolution of the Soviet bloc, the Czechoslovak political representation was compelled to formulate new policies in the areas of security and defence and to put them into the general context of the build-up of a domestic system of parliamentary democracy and the establishment of a new foreign orientation of the state.

The short period of the existence of Czech and Slovak federation ended with a split-up in 1993 and consequent forming of the successor states. On the Czech political scene, with a right-wing coalition of parties dominating, the objective of security policy became unequivocal integration of the country into the European political and security institutions, namely NATO and the European Union. Therefore, all activities in the fields of security planning and strategic preference-setting were subordinated to the achievement of this goal. In certain cases, however, such as the reform of the armed forces, the political rhetoric prevailed over concrete practical steps.

With the NATO Madrid Summit in July 1997, which listed the Czech Republic in the group of countries that were offered an invitation for the first wave of the Alliance's enlargement, a new phase opened in the process of the country's transition towards a solid position in the Euro-Atlantic security architecture. This came to an end with the formal accession to NATO in March 1999, on the eve of the organisation's 50th anniversary celebrations in Washington.

The aim of this study is to describe Czech security policy-making in the various stages of the post-Cold War development of the country, with a perspective for the beginning of the new century. It is necessary to bear in mind that since the beginning of existence of the Czech Republic in 1993 there has been quite a large discrepancy between the *proclaimed* preparedness to become a member of NATO (especially in meeting the criteria for membership spelled out by the Alliance) and the *real* state of such preparedness. In the late 1990s the impulse to incorporate the Czech Republic into NATO blocked both the Czech political representation's as well as NATO's willingness to look honestly at the true state of affairs.

As for the structure of the text, the next section gives an overview of the build-up of the security policy of the post-totalitarian Czechoslovak state in the period from late 1989 till the end of 1992 with its mostly idealist approach to international security issues. It explores some of the concepts that were adopted by former dissidents who after the November revolution assumed key policymaking posts. These ideas were further developed into the main lines of Czechoslovak foreign and security policy in which the leadership initially advocated an 'ideal' system of collective security based on institutions which on the one hand denied any notion of traditional alliance concepts, but on the other hand were incapable of bringing solutions to crises and conflicts that emerged shortly after the collapse of the totalitarian regimes in Europe.

The next section covers the period 1993-1996 that marked the establishment of the Czech Republic and a security policy based on a more pragmatic approach that set the country's membership in NATO and EU as a key security priority. It describes the

uneasy establishment of the Czech armed forces as well as efforts to continue their reform, which had started already during the period of the federal state. It also reviews foreign policy, noting Czech ambivalence towards possible co-ordination of steps to be taken by Central European countries in their effort to join Western security structures, an approach that contributed to the eventual collapse of Visegrad co-operation in this field.

Another feature of developments on the Czech foreign and security policy scene in this period was the absence of public debate on the key issues: the government would adopt certain security strategies and then pursue them without any particular regard to the voice of the parliamentary opposition or the public. This fact has been seen as one of the main causes for low public support of Czech membership in NATO both before and since accession.

The fourth section analyses efforts made in 1997-98 to speed up the process of reform of the Czech military as well as of adopting new legislative norms necessary for the country as a prospective NATO member. It notes the beginning of a more open public debate on security issues. This was due mainly to a change in the balance of power following the parliamentary election in 1996 with significant gains for the opposition. This debate, however, remained far behind expectations in terms of being a sufficient tool for increasing public support to the country's future membership of the Alliance. Put bluntly, the decision of the 1997 Madrid Summit to invite the Czech Republic to begin its accession process was made on political grounds rather than on the basis of real military and societal preparedness.

Even following accession much remains to be done in the fields of military restructuring and security-related legislation. Requirements are reviewed in concluding remarks on the future of the Czech Republic's security policy. A set of objectives is outlined and an analysis is given of the actions to be taken at the beginning of the new century.

II. SECURITY AGENDA OF THE POST-COMMUNIST STATE: BACK TO EUROPE! (1990-1992)

1. Build-up of the Independent Security and Defence Policy

Overcoming a Legacy of the Past

Amidst the turmoil of a revolution, the last communist president of Czechoslovakia, Gustav Husak, appointed a government of 'national understanding' in December 1989. For the first time in almost half a century the country had a political representation selected on the basis of pluralism, which included a number of former dissidents. The new government was to face a tremendous challenge: the transformation of one of Europe's most conservative totalitarian countries into a democratic state. Among numerous tasks to be undertaken was that of designing a security and foreign policy to safeguard the newly-gained freedom – a policy which would put the country back on the map of democratic Europe.

The Czechoslovak policymakers had to deal with a grim legacy. During more than 40 years of communist rule, the principle of the 'leading role of the party' meant that party institutions were guaranteed supremacy over virtually all state institutions. Thus, Czechoslovak foreign policy was formulated by the Department of International Politics and the Commission for Foreign Policy of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia rather than by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. But even the role of party institutions was effectively reduced to aligning Czechoslovakia's foreign policy with that of the Soviet Union. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff consisted mainly of loyal technocrats. The diplomatic service served as a haven for disgraced party and state officials, an operating field for Czechoslovak intelligence services and secret police; or, in the case of attractive ambassadorial posts, a reward. The Institute for International Relations, theoretically a think tank of the Foreign Ministry, in fact played a marginal role and was taken much more seriously abroad than in Czechoslovakia.

Equally negligible were the roles of the parliament and the political parties. The Foreign Committee of the Federal Assembly merely had a symbolic value. Legal parties, united under the National Front, did not try to formulate independent foreign policy concepts, because they were not allowed to do so. The notion of security was forcibly divorced from its foreign policy dimension and shrunk to a narrow definition of internal order and to safeguarding the dominant role of the communist party from the 'enemies of socialism'. A secret State Police (StB) penetrated all structures and sectors of society, ensuring that all was in tune with policies and concepts formulated in the party secretariat and, ultimately, in Moscow. Having one of the largest armies in Central Europe, Czechoslovakia was a strong pillar of the Warsaw Pact, the very organisation of whose doctrine of 'limited sovereignty' the country became a victim in August 1968. Although formally a signatory to the Helsinki Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe in 1975, the Czechoslovak conservative regime would oppress the opposition movements despite all the international commitments to observe fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Given all this it was only natural that the task of formulating Czechoslovakia's security and foreign policy should be entrusted to former dissidents who were perceived to have great moral credit gained over years of activity in opposition structures. While these former members of the dissident community – such as Foreign Minister Jiri Dienstbier, and his collaborators Jaroslav Sedivy, Lubos Dobrovsky or Alexander Vondra – came from various backgrounds and thus had differing opinions on many economic and social issues, they seemed united in their approach to foreign and security policy matters.

That was presumably the main reason why the steps taken by these policymakers in the course of the first three years of the democratic state hardly ever faced any challenge on the domestic political scene. Also, most political parties did not give high priority to security and foreign policy. The parliamentary security, defence and foreign policy committees would not exert a significant influence on the policy-making of the ministries of foreign affairs and defence. Moreover, the general direction of policies adopted after November 1989 would not be a matter of public dispute.

The principal goals of the new leadership in security terms were the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the country's territory, ending more than twenty years of occupation; the 'return to Europe', by which was understood the renewal of traditional political and economic links with Western democracies; establishment of friendly relations with both other emerging democracies in Central Europe and regional powers such as Germany and the Soviet Union (later Russia); the transition from a bipolar, confrontational security system to a collective security system as well as strengthening the country's role in global politics; and a thorough reform of the Czechoslovak armed forces. The latter proved to be the most challenging and complicated issue. Nevertheless, it was crucial for any future developments in the security field.

Reform of the Armed Forces: a tough challenge

Previously regarded by the vast majority of citizens as a loyal instrument of the communist regime, the Czechoslovak military would face a serious image problem from the very beginning of the new era. Lacking military traditions, since they had never defended the country against foreign aggressors, the armed forces were considered a useless institution by a majority of the public.

After toppling the communist regime, the new political leadership had to find a balance between the rather anti-military sentiments that prevailed in former dissident circles (coupled with strong public pressure to reform the armed forces) and its desire to avoid provoking the military establishment with the introduction of drastic changes. Reforms had to be carried out gradually, without any major shocks, in order to win support of parts of the military itself.

The very first step taken to ensure a new development for the Czechoslovak armed forces was the dismissal of the Defence Minister Vaclavik, a loyal supporter of the hard-line wing of the communist party. He was replaced by General Miroslav Vacek in December 1989. Although being previously a member of the communist party too, Vacek accepted the tough challenge of reforming a huge institution filled

with many strong supporters of the totalitarian regime.¹ He quickly introduced several changes aimed at the de-politicising of the armed forces – such as banning all party activities and ideological education, thus making a large number of so-called 'deputy-commanders for political affairs' jobless. Previously compulsory pre-military education in secondary schools and military training for male university students were also abolished. Another novelty was the fact that the Ministry of Defence published its budget, for the first time in four decades, thus lifting the secrecy that had previously prevailed.

Reacting to massive public pressure, the Defence Ministry was the first institution in Czechoslovakia to introduce a 'screening' of the personnel under its jurisdiction. In January 1990 Vacek initiated a three-stage process to review the backgrounds and qualifications of all professional soldiers.² The first stage involved some 5,000 top-ranking officers, including all generals, deputy ministers of defence, heads of military colleges, district commanders as well as the political officers. More than 20 per cent of them failed to satisfy the screening commissions and had to leave the military or accept transfers to lower positions. In the second and third stages of the process the backgrounds and qualifications of all remaining professional soldiers were gradually checked.

By September 1990, a total of 9,460 officers (15 per cent of the total officer corps) had left the military. More than half of them left voluntarily before the actual screenings began; 24 per cent refused to sign the new oath; 18.5 per cent retired; and the remaining 5.5 per cent were dismissed either for incompetence or because their physical condition was unsatisfactory.³ Most of those who either left or were forced to leave were below thirty years of age, which subsequently created considerable problems for the army's command structures. Out of 157 generals, 87 left the military and all the top positions in the Defence Ministry and General Staff were filled with new people, including many officers who had been dismissed after the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and were now reinstated.

The purges eventually led to a change of minister. Though President Vaclav Havel apparently trusted Vacek, a number of leading policymakers demanded his resignation and the appointment of a civilian to the post of Defence Minister. On 18 October 1990, Lubos Dobrovsky, a former spokesman of the Foreign Ministry, was named as Vacek's successor, thus starting a new era in the history of the Defence Ministry. Although this step was necessary in order to ensure the essential element of civilian direction of the military, the selection of individuals for this post would become a rather controversial issue. Since some of the future defence ministers would have either very little or even no armed forces experience whatsoever; both military and non-military experts would question their professional abilities.

Besides the screening, the most important reform of the armed forces was the adoption of new military legislation. The provisional Federal Assembly approved a

¹ Minister Vaclavik was one of the few members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party who wanted to crush the November 1989 demonstrations by the use of selected military units. He reportedly expressed his willingness to implement the provisions of top secret plans code-named 'Wave' and 'Impact' that had been prepared by the Military Intelligence and Secret State Police. Due to the indecisiveness of the party's presidium and the reluctance of most of its members, the force was eventually not used at all.

² The main criteria for screening were collaborating with the secret State Police (StB) or Military Intelligence and holding high posts in the Communist Party organisations.

³ *CTK* (the Czechoslovak Press Agency), (6 September 1990).

new military service law on 14 March 1990. Among the provisions of this law were the reduction of the conscript's service from twenty-four months to eighteen, the grant of religious freedom and the explicit exclusion of the military from the suppression of internal unrest. While most of the innovations included in the statute law were aimed at creating more humane conditions for conscripts and preventing the abuse of military personnel, the provision with the most far-reaching consequences was the introduction of alternative service for conscientious objectors.

The possibility of conscientious objection soon created considerable personnel problems. In 1990 almost 14,000 soldiers on active duty decided to apply for alternative civilian service, and a considerable portion of the young men to be drafted in the spring of 1990 chose to do likewise. Adding to the loss of personnel caused by the screening exercise, the military was facing a shortfall of some 40,000 soldiers by the end of 1990. In the following year a total of 38,000 men refused to serve in the armed forces.⁴ These numbers led to the presentation of a new draft of the law on alternative service in October 1991. This suggested that conscientious objection would remain an available option for only thirty days after the commencement of active duty. It brought little change to the situation.

Following the demise of the communist regime a need emerged also to reformulate the military doctrine of Czechoslovakia. After lengthy debates in the Federal Assembly, a draft was eventually adopted in March 1991. Based on the principle of territorial defence, the new doctrine would not define a specific enemy and thus stipulated an equal distribution of the armed forces throughout the country. It envisaged exclusively defensive missions for the Czechoslovak Army without identifying potential allies or coalitions. The document also stated that Czechoslovakia would continue supporting disarmament in Europe; that it had no territorial claims against other countries; that it did not possess any nuclear weapons and would not try to acquire them in the future; and that it was prepared to support peace missions of the United Nations.

Even before the doctrine was officially adopted, the Ministry of Defence began to develop a long-term plan that was designed to reflect political changes in the country as well as in Europe. In June 1990 the ministry published a document entitled *Aims of the Development of the Czechoslovak Army until 2005*. This envisaged a drastic reduction of the country's military potential and considerable changes in the structure of the armed forces. It envisaged reform in three stages. The first, which was supposed to last from 1991 to 1993, provided for massive reduction of both personnel and equipment along with a redeployment of forces. Manpower was to be reduced by 40,000 men (to a total of around 160,000) and equipment by 40-60 per cent.

The authors of the document asserted that this first phase was based on a number of assumptions that included the following:

- the threat of a global conflict would diminish but not disappear;
- NATO would reform itself and create units that could offer 'operational solutions' to problems that might endanger European security;

⁴ CTK (9 October 1991).

- national, ethnic, territorial and social tensions in Europe – together with the possible failure of economic reforms – might result in regional conflicts;
- at this stage, Czechoslovakia would not be integrated into any broader security structures.⁵

However, these ambitious plans, which aimed at gradual professionalisation of the Czechoslovak armed forces, went unrealised, mainly due to the slow pace of their implementation and, of course, the pending split-up of the country in January 1993.

Among other problems that the armed forces of the post-communist state had to face from the outset were a lack of financial resources to provide for the procurement of new military hardware; the continuous redeployment of units, which often lacked any logic; and, last but not least, progressive deterioration of the image of the army.

While the army would not be seen as an immediate threat to the democratic reforms in the country, it would not get much respect from the public either. A survey conducted by the Institute for Public Opinion Research in mid-1991 showed that only 13 per cent of those asked thought that Czechoslovakia's military equipment was modern and that soldiers were well trained and capable of using this equipment. Asked whether the armed forces enjoyed trust and support among the public, only about 7 per cent responded positively. Moreover, a career in the armed forces would be perceived as one of the least attractive alternatives. Public opinion polls conducted in early 1991 revealed that the job of army officer ranked forty-third out of fifty professions.⁶

Given all this, the reform of Czechoslovakia's armed forces proved to be an immensely difficult and challenging task. Despite some partial steps, the reform was well behind schedule at the end of 1992. This meant that numerous problems of the federal military were inherited by both successor states in 1993.

2. International Activity: A New Security Agenda

Vision of Pan-European Security System: Dissident Ideas Revisited

In order to understand initial dispositions in the field of foreign and security policy it is necessary to examine some of the ideas discussed within Czechoslovakia's dissident community under communist rule. Though some of them were dismissed as utopian by many experts and policymakers in the West already at the time they were formulated, this did not prevent their authors – former dissidents who became policymakers – using them as the guidelines for post-revolutionary Czechoslovak

⁵ *Aims of the Development of the Czechoslovak Army until 2005*, (Prague: Czechoslovak Ministry of Defence, 1990). The fact that both this document and the military doctrine did not explicitly mention even the slightest eventuality of the country's becoming a member of NATO, only illustrates the overall emphasis on non-alliance structures in Europe.

⁶ See *A-Revue* (no.4, 1991) pp.4-5.

foreign and security policy initiatives. Indeed, it could be argued that some concepts even foreshadowed developments in post-communist Europe.

The so-called Prague Appeal, an important Charter 77 document, is crucial to the understanding of Czechoslovakia's foreign policy in the early 1990s.⁷ Issued in March 1985, the document was signed by both Vaclav Havel and Jiri Dienstbier (the latter was one of the spokesmen for Charter 77 at that time) and was intended to be the group's contribution to a Peace Congress in Amsterdam later that year. The appeal insisted that the root cause of the fact that 'Europe is not a continent of peace' was its division, which had to be overcome 'gradually'. The document emphasised that its 45 signatories supported 'all initiatives that serve the ideal of rapprochement and the free association of European nations and opposed all measures that delay or interfere with this goal'. One of the most important questions that the appeal addressed was German unification:

'We cannot avoid topics that have hitherto been taboos. One of these topics is the division of Germany. If, in the context of European reunification, we can deny no one the right to self-determination, this must hold for the Germans as well... Let us openly acknowledge the right of the Germans to decide freely whether, and in what way, they desire a unification of their two states in their present borders'.⁸

Written at a time when no one could have predicted the events that occurred at the end of 1989, the Prague Appeal outlined a scenario that later became reality and provided a point of departure for Czechoslovak foreign policy. After coming to power, both Havel and Dienstbier supported German unification. Their stance helped to make the issue more acceptable to those European nations that were less enthusiastic about a unified Germany.

Other parts of the Prague Appeal had been strongly influenced by the Western peace movement. The document proposed, for instance, the dissolution of both the Warsaw Pact and NATO, the removal of all nuclear weapons from Europe, and the withdrawal of 'US and Soviet military units from the territories of their respective European allies.' Accordingly, during a visit to the United States in February 1990, Havel and Dienstbier made it clear that they would like to see NATO dissolved in favour of a broader European organisation, and all foreign troops stationed in Europe removed. Realising that such an idea could not be acceptable for the United States, Dienstbier later modified his stand, suggesting that US forces should remain in Europe for some time for the sake of stability.

Another proposal by former Czechoslovak dissidents that later became reality was the formation of a 'European Peace Parliament'. This proposal was made by Charter 77 signatories at a conference held in Nijmegen in September 1988. The dissidents suggested that a parliament be established that would represent all European countries, thereby overcoming the continent's bloc system. Perhaps echoing Gorbachev's slogan of a 'common European home', which had been introduced one year earlier, the proposal ended with an appeal that in just two years turned to be

⁷ Charter 77, Document no.5, March 11, 1985, in Vilém Prečan (ed.), *Charta 77 (1977-1989) – Dokumenty (Charter 77 (1977-1989) – the Documents)*, (Scheinfeld-Praha-Bratislava, 1990).

⁸ Ibid.

almost prophetic: 'Let us act as though Europe was not divided; let us act as if we were going to live under one common roof in the year 2000.'⁹

Another significant aspect of Czechoslovak foreign policy-making was a strong sentiment for the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. When the rusted 'Iron Curtain' finally broke down at the end of 1989, the CSCE was the only European security organisation to which Czechoslovakia (like its former eastern bloc allies) belonged. Being among the 35 signatory countries of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act was certainly a propaganda triumph for the communist government, but at the same time it pleased the opponents of the regime. It was particularly the 'human dimension' of the Helsinki process, anchored in the third basket of the Final Act, that had become the 'ideological' basis for Charter 77 as an independent civic initiative whose principal goal was to remind the government of its commitments in the field of human rights.¹⁰ In this context the CSCE would always be seen as an 'ally' to the opposition movements.

In the euphoria at the end of 1989 and the beginning of 1990 the CSCE was acclaimed as one of the important international factors that contributed to the fall of totalitarian regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. Thus it was only logical that Czechoslovak leaders became prominent advocates of a pan-European security system built on the principles of the CSCE. In his address to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on 10 May 1990, President Havel said:

'... foundations could be laid of a new and unified 'Helsinki' security system, which would give a certitude to all the European countries, that they need not to fear one another, since they are all elements of the same system of guaranties based on the principle of equality of all its members and obligation of all to protect independence of any of them.'¹¹

Similarly, in other speeches and essays on the theme of security there was a strong emphasis on the necessity to overcome the 'old way' of perceiving the world and its military blocs. The 'universality' of membership in the CSCE and equality of all states involved would be put in contrast with traditional alliances. Supporters of these concepts of a 'security umbrella' that would equally cover both the Western and Eastern part of the continent argued that the simple dissolution of the Soviet-dominated bloc of countries would not by itself guarantee stability in Europe. Jiri Dienstbier put it clearly:

'Replacing previous membership in the Soviet sphere of influence with integration into another sphere of influence would hardly improve the security situation of Central Europe. Indeed, the traditional concepts of spheres of influence should be retired. A network of European and transatlantic relationships must be created from which no power will be able to extricate itself. This network

⁹ The proposal was later endorsed by the European Network for East-West Dialogue and its ideas were reflected in a plan for the establishment of the Helsinki Citizen's Assembly.

¹⁰ See the Founding Document of the Charter 77 (1.1.1977), whose text begins with a direct reference to the Helsinki Final Act. Vilém Prečan (ed.), *Charta 77 (1977-1989) – Dokumenty (Charter 77 (1977-1989) – the Documents)*, (Scheinfeld-Prague-Bratislava, 1990) pp.9-13.

¹¹ Václav Havel, *Projevy (Speeches)*, (Prague, 1990) p.122.

must be sufficiently dense that no state will dare to defy the new order, nor will any state be able to dominate it'.¹²

Such ideas no longer remained only in the realm of rhetoric and essays. They were soon to be expressed in concrete proposals presented to the international community. In April 1990 the Czechoslovak government proposed an initiative which became known as the 'Memorandum on the European Security Commission'. Foreign Minister Dienstbier presented it to his European counterparts at a meeting of the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London.¹³ Dienstbier described the Czechoslovak proposal as a comprehensive plan to aid the transition to a new collective security system in Europe, to include the 35 member states of the CSCE. The document upheld the broad concept of security and stressed the need of finding a new role for both military alliances of that time, i.e. NATO and the Warsaw Pact, which were described as 'still dividing Europe' and which 'should shift their activity primarily to the field of disarmament'. The Memorandum further assumed that 'future development will strengthen their political role and gradually subdue their military role'.¹⁴

This document outlined three stages. *First*, the CSCE members would sign a new treaty obliging them to give military assistance to any signatory in case of attack. The treaty would be implemented by the institution of a bicameral 'European Security Commission' (ESC), which would include a political chamber and a subordinate military chamber. This commission was supposed to function on the consensus principle and its members were to be representatives of all the CSCE countries.

Among the main tasks of the proposed ESC were assessments of international developments in the context of European security and prevention of crises and conflicts. The ESC was supposed to deal with issues of economical, ecological and humanitarian security and also to have wide competence in the field of disarmament and confidence- and security-building measures. It was assumed that the ESC would meet at the level of foreign ministers and their permanent representatives.

The Czechoslovak proposal was based on the real security situation on the continent, where two former adversary military alliances still existed. Therefore it also contained provisions for direct contacts between their members, sometimes under the supervision of the European neutral and non-aligned countries. It was expected that both NATO and Warsaw Pact would continue to operate during the transition period, but they would inevitably lose their significance.

At the *second stage* of the process, the proposal foresaw the creation of an 'Organisation of European States' (with participation of the United States and Canada). Such an organisation would incorporate and expand existing West European institutions such as the Council of Europe and the European Parliament.

The *third and final stage* of the proposal would consist of the political integration of Europe in the form of a 'United Confederate Europe' which eventually would make all regional pacts and alliances irrelevant. In the meantime, Central

¹² Jiří Dienstbier, 'Central Europe's Security', *Foreign Policy*, no. 83 (Summer, 1991) p.121.

¹³ Western experts usually refer to Dienstbier as the author of the Memorandum, but in reality it was his advisor Jaroslav Sedivy who created this proposal and suggested it as a main theme for the agenda of the March 1990 meeting of Warsaw Pact foreign ministers in Prague. See Jaroslav Sedivy, *Černínský palác v roce nula (The Cernin Palace in the Year Zero)*, (Prague, 1997).

¹⁴ For full text of the memorandum see *Czechoslovak Foreign Policy Documents*, 4-6/1990, (Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prague, 1990).

European security would have been assured through political and economic co-operation.

Such visionary ideas were not exclusive to Vaclav Havel and Czechoslovak diplomacy.¹⁵ But the Memorandum was not accepted, since the West was not willing to give up traditionally reliable guarantees of collective defence provided by NATO in exchange for a risky and uncertain experiment. Still, the Czechoslovak political representation continued its efforts to bring about a transformation of a rather loose Helsinki process into a viable security organisation. Although Havel's suggestion to hold the CSCE summit in Prague in 1990 was turned down,¹⁶ Czechoslovakia remained one of the most active member countries, submitting one proposal after another, often on a bilateral or multilateral basis.

There was, for example, a joint proposal of Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic and Poland dated 6 June 1990, which suggested an institutionalisation of the CSCE process. This recommended meetings of CSCE heads of states and governments every two years, creation of a Council for Security and Co-operation in Europe at the level of foreign ministers, as well as a permanent secretariat. It also envisaged a Centre for Confidence Building, Arms Control and Verification, and a Centre for Conflict Prevention and Settlement.¹⁷ Ideas contained in this proposal were later discussed and some of them eventually adopted.

In November 1990 the members of the CSCE met at a Paris Summit. In its outcome, the *Charter of Paris for a New Europe*, Czechoslovakia's efforts were acknowledged in the selection of Prague as the seat of the newly-established CSCE Secretariat. The capital of Czechoslovakia thus became the home of the nascent institutionalised CSCE. Thanks to its perceived historical democratic traditions, international credit gained by non-violent revolution and, last but not least, its globally respected president, this small country in the heart of Europe seemed to be emerging as an important actor in the European security policy arena.

However, hopes of a system of collective security in Europe were soon to be shaken considerably. The war which followed the crisis and later the break-up of Yugoslavia turned out to be the hardest and in certain respects the most crucial test for the entire continent, including its evolving security institutions.

Under the effect of the Balkan crisis, in which all the European institutions were doomed to a role of desperately powerless onlookers, the policymakers from the post-communist countries, who only recently dreamt of a lasting peace and firm collective security structures, had to revise their viewpoints on international security issues, specially in the area of conflict prevention and resolution. Also the Czechoslovak diplomats realised that certain ideas they had been playing with, such as the concept of a CSCE military force, were unacceptable to the majority of NATO states. Therefore they had to take a more pragmatic approach. Although they continued to press some of the suggestions from the Memorandum on a European Security Commission, they put more emphasis on notions about which they could hope to achieve consensus with their colleagues from the West.

¹⁵ For example, Polish President Walesa designed a project of the European Citizens' Assembly and the Polish Prime Minister Mazowiecki suggested a permanent political organ comprising the foreign ministers of all the European countries.

¹⁶ This suggestion was a part of Havel's address to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, 10 May 1990.

¹⁷ See *Czechoslovak Foreign Policy Documents*, 4-6/1990 and 7-9/1990, (Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prague, 1990) pp.113-115 and 307-309.

This change of approach was reflected also in the so-called Prague Propositions. These were several points agreed upon by the Czechoslovak and German foreign ministers during a visit of Hans Dietrich Genscher to Prague prior to the Berlin Session of the CSCE Ministerial Council on 11 April 1991. In the first and second of these Propositions, the necessity of opening the EC to new European democracies was emphasised, and the success of political and economic changes in Central and Eastern Europe was declared a precondition for European security in general. The third proposition stated that it was of vital importance for the whole Europe to 'further develop the CSCE process on the basis of the Paris Charter for a New Europe and to enlarge it with new institutions'.¹⁸ In other words, the significant role of the EC, NATO and the WEU in strengthening European stability, as well as the necessity of transatlantic co-operation with the U.S. and Canada, were stressed here. The ministers expressed their conviction, that 'the European peace order they strive for includes also the USSR.... Borders, that were dividing Europe, must not be moved to its (Soviet) Western frontiers.'¹⁹

Czechoslovak diplomacy played an important role also during the preparatory period of the Helsinki II Summit in 1992. At the second session of the CSCE Ministerial Council in Prague in January 1992, Foreign Minister Dienstbier assumed the post of Chairman of the CSCE. After the parliamentary elections in June 1992 this function was passed to his successor. Even the contemporary preparations for the split-up of Czechoslovakia did not distract the CSCE Chairman and the Czechoslovak delegation actively participated in drafting the final documents of the summit.

Nevertheless, developments on both the domestic and international political scenes clearly indicated that the short period of post-revolutionary euphoria and yearning for pan-European security models was ending; and that the continent was setting out on a pragmatic and realistic path to assure its well-being and security. The leadership of the new Czech Republic quickly adapted to this trend.

Future of Alliances: A Key Aspect of Regional Co-operation

Czechoslovakia's attitude toward its closest post-communist neighbours, Poland and Hungary, was strongly influenced by the previous co-operation among former dissidents from all three countries, which in some cases had turned into personal friendship. Another reason for the strengthening of ties with the country's southern and northern neighbours was the conviction that the reform-minded states had to join forces in their effort to achieve emancipation from Soviet dominance. Co-operation among Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland thus seemed to have an ideal ground. Moreover, all three states were facing a variety of similar problems and challenges, and some form of interaction thus seemed very natural. One of the attempts to create a Czechoslovak-Hungarian-Polish regional group can be traced back to September 1989, when the government of Polish Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki announced Poland's interest in expanding and strengthening ties with Prague and Budapest. One of the aims of this initiative was to create a new regional group within the still existing Soviet-led alliance.

¹⁸ See *Hospodářské noviny* (*Economic News*, 12 April 1991).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

In the post-revolutionary period some Western thinkers too presented proposals for rearrangement of relations between these countries. In January 1990 former US National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski suggested that Czechoslovakia and Poland form a confederation, in order to 'fill a vacuum' between the Soviet Union and a unified Germany. In later statements he argued that separately the two countries would be too weak to influence European developments but would constitute an important factor if united.²⁰ While Brzezinski's proposal received some support among intellectuals and policymakers in Poland, it was quickly dismissed by Czechoslovak officials. Foreign Minister Dienstbier said:

'This is a proposal brought in by an American political scientist of Polish origin. I myself do not think, and hardly any Poles do, that we can resolve our situation by creating some kind of Polish-Czechoslovak confederation. Our problems are absolutely different'.²¹

Several months later, in an article published in *Newsweek*, former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger outlined his ideas on the future of Central Europe.²² He proposed the creation of a neutral belt composed of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary and the placing of strict limitations on the types of weapons and numbers of troops on German and Soviet territory along it. In a lecture in Prague two days after the publication of the article, Kissinger claimed that such a system would rule out the possibility of a surprise attack on Europe.

This proposal, too, found no support among the Czechoslovak leadership. Foreign Ministry spokesman Lubos Dobrovsky said that it 'represented an interesting attack on Czechoslovak foreign policy'. He further stated that Kissinger wished 'to renew the bipolarity of Europe, assuming only that the dividing line is moved some four hundred kilometres to the east.' Dobrovsky added that 'we have been a buffer zone before and we did not feel very comfortable'.²³

Instead of playing with theoretical constructs, the Czechoslovak leadership began to take more realistic steps toward the cultivation of its relationships with the two neighbours in early 1990, stressing the significance of regional co-operation in East-Central Europe. During his visit to Poland in January that year President Havel told Sejm deputies:

'We have the chance to transform the wreath of European states that until recently were colonised by the Soviets...into a special body that will approach the richer Western Europe not as a poor apostate or a helpless amnestied prisoner but as somebody who also brings something'.²⁴

²⁰ The idea of setting up a Czechoslovak-Polish confederation was not entirely new. Shortly after World War I the Polish leadership had proposed a similar plan. During World War II the Polish and Czechoslovak governments in exile again discussed such a possibility, in the context of a post-war re-organisation in Europe.

²¹ See *Lidova demokracie* (8 January 1990).

²² See *Newsweek* (international edition, 18 June 1990).

²³ See *AP* (19 June 1990).

²⁴ See *Lidove noviny* (22 January 1990).

A regional framework of close political and economic co-operation among Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, he asserted, would lay the grounds for the region to harmonise its policies in the area of security, thus making it better prepared to join the pan-European security system that could emerge from the CSCE. Havel further proposed that the three states form a loose coalition similar to the Benelux grouping. It would include a co-ordinated plan for economic development, a common agenda for reintegration with the rest of Europe, and a multilateral security framework built on non-aggression and friendship treaties.

On Havel's initiative, a meeting of the political representation of the three countries was called in Bratislava for April 1990. The meeting was the result of Havel's ambitious aims of increasing co-operation and, above all, co-ordinating the three countries' proclaimed 'return to Europe'. It was attended by Presidents Wojciech Jaruzelski and Matyas Szuros and the prime ministers and foreign ministers of Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary. Representatives of Austria, Italy, and Yugoslavia participated as observers.

The so-called 'Havel Plan' for regional security was outlined in greater detail during this summit. It stipulated, among other requirements, a common policy on the future of the Warsaw Pact. The issue of military alliances however, turned out to be the main cause of dissension and accounted for the *de facto* failure of the whole event. Differences of opinions on security matters proved insuperable.

Whereas the Polish reaction to the proposal was largely positive, the Hungarian leadership was opposed to the Czechoslovak vision of a new pan-European security structure built on the CSCE, which implied dissolution not only of the Warsaw Pact but also, at a later time, of NATO. Since Hungary was already making steps to foster its relations with the Alliance, it was not disposed to urge a strengthened CSCE. Moreover, representatives from both Hungary and Poland expressed their displeasure at the number and the speed of Czechoslovak foreign policy initiatives. In the end the meeting produced no joint statement and no efforts were made to hold further multilateral consultations. All three countries seemed to have realised that bilateral discussions on specific topics were likely to be more successful.

For example, there were some concrete steps made in the military sphere. In September 1990 deputy defence ministers of the three countries met in Zakopane in Poland, to discuss the democratisation and restructuring of their respective armies. These talks bore fruit in January 1991, when Hungary and Czechoslovakia signed a five-year defence co-operation agreement; similar Czechoslovak-Polish and Hungarian-Polish military accords were signed in February and March 1991 respectively.

One of the lessons the Czechoslovak leaders learned in Bratislava in 1990 was that if they wanted to succeed in their efforts to bring about effective regional co-operation in security terms, Czechoslovakia's position on the future of existing military alliances, especially the Warsaw Pact, had to be changed. Therefore, the initial calls for dissolution of both the Warsaw Pact and NATO, as well as the quick removal of all foreign troops stationed in Europe – calls which had been voiced before Havel's visit to the United States in February – were modified, and by May 1990 Czechoslovakia was saying that US forces should remain in Europe as a stabilising factor and that NATO was the better suited of the two alliances to be

transformed into the nucleus of a new security system – perhaps with a new name and a different military doctrine.

In the already mentioned speech to the Council of Europe on 10 May 1990, Havel said that 'while NATO had been established as an instrument for the defence of Western democracies, the Warsaw Pact had been used by the Soviet Union as an instrument for the pursuit of its own foreign policy goals.' He added that NATO, 'the structure of which makes more sense, is more democratic, and simply works better (than that of the Warsaw Pact)' had the best credentials for being transformed into the nucleus of a new European security system.²⁵

The Czechoslovak government also modified its position on the Warsaw Pact and became reluctant to call for its quick dissolution. This was also in line with Western thinking, which at that time supported the reform of the Warsaw Pact rather than its abolition, as advocated by Hungary. Foreign Minister Dienstbier listed a number of reasons for Czechoslovakia's continued membership in the Warsaw Pact. Among other things, he argued that 'for the first time in history the Warsaw Pact is of use to Czechoslovakia' because it was currently involved in arms reduction negotiations throughout Europe.²⁶ Earlier, at a meeting of the Warsaw Pact's Ministers of Foreign Affairs in March, Dienstbier had said that the pact's military role should continue 'as long as conventional arms reduction talks go on in Vienna.'²⁷ Dienstbier also made important statements on the Soviet Union's relations with the rest of Europe. He said that 'all efforts must be made to keep the Soviet Union in Europe and prevent a new 'Versailles complex', this time in the USSR.'

Czechoslovak Prime Minister Marian Calfa also supported his country's membership in the Warsaw Pact. In a speech to the Federal Assembly on 3 July 1990 he said, however, that membership was conditional on sweeping changes in the structure of the pact and on the pact's relinquishing its command over Czechoslovak troops.²⁸ His government's goal was to have a state whose army was subordinate only to its own command and the civilian minister.

After Hungarian President Arpad Goncz's visit to Czechoslovakia on 12 July a joint statement was released by Goncz and Havel in which they said that 'both sides agree that it is necessary to overcome the idea of a joint command and to turn the Warsaw Pact into a political rather than military instrument for disarmament talks with NATO.'²⁹ Three days later a commission of government officials and military experts from all Warsaw Pact member countries met in Celakovice, near Prague. Although the official purpose of the meeting was a discussion about 'new structures of security and stability in Europe', the commission focused on changes in the structure and function of the Warsaw Pact. At the same time, the possibility of its eventual abolition was also considered. Czechoslovak Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Dobrovsky was quoted by reporters as saying that the pact could be entrusted with 'a number of very useful, practical, and positive tasks that should be completed in two years, so that the reasons for its further continuation will cease to exist.'³⁰

Czechoslovakia's insistence that the Warsaw Pact should be preserved for some time, but with different objectives, was apparently based on two assumptions.

²⁵ Václav Havel, *Projevy (Speeches)*, (Prague, 1990) p.119.

²⁶ *AP* (13 June 1990).

²⁷ See *The New York Times* (19 March 1990).

²⁸ *CTK* (3 July 1990).

²⁹ *AP* (16 July 1990).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

First, Czechoslovak policymakers believed that, as a purely political group, it would be in a better position to pursue the disarmament process than its individual members. Secondly, in stressing the need to prevent isolation of the Soviet Union, they intended to somehow show their gratitude to Gorbachev for the role that his policies had played in transforming Eastern Europe. They seemed to believe that keeping the Warsaw Pact alive for some period could help the Soviet leader to stabilise his domestic political position. Subsequent events in the USSR demonstrated, however, that this was wishful thinking.

Following the Bratislava summit a new approach seemed to emerge within Czechoslovak foreign policy thinking: one that put the emphasis on faster integration into Western political, security and economic structures rather than their replacement by new pan-European ones. Czechoslovak policymakers now seemed to have come to the conclusion that their country's national interest was best served by the 'integration' option plus bilateral links with both Eastern and Western states. Only when it became clear that Western institutions, particularly the EC and NATO, were not going to respond to the new situation in East Central Europe quickly, and early affiliation was highly improbable – only then did the issue of trilateral co-operation come up again in Czechoslovak foreign and security policy considerations.

This time, however, it was not based on idealistic visions but rather on a pragmatic view. This was the conviction that the three closely co-operating countries had better chances of being taken seriously by the West. Moreover, trilateral co-operation would be clearly seen as a stabilising element in the region thus becoming a potential bargaining chip in negotiations on economic assistance and even in the process of applying for membership in Western institutions.

This approach found favour after the CSCE summit in November 1990, which made Czechoslovakia realise that European countries were not prepared for the CSCE to become a pan-European security system. Together with Poland, Czechoslovakia joined Hungary in its efforts to draw closer to NATO, thereby eliminating one of the key divisions at the time of the Bratislava summit. During the course of the last months of 1990 the three countries also recognised some of the commonalties in their position toward the Soviet Union: they lacked the military power to defend themselves and yet had no security guarantees from the West. This fact prompted them to take concerted steps to bring about the demise of the Warsaw Pact, which they described as an 'empty shell', and to begin making efforts to join Western structures.

This convergence of the positions of Czechoslovakia with those of its neighbours set the stage for the February 1991 summit in Visegrad.³¹ This event began to shift the focus of co-operation from dealing with the Soviet Union to integrating with the West. The Czechoslovak-Polish aim of regional co-operation was merged with Hungary's preference for the existing Western security structures. The *Declaration of Co-operation on the Road to European Integration* – signed by the Czechoslovak President Vaclav Havel, Polish President Lech Walesa, and Hungarian Prime Minister Jozsef Antall – was a clear signal that all three countries would strive to build a common approach toward Western institutions. The declaration, stated:

³¹ The location of the summit was quite symbolic: in 1335, the Bohemian, Polish and Hungarian kings met at Visegrad Castle to consult on how to reduce regional tensions.

'...The co-ordination of the effort of the three countries - bearing in mind their distinct national characteristics - increases the chance of achieving the desired results...of total integration into the European political, economic, security and legislative order'.³²

Though military agreements were also signed at Visegrad, all three leaders emphasised that their co-operation efforts did not constitute a new bloc or alliance; and that such efforts were not directed against either the Soviet Union or Germany.³³ The sole purpose of the 'Visegrad Triangle' was to jointly achieve access to Western structures and to maintain stability and security in Central Europe in the meantime. The governments asserted that a purely military alliance would *not* facilitate Central European countries' incorporation into the Western system. As Dienstbier wrote:

'...the security of the Central European countries does not require separate security structures, nor is there a need for an autonomous security order for that region alone. The key to Central European security lies in the widest possible use of available existing structures'.³⁴

The insistence that co-operation in the Visegrad framework did not amount to the forming of a bloc and that it was not directed against anybody became a characteristic feature of the Czechoslovak attitude towards tripartite activities.

When the Soviet hard-liners attempted a coup in Moscow on 19 August 1991, representatives of the three Visegrad countries met immediately to formulate a unified response. The subsequent developments in the Soviet Union – resulting in its ultimate disintegration – served as a catalyst for enhanced co-operation. Growing concern about instability along the three countries' eastern borders prompted more intensive consultations and increasing desire to be firmly anchored in the West. The following Cracow and Prague summit declarations reflected these sentiments.

The Cracow summit in October 1991 served primarily to underline the determination of the Visegrad states to 'complete their integration into the European political, economic, legal, and security system'.³⁵ The Visegrad leaders also issued a joint declaration calling for 'close and institutionalised co-operation with NATO'. Finally, they expressed their intention to create a free trade area among their countries as soon as possible; a step that was very much praised specially by Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

The Prague summit in May 1992 was the most successful of the Visegrad gatherings. The West was strongly encouraging co-operation among the three, which was now moving toward economic dimensions such as CEFTA. All three countries recognised the importance of the Visegrad framework in securing better relations with Western institutions, since closer relations with the EC had become the most important item on their agenda. President Havel expressed it in the following terms:

³² Cf. Petr Lunak, 'History, Reality and Central Europe's Security', *SAIS Review*, no.2 (Summer-Fall 1992) p.138.

³³ See *Lidove noviny* (22 January 1991).

³⁴ Jiří Dienstbier, 'Central Europe's Security', *Foreign Policy* no.83 (Summer 1991) p.127.

³⁵ For Cracow Declaration, see *European Security* (Spring 1992) pp.104-108.

'Co-ordination has, above all, considerably helped all three countries in their entry into democratic European structures. The democratic world to a certain extent measures our trustworthiness by our ability to reach agreement. They consider us a troika'.³⁶

Only one month after the Prague summit, however, the right-wing coalition led by the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) of the then Finance Minister Vaclav Klaus won the parliamentary elections in Czechoslovakia. This marked the beginning of a different attitude to foreign and security policy, stressing an individual approach rather than concerted co-operation with other reform-minded neighbours. Klaus' party had been the only element on the Czechoslovak political scene challenging Havel's and Dienstbier's policies. In the course of 1992 Klaus and his political allies showed that they were going to put more emphasis on bilateral treaties with clear-cut aims, rather than on wide-scale co-operation in the troika.

Back in April 1992, Deputy Chairman of the ODS Jozef Zieleniec had said – at the press conference of his party – that 'integration with Poland and Hungary is not necessarily a precondition for Czechoslovakia's return to Europe.' He added that if this process was 'pursued vigorously, it would be counterproductive.'³⁷ The ODS also charged the Foreign Ministry with 'again indulging in political experiments' by allegedly trying to turn Czechoslovakia into a bridge between East and West. Though such critical remarks may have been merely part of the pre-election campaign rhetoric, they clearly demonstrated that the ODS might perceive future tight co-operation with other former Soviet satellites as a potential hindrance to the country's fast integration to the Western structures.

This attitude, which seemed to be slowly gaining ground in Prague, also created a high degree of sensitivity among Czechoslovak policymakers toward anything that could have been interpreted as the forming of new blocs on the periphery of Western Europe. When Klaus took office in June 1992, he repeatedly criticised supporters of the Visegrad framework for advocating the creation of new bureaucracies and institutions. His criticism was dismissed as groundless, since well before his election both Czechoslovak and Hungarian leaders stressed that any creation of new institutions was unnecessary. Nevertheless, it became clear that the newly-elected Czechoslovak government was not going to sustain the foreign and security policy initiatives of its predecessor.

The new Czechoslovak strategy was based on a unilateral approach to Western institutions, the development of bilateral relations with individual European powers; and, to a lesser degree, the co-ordination of policies with Poland and Hungary. This strategy was designed to create the conditions for the soon-to-be-formed Czech Republic to succeed in its long-term aim of early admission into the EC and NATO.

³⁶ See *Lidove noviny* (11 May 1992).

³⁷ *CTK* (13 April 1992).

3. Relations with Russia and Germany: Overcoming the Strains of the Past

After the end of the totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia, relations with the Soviet Union could be described as somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand, there was a certain degree of gratitude to the Soviet leader Michail Gorbachev, who was seen by many in the Czechoslovak leadership as the initiator of the policies that contributed to the ultimate fall of communism in Europe. On the other hand, the Soviet Union was viewed as not only a latent threat – given the possibility of conservatives seizing power – but also a potential source of a long-term instability on Czechoslovakia's eastern border.

At the same time, post-communist Czechoslovakia remained heavily dependent on the Soviet market and relatively cheap energy deliveries, as well as supplies of military hardware. The virtual breakdown of the market in the Soviet Union, together with the inability to pay for goods already delivered and cutbacks in energy supplies, caused serious problems for the Czechoslovak economy.

Despite numerous difficulties, a series of geopolitically significant events completely changed the relations between the two states. The withdrawal of Soviet troops from Czechoslovak territory was successfully completed in June 1991, which was seen as a major international achievement. The subsequent dissolution of both the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance – these haunting remnants of the past for the majority of the Czech and Slovak people – also significantly contributed to the normalisation of mutual relations. When both organisations were finally dismantled, it was seen in Prague as an event of great symbolic value. Signing a friendship and co-operation treaty, however, made the most important step towards a new era of co-existence of the two countries.

Both countries needed almost two years to agree on the text of an agreement to replace the infamous document of 1970, which was one of the most visible expressions of the Brezhnev Doctrine. The two main obstacles to such a treaty were the question of Czechoslovakia's freedom to join organisations considered 'hostile' by the Soviet Union and the issue of compensation for the damage caused by the Soviet Army while stationed in Czechoslovakia after the Soviet-led intervention in August 1968.

The negotiations remained inconclusive until August 1991; but, after the unsuccessful coup attempt in Moscow, it took the two sides less than five weeks to eventually agree on a text. On 3 October Foreign Minister Dienstbier and his Soviet counterpart Boris Pankin initialled the *Treaty on Good-Neighbourliness, Friendly Relations, and Co-operation* in Prague; the document was to have been signed by Presidents Havel and Gorbachev in December 1991 in Moscow. The subsequent disintegration of the Soviet Union prevented this, however, and Czechoslovakia began preparing friendship treaties with the newly-independent former Soviet republics.

For obvious reasons, the treaty with Russia was given priority and it took only a few months to prepare the document. Negotiations between the two sides did not seem to be very complicated, and on 1 April 1992 Presidents Havel and Yeltsin signed the accord in the Kremlin. As a gesture of goodwill, Yeltsin handed Havel a number of documents on the 1968 Warsaw Pact intervention in Czechoslovakia.

In several press conferences before the Czechoslovak delegation's departure from Moscow, Czechoslovak officials praised the agreements as the end of an era of

bilateral relations marked by Czechoslovakia's total dependence on the Soviet Union and by the totalitarian character of both regimes. During the ceremony in the Kremlin, Havel praised Russia for having ended the ideologically inspired division of the world and for having chosen the path of democracy.

With the exception of Hungary, which signed a friendship treaty with Ukraine and Russia before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia was the first country of the former Warsaw Pact to have reached such an agreement with the Russian Federation (and, after Finland, only the second country to sign such a treaty with Russia at all).

As for the treaty itself, only a few parts differed from the Czechoslovak-Soviet agreement initialled in October 1991. The main difference was probably the inclusion of a relatively strong condemnation of the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. While the earlier text had also mentioned the invasion – stating that the signing parties intended 'to make a clear break from the pattern of their past mutual relations, which culminated in the events of August 1968' – the new agreement was far more outspoken in this respect. As a matter of fact, President Havel indicated in several interviews that it was the Russian side that insisted on the new formulation. The preamble stated that:

'in connection with the illegal use of force against Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the unjustifiable stay of Soviet forces on Czechoslovak territory thereafter, the contracting parties share the wish definitively to close the book on their totalitarian pasts'.

It further stressed the 'traditional friendship between the peoples of the two states' – a formulation which might be appropriate to such a kind of a treaty but which sounded somewhat artificial in view of the problematic relations between the two countries over the preceding forty years. (It is noteworthy that a similar sentence was *not* included in the Czechoslovak-German treaty).

The text also enjoined both signatories to base their relations on the principles of international law, the United Nations Charter, and the rules agreed upon in the CSCE. In addition, it emphasised the 'significance of uncompromising adherence to human rights and basic freedoms and to the principles of democracy, humanitarianism, and the rule of law.' Conflict between the two states should be resolved exclusively by peaceful means. Another provision stated:

'Neither party will allow its territory to be used for aggression or other violent acts against one of the signatories...Should one of the contracting parties be subject to an armed attack, the other party will not grant any military or other support [to the aggressor] and will make efforts to solve the conflict in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter and the documents of the CSCE'.³⁸

This clause practically demonstrated the abolition of the former Warsaw Pact style of relations: the corresponding provision in the 1970 Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship

³⁸ *Czech Foreign Policy Documents*, 4-6/1993, (Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prague, 1993) pp.110-116.

Treaty had stressed that an attack against one of the contracting parties constituted an attack against the other, with all the attendant consequences.

The 1992 treaty also ruled that regular meetings would be held between ministries and other government agencies and that the highest state authorities would hold negotiations at least once a year. The document stressed that the two governments would support nuclear, chemical, biological and conventional disarmament in Europe, as well as efforts to 'create permanent structures of pan-European security.' The provision contained in Paragraph 11 of the treaty – which stated that both signatories would strive to prevent 'a new division of Europe' – was viewed as controversial however. Because it was not accompanied by an explanation, it thus remained open to various interpretations: for instance, that it was a warning against possible Czechoslovak membership in those Western institutions which would be perceived by Russia as 'causing division of Europe'.

Another important document, signed simultaneously, was the agreement on compensation for damages caused by Soviet troops stationed on Czechoslovak territory. This document had been preceded by a Czechoslovak government resolution on 12 March 1992 that received virtually no publicity and hence went almost unnoticed in Czechoslovakia. The treaty provided that all damages caused by the Soviet presence would be paid for by donating to Czechoslovakia the installations and buildings left behind by the Soviet military. In addition, Russia was to transfer to the Czechoslovak authorities all proceeds collected from the sale of former Soviet property in Czechoslovakia. Given the poor state of the installations and equipment concerned, this provision turned out to be highly unfavourable for the Czechoslovak side.³⁹ The agreement, however, seemed to be the only possible way at that time to close this issue once and for all.

At least the Friendship and Co-operation Treaty finally put the two countries' relations back on a normal footing. Both sides made it clear that they regarded one another as fully sovereign states and both pledged to adhere to internationally recognised principles of bilateral relations. In retrospect, the accord also paved the way for good relations between Russia and the infant Czech Republic. Its only surprising element was the fact that the treaty never became a political issue on the Czechoslovak domestic scene, particularly in comparison with the effort by some of the political parties to mobilise the public against a similar treaty signed with Germany.

In the context of the Cold War, relations between Czechoslovakia and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) were subject to considerable strains, while the relationship between Czechoslovakia and the communist German Democratic Republic was officially set in the framework of 'socialist internationalism' and thus considered to be unproblematic. Both totalitarian states were 'allies' in the Warsaw Pact, and also bound by bilateral treaties.

Official relations between Czechoslovakia and the FRG began to improve in the 1970s as a result of the West German Chancellor Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*. This new approach, sanctioned and supported by the Soviet leadership, led to the signing of a series of treaties between the FRG and its eastern neighbours, including the *Treaty*

³⁹ Many of the buildings were not constructed according to Czechoslovak health and safety standards and therefore had to be demolished. Other installations were in such a bad shape that renovating them cost almost as much as new construction.

on *Mutual Relations between the FRG and Czechoslovakia*, signed during Brandt's visit to Prague in December 1973.

One of the most important provisions of this document was that it declared the infamous Munich agreement null and void. At the same time, however, any possible legal consequence of this annulment was ruled out. The treaty stated that all differences between the two countries were to be resolved exclusively by peaceful means. The contracting parties agreed that they had no territorial claims against each other and that they would not make any such claims in the future.⁴⁰ The practical value of the treaty remained a matter of debate, as East-West relations determined relations between the two countries in general. The conditions for a new relationship were created only by the events of 1989 (in both countries).

Immediately after becoming President, Havel paid official visits to the two German states on 2 January 1990. This gesture had great symbolic value (for the first time in more than forty years the first official visit of the Czechoslovak President was to somewhere else than the USSR) and demonstrated both Havel's and Dienstbier's commitments to their ideas from dissident times. Their outspoken support for German unification effectively helped other European states to overcome their own reservations in this respect.

The Czechoslovak leadership also signalled its willingness to deal with unresolved questions of the past. Havel said, 'we have a duty to apologise to the Germans who were expelled after the Second World War'.⁴¹ Dienstbier stated, in the same tone, that it was Czechoslovakia's 'moral duty to make a statement on what happened to innocent German women and children'.⁴² These statements, which received support from various Slovak leaders and the Catholic Church, launched a wave of criticism by the communists as well as by the representatives of some other parties. Shortly after Havel's visit, Dienstbier and his German counterpart Genscher agreed to establish a commission of historians to investigate all those events that had contributed to the formerly strained relations between the two countries, including the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia and the 1945 expulsion of more than three and half million Sudeten Germans from Czechoslovakia.

All these gestures were well received in Germany, and the fact that Czechoslovakia was among the first states to give open support to the unification process improved mutual relations even further. Nevertheless, both governments were facing considerable opposition to the planned new friendship treaty, which was considered necessary on both sides in the context of the changing political and security landscape in Europe.

Some Czech nationalists, communists, and a number of representatives of other political parties including the Social Democrats were opposed to including in the treaty any expressions of regret over the expulsion of the German minority, claiming that this would undermine the Potsdam agreements. Representatives of the Sudeten German associations in Germany (especially in Bavaria) demanded that it should cover such questions as their right to return to Czechoslovakia and the post-war confiscation and nationalisation of German property. Negotiations between the

⁴⁰ Miroslav Kunstat, 'Nemecko a Ceska republika' (Germany and the Czech Republic), in: Vladimír Handl, Jan Hon, Otto Pick (eds.), *Vztahy SRN ke statum stredni Evropy (Relations of the FRG and the Central European States)*, (Institute of International Relations, Prague, 1998) p.198.

⁴¹ See *The New York Times* (6 January 1990).

⁴² *CTK* (19 December 1989).

two governments were therefore very complicated and unusually protracted. Moreover, the occasional rumours about the content of the treaty, which would appear in the media, fuelled criticism on both sides.

The situation was further complicated by a clause in the draft preamble to the treaty which stated that 'the Czechoslovak state has never ceased to exist since 1918'. Acceptance of an interruption in the country's continuity would have meant a formal recognition of the legitimacy of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, which had been declared illegal at the Potsdam Conference, and could have had serious consequences. However, reflecting the rising wave of nationalism in Slovakia, the Slovak representatives insisted on a change, claiming that the statement ignored the existence of the Slovak State in wartime.⁴³ This objection was considered irrational by both parties, as it not only revived the memory of the darkest era in Slovak history but, if taken seriously, would also place Slovakia among the defeated states of the Second World War, with all the legal consequences.

Finally, after months of negotiations, the treaty was initialled during the visit to Czechoslovakia of the German President Richard von Weizsäcker on 7 October 1991. It contained an unusually long preamble, which touched upon many sensitive historical issues. It stated that the two countries were determined to base their relations again on the 'centuries-old, fruitful traditions of their common history; never again to use force or to seek revenge against each other; and to overcome the consequences of the painful events that marked relations between the two countries in this century.'

The preamble also reaffirmed 'the uninterrupted existence of the Czechoslovak state since 1918' and the principles of the Treaty on Mutual Relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and Czechoslovakia of 1973. It said, too, that 'the Munich agreement of 28 September 1938 is considered null and void', but not that this agreement had been invalid from the outset, as the Czechoslovak side would have preferred.⁴⁴

Among the most important provisions of the treaty were the ones that enjoined both parties to solve differences exclusively by peaceful means and to renounce any territorial claims against each other. Germany also pledged to give every assistance to Czechoslovakia in its economic development and to support its application for full membership of the EC. Both sides stressed that they would base their relations on international agreements, particularly the United Nations Charter, the Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter for a New Europe.

Article 3 of the treaty, dealing with the inviolability of borders between the two states, attracted most of the criticism in Czechoslovakia. Some Social Democrats as well as the left-oriented press argued that the treaty did not address the issue of borders properly.⁴⁵ The subject of their criticism was a formulation in the treaty describing the frontiers between the two countries as 'existing borders', a term that had been used by the West German side to refer to the *inner* German borders prior to unification. The Czechoslovak government was therefore accused of accepting a formulation which was less definitive than the term 'common border' used in the 1973

⁴³ See *Respekt* (29 September 1991).

⁴⁴ For a discussion of the possible consequences if the latter formulation had been adopted, see Miroslav Kunstat, 'Nemecko a Ceska republika' (Germany and the Czech Republic), in: Vladimír Handl, Jan Hon, Otto Pick (eds.), *Vztahy SRN ke statum stredni Evropy (Relations of the FRG and the Central European States)*, (Institute of International Relations, Prague, 1998) p.201.

⁴⁵ See *Rude Pravo* (10 October 1991).

treaty. The critics claimed that the article could be interpreted in various ways and that Germany could, in fact, come up with territorial demands in the future.

The criticism was based solely on a literal interpretation of the first part of Article 3, utterly disregarding the mutual abrogation of territorial claims. Such criticism does not have any historical grounds either, since the Czechoslovak-German borders have never been a controversial issue and none of the Sudeten organisations ever demanded any secession of historically Bohemian territory to Germany. In their effort to revive the 'German threat', therefore, the representatives of some political parties in Czechoslovakia were following their narrow partisan interests.

The fact that the treaty did not deal with the issue of property confiscated from the Sudeten Germans has been criticised on both sides. Czechoslovakia's restitution laws apply only to property that was confiscated after the communist take-over in February 1948, which effectively rules out any return of property to Germans. Several officials and media in Czechoslovakia demanded that the treaty should have said explicitly that Germans would not have their property returned.

Sudeten German representatives complained that the treaty did not include a provision on the possibility of their resettling in Czechoslovakia. This demand gave rise to some controversy in Czechoslovakia. While some people argued that such provision would call into question the Potsdam agreements, others asserted that if Czechoslovakia really wanted to 'join Europe' it had to grant Germans the right to settle and work on the territory of their choice.

The treaty was signed during the visit to Czechoslovakia of the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl on 27 February 1992. In his speech on this occasion President Havel said that the treaty showed the determination of both nations to 'look even at the darkest sides of their common history and the will to establish mutual relations on the basis of mutual esteem and respect for human rights'.⁴⁶

Though the document reflected the spirit of full normalisation of relations between the two countries, it did leave aside several important issues. These were to be resolved only later, by the diplomacy of the Czech Republic.

4. Czechoslovakia on the Eve of Separation

The developments that followed the June 1992 parliamentary elections resulted in the process of peaceful division of the federal state as the only possible solution to almost two years of deadlock over the state's constitutional set-up. This inevitably had consequences for both successor states. The Czech Republic was to face a reduction of the number of its immediate neighbours, its territory being virtually surrounded by Slovakia and two German-speaking states, Germany and Austria. It was clear that Germany's influence over the Czech Republic would thus increase considerably. Moreover, since the Czech Republic was not to be immediately affected by developments in Ukraine and Hungary, it would be obvious that the country's interest in these states would gradually diminish.

It was also clear that, because of their different historical experience and outlook, the Czech and Slovak national interests would slowly grow apart. While

⁴⁶ Václav Havel, *Vázení občane: projevy 1990-1992 (Dear Citizens-Speeches 1990-1992)*, (Lidové noviny, Prague, 1992) p.153.

Prague had been clearly demonstrating its determination to turn to the West, Slovakia was expected to look eastwards, nurturing ties to a potentially unstable Ukraine and Russia. Such differences in foreign policy orientation would necessarily find their reflection in the security policies of both successor states.

The split-up of Czechoslovakia ended the short existence of a federal state that had gone through three foreign policy phases. This period can be shortly characterised by a changing way of thinking on foreign and security policy concepts. It started with an idealistic approach that included experiments with non-alliance security structures; then the reality of existing political and military blocs was acknowledged and used as a tool for trilateral regional co-operation. Finally, it developed into a purely realist attitude, stressing the importance of the country's quick integration into Western security institutions – an attitude that formed the bedrock of Czech security policy in the years to come.

III. PATH OF REALISM: TOWARD EURO-ATLANTIC STRUCTURES (1993-1996)

1. Security Agenda of the Czech Republic

New Geostrategic Location: Smaller but More Secure?

Even after the split of Czechoslovakia the Czech Republic remained in the direct neighbourhood of both NATO and EC. Its location as the westernmost part of the former communist bloc became more apparent. Despite the unfinished political and economic transformation and process of build-up of democratic society it was obvious that the mentality and the life-style of its people were the closest to the Western countries, as compared to other 'new' democracies.

With the division of the federation the Czech Republic found itself obliged to consider how to provide for its security. On the one hand it did not have any international security guarantees in terms of allegiance to a military alliance, on the other hand there was no concrete and evident adversary that would pose a threat to it.

The country's geostrategic location had some specifics. Due to the shorter length of its frontiers and the smaller number of inhabitants, the Czech Republic fell into the category of small states. From the military point of view, its territory had become almost impossible to defend with the country's own means, because of a lack of human resources and military hardware. It was therefore necessary to create armed forces that would be rather smaller, but able to react rapidly and provide essential defence until the arrival of some allied assistance, which now had to be insured. The latter fact was crucial for determining the main objectives of security policy: in terms of foreign orientation, reform of the military and good relations with neighbours.

Regarding the first of these, the Czech Republic declared its pro-Western course, and clearly defined its aims to find a way to the Euro-Atlantic military and economic structures, specifically NATO and the EU. As the new Foreign Minister Josef Zieleniec told the Czech parliament: 'it is necessary to create foreign-policy legislative conditions for gradual involvement and membership of the Czech Republic in the main European economic, political and defence organisations such as the European Communities, NATO and Western European Union'.⁴⁷

Another priority was good relations with the country's neighbours. It was expected that the Czech Republic would wish to strengthen its ties with Germany, the regional power with growing influence. At the same time it became clear that, though the Czech Republic would continue to maintain good bilateral relations with Poland, it would not be so keen on continuing co-operation within the Visegrad framework. Relations with Slovakia would have to be good in security terms, although not entirely without a possibility of Slovakia becoming oriented more eastward and thus creating an area of instability on the Czech eastern border.

Not surprisingly, most security analysts concluded that the international position of the newly-created state would be determined more by the quality of its policy-making rather than by the usual attributes of power.

⁴⁷ A report from the parliamentary session no.8/1993, p.326.

Military Reform Continues: A Process without End?

The Czech republic inherited two-thirds of the federal army. Given that the split of the country was carried out within a mere six months, the division of federal property between the Czech and Slovak Republics went surprisingly smoothly and the distribution and re-location of military assets posed no major problems. Although it was agreed that all movable property would be divided according to a ratio of 2:1, the Czech government went out of its way to meet many of Slovakia's demands. This was mainly because the Czech government had little interest in keeping Soviet-designed equipment. However, most notably, the twenty Mig-29s of the Czechoslovak Air Force were divided equally between the successor states.

Despite the smooth division, however, it was evident that it would take some time for the two new states to organise their own armies. The ensuing problems have, indeed, plagued both national Defence Ministries ever since. Moreover, earlier efforts to reform the Czechoslovak Army, most notably purging the officer corps, were widely seen as having been incomplete and half-hearted. It was expected that the new leadership would initiate a reform process in keeping with the Czech Republic's quest for rapid integration into Western political, economic, and military structures.

The man in charge of the newly-created Czech Defence Ministry – nominated by the Christian Democratic Union-the Czech People's Party – was Antonin Baudys. He did not have a military background.⁴⁸ He stressed his intention to turn the Defence Ministry into a civilian institution, meaning that the vast majority of military personnel employed by the ministry were to be gradually removed. At the same time, he announced that the General Staff would assume its 'proper role'; namely, commanding troops.⁴⁹

As a result, most of the General Staff's previous tasks – including the conduct of international relations, the forging and maintenance of contacts with the arms industry, and the development of military equipment – were eventually to be undertaken by civilians. However, Baudys' other reform efforts, particularly his purge of the officers corps, received far more attention than this reorganisation.

When Baudys assumed his post, in terms of personnel in relation to population the Czech Republic had the second largest army in Europe (after Ukraine) with ten soldiers per 1000 inhabitants, for a total of 105,000. Because of budgetary limitations and the inflated number of higher-level officers, Baudys made it one of his top priorities to reduce the upper ranks. On 17 May 1993 he ordered that the 'moral, physical, and professional qualifications' of 43,000 professional soldiers should be examined. The checks, which were to take the form of interviews, were scheduled to be completed by the end of 1993.

Among the criteria for continued employment in the Czech armed forces were a sufficient educational background, physical fitness, and a clean moral record. Baudys also said that officers who had participated in the purge of the armed forces after 1968, or in the preparations for the military clampdown on student demonstrations in November 1989, would be fired. By 1 August 1993 over 1,500

⁴⁸ The fact that Baudys possessed a so-called 'blue card' (a certificate of physical inability to serve in the military) was seen by the majority of army officers as a handicap. They would argue that even the civilian on this post should at least have done mandatory service in order to be familiar with the military environment.

⁴⁹ See *Respekt* (no.4, 25 January 1993).

officers and generals of the Czech armed forces had been screened. According to Deputy Defence Minister Jiri Pospisil, only 618 survived the screening and another 97 left the armed forces voluntarily.⁵⁰ Despite the relatively high numbers of officers who had to leave the military, this move would not cause any dramatic social response, mainly due to the fact that the majority of them soon got integrated in the civilian sector. Only 5 per cent actually became unemployed.⁵¹

The purges in the armed forces, no matter how necessary, caused numerous problems. The fact that the Defence Ministry was headed by a civilian without any military background – and that the majority of newly-appointed high-ranking officials had had either no or very little experience in military affairs – gave rise to concerns that the combat readiness of the Czech armed forces would be undermined.

More important, many young, able officers left the armed forces to seek more lucrative civilian positions, while the vast majority of senior officers remained. As a result, the lower and middle levels of the command structure became weakened, while the top levels were overflowing with officers whose loyalty to the new political system was questionable. The problem was aggravated by the fact that many young officers became increasingly frustrated with the slow pace of a military reform. Poor living conditions, meagre wages, low social prestige, and very little chance of promotion due to the inflated command structures meant that the armed forces were hardly an attractive option for those qualified to take up a civilian profession.

According to journalists' reports, some 500 professional soldiers, most of them young, were leaving the army each month in this period.⁵² It was further claimed that a majority of combat and other military pilots intended to leave for the civilian sector; that most Czech officers who had attended training courses at Western military academies since 1990 had already left the service; and that many students at Czech military colleges would leave before taking their final examination. Moreover, there was an increasing lack of interest among young men in obtaining military education.

On 4 May 1993, Baudys announced the resignation of one of the last important representatives of the 'old structures', the Chief of the General Staff of the Czech Army, General Karel Pezl. About two months later, on 30 June, President Havel appointed a successor, 45-year-old General Jiri Nekvasil, who had previously served as chief of staff to the commander of the air force and air defence.⁵³ Nekvasil had a background typical of a former Czechoslovak officer, having obtained a Soviet military education.⁵⁴ This fact, together with manners of behaviour typical of a communist-era officer and absolute lack of public relations skills, made many observers doubt that his appointment foreshadowed change. Such doubts increased when the chairman of the parliamentary Defence and Security committee stated that no officers who had graduated from former Soviet military colleges or who had

⁵⁰ CTK (16 August 1993).

⁵¹ Almost two-third of the released officers found a job in private sector, mainly as employees, 15 per cent established their own business. It is interesting to note that more than 50 per cent of those employed in the private sector were given posts in the area of personnel management, i.e. sector that has been criticised as the most ineffective and backward element of the military.

⁵² See *Lidove noviny* (9 July 1993).

⁵³ CTK (30 June 1993).

⁵⁴ Nekvasil studied at the Military Academy of Air Defence in Kalinin (1974-77) and later at the Military Academy of the General Staff in Moscow (1988-90).

'defended the achievements of the working class until 1989' should serve in the new Czech Army.⁵⁵

On 15 June 1993 the Czech parliament adopted also an amendment to the law on the military, shortening compulsory service in the armed forces from eighteen to twelve months. Moreover, male university students who had taken military education courses and passed the final exam in the subject had their compulsory service reduced from twelve to nine months. (After the amendment had been adopted, Baudys announced that his ministry would revise the military law.)

In the same month, Baudys presented a blueprint for the restructuring of the armed forces and their transformation into what Defence Ministry officials referred to as a 'semi-professional army'. The blueprint was quickly adopted by the State Defence Council and the government and it did not meet with any major objections in the parliament.⁵⁶ According to this plan, the armed forces were to be cut from their strength of 88,500 to 65,000 by the end of 1995, with a reduction in the number of professional soldiers from 43,000 to 32,000.

The division structure, which was modelled after the Soviet military and had been retained in the federal army, was replaced with a brigade structure. The ground forces – which represented the core of the army – were to have 28,000 men (43 per cent of the overall strength of the Czech armed forces) and were placed under the command of a staff headed by an inspector of the ground forces.⁵⁷ The Field Force would consist of seven mechanised brigades, two artillery brigades, a chemical brigade, a communications brigade, a missile regiment, and an air defence regiment. During peacetime these units would be manned by between one-fifth and one-half of their combat-ready troops. The Field Force was subordinated to one of the two ground forces' operational commands. The other operational command would supervise the Territorial Defence Force of fifteen brigades, each of them operated in peacetime by a skeleton garrison.

One of the novelties in the structure of the Czech armed forces was the creation of a Rapid Deployment Force under the direct command of the inspector of the ground forces. It was made up of one brigade of about 3,000 men and equipped with armoured personnel carriers and self-propelled DANA howitzers. The Rapid Deployment Force was designed exclusively for professional soldiers. Baudys stressed that it would be similar to comparable NATO units and in a position to participate in joint military actions.

The restructuring also affected the Air Force. According to the blueprint, the Czech Air Force was to have a maximum strength of 20,500 men, including ground-based air defence units. It was decided to scrap about 50 aircraft and operate a total of 150 military planes and 36 attack helicopters. The Air Force also had to dismiss a total of 6,713 uniformed personnel and over 800 civilians.⁵⁸ Flying squadrons and ground-based air defence were separated and put under two different commands. Four out of the twelve military airfields on Czech territory were to be closed by the end of 1993 and another one in 1996, leaving seven operating bases.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ CTK (16 August 1993).

⁵⁶ See *Telegraf* (2 June 1993).

⁵⁷ CTK (1 June 1993).

⁵⁸ See *Rude pravo* (12 June 1993).

⁵⁹ See *Lidova demokracie* (15 June 1993).

Within the context of the ongoing military reform, discussion about the need for a civilian inspector general resurfaced. Back in December 1990 the Czechoslovak parliament had adopted the Law on the Inspector General of the Armed Forces. The law was designed to increase civilian control over a ministry that at the time was still headed by a military person. It also specified that the inspector general was to personify parliamentary control over the Ministry of Defence and the army while respecting confidentiality, since the legislators agreed that not all issues pertaining to the country's security and, in particular, the armed forces should be openly discussed by the parliament or its committees.

After the introduction of a civilian minister, however, the need for an inspector general became less urgent in the eyes of most parliamentarians; thus, no appointment to this post was actually made. With the split of the federation, fresh discussion emerged in the Czech Republic about the usefulness of an inspector, and a law to this effect began to be drafted. Several opposition parties – and individuals within the governing coalition – proposed that the inspector general should be a kind of ombudsman within the armed forces, overseeing the observance of human rights in the military.⁶⁰ Prime Minister Klaus said in an interview that the parliamentary Defence and Security Committee had sufficient control over the Defence Ministry and the military in general and that the inspector and his staff should form a more or less autonomous agency within the ministry but at the same time be subordinate to the minister himself.⁶¹ After a lengthy parliamentary debate, however, the whole issue was dropped, mainly due to the prevailing opinion that parliamentary control over the military was well secured by existing mechanisms and that the creation of a new post would be both a financial burden and an unnecessary complication.

Another of the essential factors for a build-up of the new Czech armed forces was their modernisation. The former Czechoslovak Army was designed as a front-line offensive force, according to the needs of Warsaw Pact doctrine. However, the foreign policy orientation of the Czech Republic required a defensive military and had no need for a considerable portion of the heavy equipment inherited from the past. Moreover, due to the Czech government's proclaimed aim to make the country's armed forces compatible with the NATO armies, many assets, designed for utilisation in the Warsaw Pact, were of little use. Only a small portion of the inherited equipment – such as Czech-made heavy trucks, training aircraft, anti-chemical protection and measurement devices, and some light infantry weapons – could meet Western standards.

The Defence Ministry calculated that making the Czech armed forces' equipment compatible with that of NATO armies would require an additional annual expenditure of some Kc 20 billion over twelve years.⁶² But given the armed forces' 1993 annual budget of less than Kc 23 billion or 3 per cent of the state's GNP, such a project was clearly out of the question.⁶³ Moreover, Prime Minister Klaus suggested that a maximum of 2.5 per cent of GNP should be spent on the military. Although

⁶⁰ See *Rude pravo* (3 September 1993).

⁶¹ See *Cesky denik* (18 September 1993).

⁶² See *Mlada fronta DNES* (22 May 1993).

⁶³ The 3 per cent of GNP allocated to the military in the Czech Republic was lower in comparison with the budgets of other European armies, such as that of the U.K. (4.8 per cent GNP), Poland (4.7 per cent), Hungary (3.8 per cent), or France (3.1 per cent) See Jaroslav Janda and others, *Security Policy of the Czech Republic*, (Institute of International Relations, Prague, 1996) p.128.

Klaus indicated that he might not be opposed to granting a one-off allocation of finance for modernisation, it was quite clear that there was a major challenge here.

In particular, the air force was facing many difficulties. It was expected that upgrading even advanced Soviet-designed aircraft would take years to accomplish. Although plans were made to replace the obsolete MiG-21 (the backbone of the air force!) with a new Czech-designed subsonic aircraft (L-159) by the end of the 1990s, it was not clear in 1993 whether the necessary funds would be available. In the same way, there were proposals for replacement of the 10 high-performance MiG-29 fighters with Western aircraft.⁶⁴ These plans provoked wide discussion on this issue, which continued through the 1990s; and fighter procurement choices were still pending at the turn of the millennium.

The severe shortage of funds also posed problems for the training of Czech military personnel. Again, the air force was the most affected, mainly due to the increasing cost of fuel. While NATO pilots are required to fly an average of 180-240 hours a year, Czech pilots were limited to 75 hours in 1992 (down from 120 hours in 1991) and in June 1993 the air force announced that military pilots would be granted only 50 hours in the air.⁶⁵ According to some information leaked from the Defence Ministry, even these figures were theoretical, as many pilots would fly a mere 35 hours a year. Such information raised many questions on the proficiency of the air force.

In April 1993 the Defence Ministry appealed to the parliamentary deputies to increase the defence budget by Kc 10 billion.⁶⁶ A ministry spokesman said that the Kc 23 billion envisaged for the fiscal year 1993 was barely enough for the military to survive and that the Czech Republic might well lose its defence capability. Prime Minister Klaus, apparently incensed at the publicity the issue had been given in the media, ruled out the possibility of allocating such additional funds.⁶⁷

Adding to the personnel shortage and financial constraints, there were also other problems that made life for the new Czech army difficult. Military training became a target of criticism and complaints from private citizens and various interest groups protesting against noise levels, environmental pollution, and the hazardous state of some military installations. Moreover, there were reports of low morale among conscripts, often resulting in criminal offences.⁶⁸

All these factors contributed to a continuous decrease in the prestige of the armed forces. Considerable official efforts to improve their image enjoyed only limited success. Not only was the social standing of military officers low, but the majority of Czech citizens indicated in the opinion polls their conviction that standards in the army were generally poor. More than 63 per cent of the respondents believed that morale in the army was low and 36 per cent had doubts that Czech soldiers were well trained.⁶⁹

Even more significant was the fact that a mere 41 per cent of the population had confidence in the army and an even smaller proportion (33 per cent) thought that the army supported the political changes that had taken place since 1989. Many Czechs were convinced that, despite all the purges, the military was still a haven for

⁶⁴ See *Hospodarske noviny* (15 June 1993).

⁶⁵ See *Lidove noviny* (15 June 1993).

⁶⁶ *CTK* (13 April 1993).

⁶⁷ See *Telegraf* (10 June 1993).

⁶⁸ See *Pravo* (3 July 1993).

⁶⁹ See *Lidove noviny* (6 August 1993).

'old structures': that is, Soviet-trained communists who, under the pressure of circumstances, had turned into nominal democrats. Many were convinced that those who joined the ranks of the Czech officer corps either did not have necessary qualifications (not talking about physical fitness) or were not sufficiently motivated to do well in a civilian profession. Moreover, while the military had enjoyed preferential treatment under the communist regime, the businesses in the burgeoning market economy state offered more money, benefits, and social prestige to those who had a specialist training. That became one of the reasons why young graduates of the military colleges would leave the army almost immediately after completing their studies.

Even though Baudys received much vocal support for his ambitious steps to reform the Czech military, the new state's manifold problems, together with the prevailing conviction among policymakers that the country would be unable to defend its territory on its own, prevented military reform from becoming one of the government's top priorities. It was obvious that due to the shortage of funds required to implement Baudys's plans (his ultimate goal was to have a fully professional army), the pace of the reforms would have to be slowed down significantly.

Yet reform efforts continued. Taking into consideration various scenarios of possible future development in the area of new security threats and risks, as well as the fact that there were no clearly defined prospects of speedy enlargement of the Euro-Atlantic structures, the *Concept of the Build-up of the Czech Armed Forces until the year 1996* would be further developed. This reflected the changed security situation in Europe and responded to actual risks and possible threats to the Czech Republic, taking account of the requirement to defend the country with its own assets and without defining a particular adversary.

The basic features of the continuing transformation of the Czech armed forces were: transition to a three-tier command system, i.e. strategic, operational and tactical; development of an organised brigade structure; enhancement of the role of the territorial defence forces; and introduction of a system for planning, programming and budgeting, as of 1995.⁷⁰

In terms of the armed forces strength, the transformation process would be carried out according to the armament levels laid down by the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE), which allowed the Czech military to possess 957 tanks, 1367 armoured combat vehicles, 767 artillery systems, 227 combat aircraft and 50 attack helicopters.

The most important structural change proved to be the transition to the three-level command and control system, which was to be completed by 1996.

- The *strategic* level of this system would consist of the Ministry of Defence as a part of the state executive, responsible for the defence of the Czech Republic, the implementation of national defence policy and for carrying its administration in areas designated by law. The Ministry included the General Staff as the high command.
- The *operational* level, both in times of peace and during states of emergency, would be composed of corps commands. These

⁷⁰ Jaromir Novotny, 'The Czech Republic, an Active Partner with NATO', *NATO Review* no.3 (June 1994) pp.12-15.

commands would be directly subordinate to the Chief of the General Staff, who would command through the Inspectors of Ground Forces, Air Forces, Air Defence Forces, and newly-established Logistic Forces.

- The *tactical* level would consist of commands of brigades, regiments and battalions of the Ground, Air Defence and Logistic Forces – as well as air base commands in the case of Air and Air Defence Forces and for installations serving the Logistic Forces.

Adopting this structure, the Czech armed forces made another important step toward a Western-like military. Its introduction, however, met numerous problems, such as a lack of appropriate legislation. This meant that all the new measures had to be introduced in accordance with norms from the 1960s and sometimes even from much earlier.⁷¹ It meant the absence of social security measures for soldiers; and a prevailing shortage of professional personnel, especially on the lowest levels of command. For example, in 1995-96 the army lacked 31 per cent of professional platoon commanders and even 58 per cent of squad commanders. These posts therefore had to be filled with the conscripts, which caused further problems.⁷²

The slow pace of reforms, growing displeasure of the high-ranking military officers with the continuous restructuring and redistribution of troops – and, last but not least, a number of personal scandals – ultimately led to the dismissal of Defence Minister Baudys and his replacement by Vilem Holan in September 1994.

Like his predecessor, Holan did not have a military background. However, due to his membership of the Foreign Ministry's commission for co-ordination of Czech foreign policy, he was expected to have at least some insight in security matters. Nevertheless, it soon became clear that the problems in the armed forces were deeply rooted and could not be solved through replacing a political figure.

Holan set the priorities of the Czech military according to the international scene, rather than the domestic one, which soon proved counterproductive. Although the Czech Republic gained a good reputation for its activities in the framework of NATO's Partnership for Peace programme and mainly for its involvement in the former Yugoslavia, the situation on the 'home front' remained unchanged. There was a continuing rivalry between the officials of the Defence Ministry and top officers of the General Staff, characterised by mutual accusations of incompetence.

Most officers would allude to the fact that Czech units serving abroad, together with the Rapid Deployment Brigade, had become a kind of a showcase of the armed forces, but that their good professional level did not reflect that of regular units.

Holan formulated ambitious plans for re-equipment of the armed forces in the period 1995-2005. As a direct result of introduction of this acquisition plan, a much-disputed step was made to withdraw and store MiG-29 fighters. This was officially explained as a necessary measure for 'economic and operational inconvenience'.⁷³ Nevertheless, many observers saw it first as a political gesture to demonstrate the

⁷¹ Preparation of the key documents such as the 'National security of the Czech Republic' and the 'Military Strategy of the Czech Republic' that started in 1994, was still far from complete two years later.

⁷² The fact that conscripts were often made commanders to their peers of the same age group was one of the reasons for main victimisation and bullying, which consequently led to a decrease of interest in military service and to a bad reputation of the military in general.

⁷³ Vilem Holan in interview with *Military Technology*, no.7/95.

Czech determination to get rid of Soviet-made equipment even at the cost of weakening the armed forces and, secondly, as an invitation to Western arms firms to invest in the Czech Republic.

The acquisition plan included also tenders for modernisation of T-72 battle tanks and installation of the new command and control communication system. However, both cases soon became subject of dubious financial machinations and eventually ended up in corruption scandals.

The image of the Defence Ministry and the military in general suffered because of all this; and Holan himself was considered by army officers to be the worst Defence Minister since 1990. Despite all the criticism, he remained at his post until the parliamentary elections in 1996.

It can be said in conclusion that the period of 1993-1996 witnessed the creation of the new Czech armed forces, which were 'new' mainly in terms of the country they were supposed to defend, but they were plagued by many problems. Ambitious reforms could not be implemented either in full or to the planned schedule, mainly because of lack of legislation, resource constraints and personnel shortage.

Despite all these negative aspects, however, there were also some achievements. The Czech army gained acclaim for its performance abroad and, in the domestic field, the restructuring laid foundations for armed forces of a new type which, provided the reform was successfully completed in following years, would be able to carry out new missions in close co-operation with NATO, thus taking an important step in the overall effort to become a full member of the Alliance. But even these positive signs could not dispel doubts on the usefulness of the army that prevailed with the majority of the citizens. People continued to see the armed forces as too big and too expensive, and as a still quite backward structure whose size and costs were not appropriate to the needs of a country that was neither exposed to any large security threat in the present nor likely to face any such threat in the future. It was apparent that such attitudes would remain the greatest challenge, for both military officials and civilian policymakers, in the final stage of the country's approach to NATO.

2. International Shifts: Farther from Visegrad – Closer to Brussels?

Farewell to Pan-European Idealism

In the beginning of the 1990s the (then) Finance Minister Klaus was the only leading Prague politician who criticised the dissident-originated concepts of Czechoslovak foreign and security policy. In one of his essays he wrote:

'The East European revolutions of 1989 did not provide any fundamentally new ideas on key questions concerning politics, economics, and the laws of international politics - and I would add that it does not really matter. The important thing is to realise this fact and to accept humbly (both) tested solutions and old truths as soon as

possible. Only in this case, we will probably be able to add some of our small specifics'.⁷⁴

Three years later, as the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, he made clear that the approach of his government to security issues would be much more pragmatic and free of idealist visions of a 'new world order'.

The first practical example of the Czech governing coalition's policies was a change of attitude towards the CSCE. Seeking their main security and stability guarantees in Euro-Atlantic structures, the Czech policymakers suddenly put the CSCE aside as a remnant of euphoric post-revolutionary times.

Continuity of opinion on the CSCE could thus be seen only in the views of President Havel, but due to his limited constitutional powers he was in fact unable to further them in practical politics. The passive attitude of the coalition parties was shown clearly in the government's relations to the CSCE Secretariat in Prague.

During its four years in the Czech Republic the Secretariat, which initially counted twenty-five persons, shrank to a group of six people running the 'Prague Department of the OSCE Secretariat' the main office having moved to Vienna when the CSCE formally became the OSCE.

The concrete reason for Czech indifference has never been officially explained. It can be argued that the CSCE/OSCE lost a certain degree of attractiveness because of its inability to fulfil once very ambitious goals; and that the Czech Republic's pragmatic leadership did not see any merit in having close ties with it. Such argument, however, sharply contrasts with the attention paid to the CSCE/OSCE bodies by the government of Austria, who created very good working conditions for them. It is very probable that the real reason for abandoning a pro-CSCE policy was a worry that sticking to the 'old federal' patterns of foreign policy could undermine the country's efforts to join the key Euro-Atlantic structures.

It also might be true that, by cooling relations with an organisation warmly supported by President Havel and some of his closest collaborators, the new (largely non-dissident) political elite intended to demonstrate a kind of definite break with the idealistic approaches of its predecessors and with any notions of 'a third way' in foreign policy.

As is unfortunately typical for the Czech political scene, this official attitude to the CSCE/OSCE was quickly accepted by most scholars and experts, as well as by the mass media, leading to a loss of popular interest in what remained one of the most valuable European security organisations. Also in the academic sphere discussions on the most appropriate use of the OSCE and on the potential and future role of this organisation slowly faded. In some quarters the institution was dismissed as irrelevant.⁷⁵

Certainly in the second half of the 1990s the OSCE almost disappeared from the vocabulary of policymakers and diplomats or was spoken about disparagingly:

⁷⁴ See *Literarni noviny* (21 June 1990).

⁷⁵ The following incident, witnessed by the author, can serve as an illustrative example. At a round table discussion on NATO enlargement, held in Vilémov Castle in October 1997, one of the participants mentioned a need of viewing the Alliance's future development in the context of its relations and co-operation with other security structures such as the OSCE. The chairperson immediately reminded him that the main topic of the discussion was NATO, and that an obsolete organisation like the OSCE should not be brought into the debate.

'The CSCE alone is an example of disparity between high expectations and factual possibilities and results. The conference's only charm at that moment is in its pan-European universality...It is particularly [devoted to] the sphere of peacekeeping, which we consider an important place for checking the abilities of any institution to address effectively the hotbeds of conflicts. The CSCE so far has not acquired this ability and what is more it has created its own taboo called enforcement'.⁷⁶

As the Czech Republic started to advance closer to the Euro-Atlantic structures, however, the OSCE came to be viewed by the country's political representation as an important part of the European security architecture, with a role in enhancement and improvement of preventive diplomacy mechanisms and in co-operation with other security structures. Nevertheless, it seemed almost certain that this organisation would *not* regain the prominence it had previously had on the agenda of the Prague policymakers.

Regional Co-operation and the Prague Summit: Beginning of the End?

At the time of the Visegrad summit in Prague in May 1992, Klaus could already be heard criticising this concept of co-operation also; and, as the Czech Prime Minister, he appeared even more determined to restrain its development. Although he reluctantly supported the creation of the Central European Free Trade Association (CEFTA) in December 1992, he continued to assert that co-operation with – in his opinion – less prosperous and stable neighbours could only delay rapid Czech accession to the European Communities and NATO.⁷⁷ He would go as far as to insist that the Visegrad framework might be imposed on the countries concerned by Western states in order to delay their entry into Western institutions.

In this particular view of the Visegrad forum, Klaus was able to win a certain backing from President Havel, one of the co-founders of the concept. Havel publicly agreed with Klaus that co-operation among the Visegrad countries should not hamper or restrict any member of the group. He also subscribed to Klaus's view that the rise of the Visegrad group had been nurtured by the West 'as a metaphor, which is to a certain degree justifiable'.⁷⁸

Dilution of Visegrad co-operation continued also in the military sphere. Regular military consultations and meetings of defence ministers and military chiefs of staff of the troika were held throughout 1992 and were supposed to continue after the split of Czechoslovakia. From January 1993, however, the Czech Defence Minister would not attend these joint meetings and said that each of the Visegrad countries would have to act on its own in striving for association with NATO.⁷⁹ This

⁷⁶ Alexander Vondra, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, in his address at the symposium of ministers of foreign affairs and defence of nine countries of the CEE, Vienna, 7 September, 1993, see *The Czech Foreign Policy Documents*, 9/1993, (The Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prague, 1993).

⁷⁷ CTK (13 January 1993).

⁷⁸ CTK (27 January 1993).

⁷⁹ According to Baudys, the Czech Republic was to be one of the first countries to join NATO, see *Cesky denik* (7 June 1993).

further reflected the Czech Cabinet's diminished commitment to the overall objectives of the group.

In May 1993 Defence Minister Baudys visited Germany and met with his German counterpart, Volker Ruehe, who told him that he supported the Czech Republic's integration into the West's political and security structures. Baudys in turn announced his country's desire to restructure its army to facilitate admission into NATO.⁸⁰

In June the Czech Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Vondra and senior Hungarian diplomat Istvan Gyarmati agreed that admission into NATO should precede membership in the EC. They saw several variants of admission, including the creation of an associate membership arrangement. They also addressed the issue of Russia's fear of NATO's eventual eastward expansion, saying that no European security system could be created without or against Russia and that Russia had nothing to fear from eventual NATO enlargement unless it still considered the Alliance a 'remnant of the Cold War' rather than an effective tool for protection of freedom and democracy. 'We do not want to move away from Russia, but to move closer to the democracies of Europe', Vondra said.⁸¹

Combining pragmatism and realism, the Czech government, while sharing Poland's and Hungary's stated objective to join NATO, stressed that it had the same interests and values as Western Europe. At the same time, it was advancing its own national ambitions. Still proclaiming solidarity with its Visegrad partners, it had chosen by the time of the 1994 Brussels and Prague summits to follow an independent rather than a collective approach to attaining NATO as well as EU membership.

Regarding NATO enlargement, President Havel clearly moved closer to the foreign policy positions of Klaus. An early advocate of NATO membership for his country, as well as for the other three Visegrad partners, Havel stressed in 1993 that the Czech Republic wanted to play an active role in the defence of European peace and democracy; that it had always belonged to the Western sphere of civilisation and shared the values on which NATO was founded; and that it was interested in a functioning system of collective security in Europe. In his view, NATO should open up gradually and consider the Visegrad Four as its first new members in view of their positive records in building democracy and a market economy.

Havel also stressed that a continued US presence in Europe was essential as a stabilising factor. As for Russia, he saw only two alternatives there; namely, a victory for either the democratic forces or 'chauvinist, Greater Russian, crypto-communist, and crypto-totalitarian forces' that would oppose NATO's eastward expansion.⁸²

Other Czech officials also made it clear that Prague wanted to strengthen co-operation with NATO and that membership in the Alliance was the long-term goal. At the same time they expressed their anxiousness about the organisation's future shape.⁸³ Alexander Vondra put it in these words:

'The question of our relation towards NATO seems to us more topical.
Needless to point out that our participation in the Alliance is part of

⁸⁰ *Rude pravo* (27 May 1993); and *Cesky denik* (7 June 1993).

⁸¹ Alexander Vondra in an interview with *CTK* (Budapest, 5 June 1993).

⁸² Václav Havel, 'Central Europe Belongs in NATO', in: *NATO's Sixteen Nations*, (no. 5-6, 1993).

⁸³ Alexander Vondra, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, in his address at the symposium of ministers of foreign affairs and defence of nine countries of CEE, Vienna, 7 September, 1993, see *The Czech Foreign Policy Documents*, 9/1993, (The Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prague, 1993).

our strategic concept... We ourselves believe that NATO's transformation, however radical, should not result in the elimination of its nature of an alliance. By no means do we need a NATO metamorphosed into a narrow form of the CSCE.'

A poll conducted in the early summer of 1993 showed that these views were backed by slightly more than half of the Czech population, with 19.9 per cent of the respondents 'definitely' in favour of the state's admission to NATO, 31.2 per cent 'more or less' in favour, and only 18.5 per cent 'definitely' against. The poll also revealed that 89.9 per cent of the supporters of right-of-centre parties favoured NATO membership, compared with only 13 per cent of those who supported leftist parties.⁸⁴ These results, however, were based on the particular form of questions asked in the polls, rather than on a real debate on this issue.

In June 1993 General Shalikashvili, at the time NATO's Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, came out in favour of increased co-operation between the Alliance and the Czech Army and Defence Ministry. The idea of Czech membership in NATO, or at least affiliations with the Alliance, was discussed, along with the possibilities of joint training, exercises, and peacekeeping operations. In addition, the setting up of a NATO mission in Prague was agreed upon.⁸⁵ Subsequently, the Chief of Staff of the Czech Army, Major General Nekvasil, visited NATO Headquarters in Brussels where he said that the Czech Army had to take many steps to be able to join NATO.⁸⁶

On 26 August 1993 Russian President Yeltsin visited Prague to sign a Czech-Russian Treaty on Friendship and Co-operation. Asked at the press conference about Czech membership in the EU and NATO, he replied that 'Russia does not have the right to prevent a sovereign state from joining a European organisation'. Havel had earlier told Yeltsin that the Czech Republic's desire to join the EU and possibly also NATO did not imply anything against Russia.⁸⁷ Yeltsin's statements in Prague and earlier in Warsaw enlivened the debate about Czech prospects for joining NATO and were largely interpreted as Russian consent to NATO enlargement.

At a press conference in early September Havel, echoing Klaus's strongly held views, made it clear that his country believed the role of the Visegrad Group was changing. Rather than striving to become an institution, he suggested the Group should transform itself into an economic and political consultative forum to propose concrete means of co-operation among its members. Declining to support Polish Prime Minister Suchocka's proposal for creating a central European security system as an alternative to NATO, Havel said that the Central European countries should join Western structures 'when they are ready' and not wait for one another. In his view, Slovakia should also be allowed to join NATO for the benefit of political stability in the region and to prevent the creation of a new 'political border' between the Czech Republic and Slovakia.⁸⁸

In the following month, on a visit to the United States, Foreign Minister Zeleniec said that Prague was seeking a clear commitment from the US

⁸⁴ CTK (27 May 1993).

⁸⁵ CTK (20 and 21 June 1993); also see *Rude Pravo* (17 June 1993); *Telegraf* (21 June 1993).

⁸⁶ CTK (21 September 1993).

⁸⁷ CTK (27 August 1993).

⁸⁸ CTK (9 September 1993).

Administration to support the Czech goal of NATO membership, while realising that such membership for the Central and East European countries should be seen as the culmination of a gradual process of consolidating East-West ties. Zieleniec's views were generally considered to be more moderate than those of Klaus. Certainly he chose to use rather careful words when asked about the likely date of eventual Czech membership in the Alliance:

'Joining NATO is certainly a matter of a longer time perspective. Rather than talking on the accession to NATO, I would prefer to speak about a process, which would lead us to eventual membership in the North Atlantic Alliance. This is the way I understand our election program, the coalition parties' position and the program of the government. It is, thus, our foreign policy orientation rather than the issue of the day'.⁸⁹

Just a month later, however, Klaus wrote that European security was 'unimaginable' if the former Soviet satellite states were not admitted to NATO; and he rejected proposals for alternative security structures in Europe.⁹⁰ The Czech Prime Minister thus again indicated that he was not willing to make any compromise on this issue, which he saw as one of paramount importance.

Czech officials continued to press for integration with the West during the visit to Prague of German Defence Minister Ruehe, until then a strong advocate of NATO's eastward expansion, starting with the Visegrad countries. Ruehe was now more cautious, influenced no doubt by the 'Yeltsin letter' in which the Russian leader had qualified his earlier 'consent' to NATO enlargement and stressed that while Moscow could not prevent such a development it would not be welcomed there. The German minister now said that no durable stability could be achieved in Europe without Russia and that the Russian leadership sought strategic partnership with a new NATO.

Even though the Czech leaders were quite disappointed by Ruehe's apparent switch to an indefinite, long-term enlargement of NATO – in line with the overall Western reaction to Yeltsin's letter – they were not inclined to abandon their independent course towards membership in the Alliance, believing that their economic achievements and the planned restructuring of their armed forces would count in their favour.⁹¹

And not all Western leaders were as circumspect as Ruehe. During his visit to Washington and talks with Vice President Al Gore, Prime Minister Klaus was told that the United States supported the Czech Republic's desire to join NATO in principle; and, meeting with President Havel in Germany, Chancellor Helmut Kohl said that he strongly favoured the *quick* admission of the Czech Republic into the EU and NATO. Following his meeting in Warsaw with President Walesa, Havel said that his country might agree to a treaty of association with NATO but would continue to push for full membership.⁹² In an earlier speech to the Czech Parliament, Havel said that in order to remain functional, NATO should not admit 'everyone but should consider the Central European states as prime candidates for membership'. He also

⁸⁹ Josef Zieleniec in an interview with *Rude pravo* (9 September 1993).

⁹⁰ See *Lidove Noviny* (9 October 1993); *Telegraf* (13 October 1993).

⁹¹ Antonin Baudys in an interview with *Lidove noviny* (12 October 1993).

⁹² Reuters (Warsaw, 21 October 1993).

rejected Western arguments about Russia's sensitiveness and urged the Alliance to resist pressure from 'reactionary forces in Russia'.⁹³

In November 1993 Baudys met with Shalikashvili, Defense Secretary Aspin and other US officials in Washington to further discuss the issue of expanding Europe's security zone eastward. Having been acquainted with plans for the Partnership for Peace (PfP) initiative, he called it a 'balanced proposal' and 'the proper first step in particular, if we consider what the realities are'.⁹⁴ Deputy Foreign Minister Vondra said that if the West were to reject Central Europe, this would amount to a repetition of Munich and Yalta and would only help the ultra-nationalist forces in the region.⁹⁵

At the December NACC meeting in Brussels, Zieleniec praised the PfP proposal and reaffirmed Prague's interest in full NATO membership. He also stressed that the least the Czech Republic was expecting from the January 1994 NATO summit in Brussels was a declaration that the Alliance would be open to other countries. Meeting afterwards in Prague, Zieleniec and his Polish counterpart issued a joint statement saying that the summit should send a clear signal that the Alliance would sooner or later accept Central and East European countries as members.⁹⁶

Some Czech policymakers were, however, less keen about the whole project. In reaction to the November meeting of the NATO defence ministers in Travemunde, Jiri Payne, chairman of the Foreign Committee of the Czech Parliament, published an article that was perceived as critical of the Alliance's plans. Having listed some doubts of the Americans as well as objections and protests of the Russians vis-à-vis NATO's eastward expansion, Payne concluded:

'The United States would like to see Russia as their strategic partner, but at the same time, they fear it as much as the European states do. Russian diplomacy, however, makes a successful advantage of such an attitude. Traditionally, wherever there is a space for exercising political influence, Russia does not hesitate to conquer it'.⁹⁷

According to Payne, the Alliance lacked 'a strong and unequivocal expression of its interest in the integrity of East Central European frontiers'. He also asked 'what are our perspectives, if the area liberated at the end of the Cold War has been in fact cleared for the sake of Russian interests?'

Such critical notes, however, did not affect the overall positive Czech response to the plan. Following the Brussels Summit, Prime Minister Klaus said that his government accepted the PfP and the United States' gradual approach to NATO co-operation with Central and East European countries. With regard to Russian officials' stand on the issue, he said he understood that the West's cautious approach was a

⁹³ Address of President Havel to the Parliament of the Czech Republic, *Czech Foreign Policy Documents*, 10/1993, (The Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prague, 1993); also Havel in the *New York Times* (17 October 1993).

⁹⁴ RFE/RL Correspondent's Report (Washington, D.C., 18 November 1993).

⁹⁵ Cf. Alfred A. Reisch, 'Central Europe's Disappointments and Hopes', *RFE/RL Research Report*, (no.12, 1994, p.30).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, (9 December 1993).

⁹⁷ See *Lidove noviny* (10 November 1994).

sensitive issue for Russia; but the question, he noted, was not of immediate importance, because 'no one is offering us NATO membership'.⁹⁸

Meanwhile Zieleniec warned his Polish and Hungarian colleagues that President Clinton's upcoming visit to Prague would be primarily a bilateral affair, with Czech-US talks on the first day and a US-Visegrad meeting on the second. Baudys said he saw no reason why the Visegrad Four should co-ordinate their steps and work on a joint stand with regard to NATO membership, adding that he would not attend a meeting of the group's defence ministers scheduled to take place in Warsaw on 7 January.⁹⁹

President Havel sounded a mildly critical note when he told Reuters that NATO's approach to eastward expansion was 'perhaps cautious, slow, and perhaps too pragmatic'. At the same time he appeared content with political realities behind NATO's expected decision to accept the PfP formula; but he did note that Russian pressure to block NATO enlargement should be confronted.¹⁰⁰ He repeated basically the same message during a 10 January meeting with US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright – who had come to explain and sell PfP – urging NATO to change more rapidly and display 'more courage and generosity' toward former Warsaw Pact countries. He said that he would personally convey to President Clinton the Czech Republic's views on the Partnership, the future of NATO and overall European security.¹⁰¹

The Czech government's determination to give Clinton's Prague visit a bilateral character became obvious long before the event itself. Statements of Czech officials reflected a marked desire by Prague to reduce its involvement with the East and enhance its progress toward membership in the Western political and economic institutions. It was felt that the country's better economic situation and political stability (compared, for example, to Slovakia and Poland) warranted a 'go-alone' strategy.

That Prague was unwilling to give up this approach was shown by the January meeting of Visegrad defence ministers which Baudys had decided not to attend. Saying that his government did not believe it would be useful for the Visegrad group to co-ordinate their positions, he sent his first deputy, Jiri Pospisil, instead. The Visegrad defence chiefs, who were also briefed by Secretary of State Albright and General Shalikashvili, welcomed the PfP, calling it a step in the right direction; but they also expressed concern about its ambiguity and demanded assurances that this was a step toward eventual full membership in the Alliance. While Walesa said that the Visegrad group must co-ordinate its actions to improve its chances to join NATO, Pospisil asserted that Prague would go it alone if it thought it could join more quickly that way; if this was not the case, it would then take part in the joint effort. These Czech stands were consequently strongly criticised, particularly by President Walesa and the Polish media.

The visit *was* mainly bilateral. The first day was a strictly US-Czech event, highlighting the excellent personal relations between Clinton and Havel. The latter accepted the PfP and was told by Clinton that the security of the entire region was of 'vital importance and interest' to the United States and Western Europe. President

⁹⁸ Reuters (Prague, 5 January 1994).

⁹⁹ CTK (6 January 1994).

¹⁰⁰ Reuters (Prague, 7 January 1994).

¹⁰¹ CTK (9 January 1994).

Clinton also said that the PfP was a process that made it possible for those who joined it to achieve NATO membership. He also mentioned that it was theoretically not excluded that not every country in the region would join the Alliance at the same time. At the same time he said that he would be glad to see regional co-operation continue to develop, thus supporting a joint position of the Visegrad countries.

The Czech leaders had every reason to be satisfied with Clinton's trip to Prague, which reinforced their feelings that the Czech Republic had the best chances of being the first Central European state to join the EU and NATO. They said the meeting was a success and that it demonstrated the United States were serious about the overall concept of PfP and the possibility that the programme would eventually lead to NATO membership. Havel said his country would continue its independent course of action.¹⁰² Klaus said the country would take part in the Partnership for Peace, but was still interested in becoming a full member of NATO.¹⁰³

During a February visit to Prague by Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev, Havel stressed that the Czech Republic wanted to become as quickly as possible 'a normal European country', which also included membership in NATO. Kozyrev, on the other hand, believed that any enlargement of NATO would estrange Russia and discriminate against his country. A discussion of the issue was no longer topical, he said, since the PfP programme had been accepted and Russia would also participate in it. He said that just as every state had the right to decide which organisation to join, so Russia had the right to express its opinion about 'how European security can be most favourably ensured'. When told by Havel that statements to the effect that the Czech Republic should be in the Russian sphere of interest caused anxiety in Prague, Kozyrev said that if such a formula reminded the Czechs of their past, he would stop using it.¹⁰⁴

According to Zieleniec, Prague was not disappointed by the fact that neither the EU nor NATO offered a timetable to those wishing to join. It was recognised that only democratic countries with a functioning market economy could be admitted. Asked about Visegrad co-operation, he said that the Czech attitude was not based on 'egoism but on the belief that each of the four countries would reach its goals faster by its own means'.¹⁰⁵

Fostering Relations with NATO: Czech Republic and PfP

On 10 March 1994, Prime Minister Klaus signed an agreement in Brussels on the Czech Republic's official membership in the PfP. He stressed once again that the Czechs saw participation as a step toward full NATO membership. 'We consider the Alliance the most reliable way to safeguard our security', he said.¹⁰⁶ Just two days before Klaus's visit to Brussels, Havel voiced some critical words to the West, which, he said, at times 'lacked courage and moved at a snail's pace' over the issue of forming

¹⁰² CTK (14 January 1994).

¹⁰³ Reuters (29 January 1994).

¹⁰⁴ CTK (19 February 1994).

¹⁰⁵ Zieleniec in an interview with *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 26 February 1994, cited in Alfred Reisch, 'Central Europe's Disappointments and Hopes', *RFE/RL Research Report*, no.12, 1994, p.30.

¹⁰⁶ CTK (10 March 1994).

close relations with its former adversaries. He also noted that his only criticism of NATO's PfP was that 'it came two years late'.¹⁰⁷

Foreign Minister Zieleniec noted that PfP was perhaps the only possible compromise that NATO could achieve at that time:

'We have evaluated the Partnership in the form offered by the Summit as the Alliance's response to a number of often controversial interests of non-members. We are reflecting on our security interests and aspirations soberly and in the context of the situation on the whole continent, including its easternmost part'.¹⁰⁸

Other Czech policymakers likewise welcomed the project, stressing their conviction that it was just the beginning of a journey that would eventually end with the country's full membership in the Alliance. They all emphasised the fact that the Czech Republic did not see it as solely a one-way street and asserted the country's commitment to actively contribute to its success. Jaromir Novotny, the Chief of the Foreign Affairs Section of the MoD, stated clearly:

'We do not intend to be merely a passive bystander but rather an active participant. We see PfP as a kind of a test of maturity for the novices seeking eventual NATO membership'.¹⁰⁹

Meanwhile, the co-operation of the Czech armed forces with their NATO counterparts continued.

In this connection, Chief of Staff General Nekvasil, after meeting in Prague with General Heinz von Ondarza, the NATO Commander for Central Europe, announced that small Czech and Dutch motorised platoons would hold exercises on Czech territory in March. This activity had been planned even before the PfP exercise and was expected to become part of this programme. Defence Minister Baudys paid a three-day visit to Turkey in February with the purpose of discussing possible military co-operation under PfP. The same month a Czech parliamentary delegation went to Bonn to discuss with German Defence Ministry officials ways to align the Czech Republic with NATO and possibly also with WEU, including more training sessions for Czech officers in Germany, closer co-operation between border forces, and joint exercises.¹¹⁰

In April 1994 the Czech Republic, together with other PfP participating countries, officially began the activities of its co-ordination group in the SHAPE Headquarters in Mons. This step was followed by a hand-over on 17 May of the Czech PfP Presentation Document.¹¹¹ In its preamble the document affirmed the Czech Republic's strategic objective to become a full member of NATO, and its understanding of the PfP as a means for intensive preparation to achieve it. It also

¹⁰⁷ Reuters (Rome, 7 March 1994).

¹⁰⁸ Zieleniec in *NATO's Sixteen Nations*, no.2/94, p.15.

¹⁰⁹ Jaromir Novotny, 'The Czech Republic, an Active Partner with NATO', in *NATO Review*, no.3, June 1994, pp.12-15.

¹¹⁰ *CTK* (20 and 28 February 1994).

¹¹¹ For the full text of the Presentation Document see for example, Dobroslav Matějka (ed.), *Ceska republika a NATO (The Czech Republic and NATO)*, (Institute of International Relations, Prague, 1996).

outlined concrete forms of activities that the Czech Republic was going to engage in with NATO partners, such as various types of bilateral and multilateral military exercises, co-operation in the field of personnel management or joint training for peacekeeping operations. The Czech Republic offered its three training ranges to be made available for NATO exercises and suggested several short-term exchanges of commanders and staff experts in order to get insight into the working methods of the Alliance's command and control structures.

One of the top priorities of the Czech military was achievement of interoperability in the command and control systems of both the ground and air forces. Therefore the Czech side made a commitment in the presentation document to adopt the Alliance's aircraft identification codes. It also expressed its interest in the 'STANAG' norms for designing and build-up of command, control, communications and information systems, as well as in the participation of Czech military experts in joint conferences on these matters.

Submitting of the Presentation Document paved the way for the Czech Republic's involvement in a vast range of activities. In the autumn of 1994 the first joint military exercises in the PfP framework with Czech participation were held in The Netherlands and Poland. The Czech armed forces had an opportunity to host the historical first Czech-German joint exercise KOUBA-CHAMB in south-western Bohemia. Most of these exercises dealt with the simulation of various peacekeeping operations that could be tested in the field in former Yugoslavia.

The active participation of the Czech armed forces in international efforts in the Balkans became one of the country's most important media for co-operation with its NATO partners. The Czech military had been involved in the UNPROFOR operation already in 1992, that time as a part of the federal army. The total strength of the contingent was initially a battalion of approximately 500 men. After the split of Czechoslovakia the Czech Republic took over this mission and, at the request of the UN, increased the number of personnel deployed to around 1,100 men in 1994, a contribution which corresponded proportionally to that of France. Beside the participation of combat troops, the Czech military was represented also by a surgical team. The high level of preparedness and professional abilities of the Czech soldiers were also reflected in the posts some of them occupied in the UNPROFOR staff. A Czech general, for example, became commander of UNPROFOR's Southern Sector in April 1994 and a Czech officer became the commander of the UNPROFOR military police in former Yugoslavia.

The Czech involvement in the PfP programme and close co-operation with NATO countries within UNPROFOR led to a decision of the country's leadership to join the NATO-led IFOR mission established by the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords. The Czech parliament approved the deployment of one mechanised battalion composed mainly of professional soldiers (about 800 in total) in Bosnia-Herzegovina.¹¹² The battalion was placed under the command of the Canadian Brigade within the British Sector. Its main mission was to supervise the disarmament process in the region and secure the free movement of civilians across the line of separation between Muslims and Serbs.

This mission again demonstrated the excellent level of preparedness of selected Czech units, whose members would be often praised by the commanding

¹¹² CTK (8 December 1995).

officers.¹¹³ The IFOR operation was a practical display of the co-operation between the Czech Republic and NATO and the outstanding performance of the Czech contingent became a valid argument for the Czech political representation in its diplomatic activities vis-à-vis NATO enlargement, which continued throughout 1995.

President Havel took part in the SHAPEX conference that was held in April at Mons. In his address to the conference he focused on the issue of the Alliance's enlargement and the position of the Czech Republic. Havel pointed out that the Czech Republic's desire to become a member of NATO was not motivated just by seeking security guarantees but also by the country's democratic traditions and feelings of allegiance to Western civilisation:

'...we want to participate in defending values, the constitution of which we have assisted throughout the centuries. We really want to participate, that is, to bear our share of participation to such defence, and not only to hope that someone would defend us in case of a threat. We feel responsible for the peace in Europe and in the world'.¹¹⁴

Havel again voiced a call for a more clear commitment to enlargement and warned that 'if NATO will not have courage to soon clearly re-define its mission and to enlarge itself in the spirit of this definition it might, in the course of several years, lose its meaning'.

Further activities continued also in the military sphere. U.S. Defense Secretary William Perry visited the Czech Republic in September to take part in the joint exercise Olsina 95 where Czech, German and U.S. units trained for peacekeeping activities. One month later, a large international command and staff exercise Co-operative Challenge 95 took place at Vyskov Military College. It was the first activity on this scale in Czech territory since November 1989. The main aim was to practise the co-ordination of activities in the separation of two adversary countries. The exercise was inspired by daily situations that would occur during the IFOR mission in Bosnia and served to deepen co-operation among the officers from 14 countries taking part. At the end of the exercise, the U.S. General Nashe praised the Czech participants and said that they 'demonstrated good skills in fulfilling their tasks and proved that they are capable of co-ordination and communication in UN peace operations'.¹¹⁵

With the publication of the NATO Enlargement Study in September 1995 the entire process of the Alliance's expansion got a new impetus. Although the Study did not specify any time frames for actual accession, it did outline concrete requirements that the prospective candidates were to meet. This document was presented to the Czech foreign and defence ministries on 20 October and became an important guideline for further steps in Czech military reform.

In April 1996, NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana paid a visit to the Czech Republic. In his speech at the Bohemiae Foundation he stressed the

¹¹³ Jaromir Novotny, 'From Pfp to IFOR, the Czech Experience', *NATO Review*, no.4, July 1996, pp.25-29.

¹¹⁴ For the full text of the Havel's speech see, Dobroslav Matějka (ed.), *Ceska republika a NATO (The Czech Republic and NATO)*, (Institute of International Relations, Prague, 1996), pp.11-18.

¹¹⁵ See *Mlada Fronta DNES* (15 October 1995).

seriousness of the intention to enlarge the Alliance and the fact that all the newly-admitted members would have equal rights and obligations:

'... Those who will join will be full members with all the benefits and obligations that membership implies. NATO is not interested in semi-detached members, and we are certainly not interested in ideas for political but not military membership of NATO'.¹¹⁶

When Foreign Minister Zieleniec visited Brussels in December 1996, NATO's decision to extend the invitation for membership to one or more countries from Central and Eastern Europe at the Alliance's summit in Madrid 1997 had been announced. In his speech at the NACC Ministerial Meeting he listed several goals he believed could be achieved before this historic event. He expressed the Czech Republic's desire to 'see the internal adaptation of NATO completed' as well as enhanced co-operation with the PfP partners.

He also invited his counterparts to a NATO Workshop that was to take place in Prague shortly before the Madrid summit. The Czech political representation thus saw this event as a good opportunity for a final diplomatic offensive which, as everyone in Prague hoped, would bear its fruits in the form of the invitation to the Czech Republic to become a full member of NATO by April 1999.

¹¹⁶ Dobroslav Matějka (ed.), *Ceska republika a NATO (The Czech Republic and NATO)*, (Institute of International Relations, Prague, 1996) p.109.

IV. THE MADRID SUMMIT: THE GOAL AND AFTER (1997-1998)

1. Pre-Madrid Efforts

In almost all the prognoses made in the very first days of 1997, that year was hailed as a landmark in modern Czech history. The NATO summit scheduled for early July was to offer an invitation to its future new members; and nobody among the Czech key policymakers doubted that the Czech Republic was going to be in that group of chosen ones. 'It seems that there is not a possibility at all that we would not be in the first wave', said Foreign Minister Zieleniec.¹¹⁷

Similar statements, expressing hopes mixed with certitude, would echo through the media. In achieving its principal goal of becoming a full member of NATO, the Czech government saw the process of the country's transformation in terms of foreign and security policy accomplished. Hence the leading motive of the activities of both foreign and defence ministries was to strengthen the country's final efforts to meet at least some of the criteria for membership.

In the countdown to 8 July – 'D-Day' – it seemed that many Czech policymakers only then started to realise that the situation was getting serious and that despite optimistic rhetoric there were many deficiencies in the country's preparedness.

The Czech political representation that emerged from the June 1996 elections had to face many challenges. Although the right-wing coalition retained its power, internal struggles among its member parties as well as the declining economic situation of the country would make it much weaker than before. With a significant number of parliamentary seats won by the anti-NATO oriented extremists and a strengthened social democratic opposition that was not hiding its intention to bring the government down, the coalition had much to do and little time.

Military and Diplomatic Activities: Too Little, Too Late?

There was a new Defence Minister, Miloslav Vyborny.¹¹⁸ His task was to assure his coalition partners as well as the general public that he was determined to lead the country's military towards achieving the necessary level of preparedness to join NATO's military structures. At the same time he would repeatedly emphasise that the military alone could not be successful without support of the whole society:

'The main priorities are all focused on strengthening the security of the Czech Republic. In concrete terms, this implies formulating and implementing a strategic conceptual and legislative framework, in which we would permanently develop our defence system...

¹¹⁷ See *Mlada fronta DNES* (2 January 1997).

¹¹⁸ Vyborny was the third Defence Minister nominated by the Christian Democratic Union – the Czech People's Party. Unlike his predecessors, he enjoyed general appreciation for his efforts in the field of military legislation, himself being a lawyer.

However, it should be stressed that we perceive the defence of the state as being not only a matter for the Armed Forces but as a responsibility of the whole society, i.e., of each citizen'.¹¹⁹

Despite such clearly formulated calls for support, the early months of 1997 seemed to resemble the situation from the past years, i.e. that only the defence and foreign ministries would bear the burden of responsibility in efforts to create a better image of the Czech Republic's military and security policies, whereas the rest of the state administration would remain rather indifferent.

The first of the long awaited steps was in January, when both the Defence Ministry and the General Staff drastically reduced their personnel by more than 400 people. This measure was taken in order to bring about saving of finances and more effective management. At the same time it started the process of dividing competencies between the two institutions. The Ministry of Defence began to transform itself into a typical institution of the state administration, whereas the General Staff assumed the command of troops. Further organisational changes followed: about 1,500 soldiers and 6,500 civilians were to leave the military sector.¹²⁰ The funds thus saved were to finance the modernisation of military hardware.

Officials in Brussels, whose visits to the Czech Republic intensified, would closely follow all such steps. Though no official statements on the readiness of the country would be made during such occasions – and visitors such as the Commander of NATO Air Forces in Europe, U.S. General Michael Ryan, would diplomatically refer to the 'extent of the capability to co-operate'¹²¹ – many observers and reporters noted that a few months before the crucial NATO summit the Czech Republic was anything but close to the security arrangements, equipment quality and norms of existing members.

Even top officials began to express their worries that the summit might bring a very unpleasant surprise in the form of relegation to the second wave of the enlargement. 'The Alliance is going to show us a mirror of truth in July. It will either invite us in or tell us that we have a time to wait', said the director of the Foreign Section of the Defence Ministry.¹²² There seemed to be every reason for such concerns. Just to mention some examples: the Czech administration had not been able to design an integrated system of crisis management in case of a nuclear breakdown, a system that would co-ordinate activities of the army, police and transportation; most of the computer hardware in the General Staff Headquarters was for routine office work rather than for prompt information exchange and analysis; The military production of the Czech industry lacked any co-ordination; and little had been done to promote technical standardisation according to NATO norms.

Moreover, the Czech army was still overflowing with thousands of redundant high-ranking officers whose main concern was economic survival. As one NATO official put it: 'The only other job they're likely to get is as a hospital porter'.¹²³ On the other hand, the army was still desperately short of non-commissioned officers – the experienced sergeants and corporals who form the backbone of most NATO units.

¹¹⁹ Vyborný in an interview with *Military Technology*, no.4/5/97.

¹²⁰ See *Mlada fronta DNES* (3 January 1997).

¹²¹ See *Mlada Fronta DNES* (19 February 1997).

¹²² See *Mlada Fronta DNES* (13 February 1997).

¹²³ Cf. *The Guardian* (7 July 1997).

Another significant problem was posed by inadequate language preparation. In 1997 only about 15 per cent of all professional soldiers (slightly more than 3,000) had a certified knowledge of English, and another 15 per cent were believed to have some knowledge in that language.¹²⁴ Despite general awareness of the fact that English is the principal communication language of the NATO staffs, it was *not* made a compulsory subject for cadets in the military colleges.

In the first cycle of the PFP Planning and Review Process (PARP I) in 1996, the Czech Republic committed itself to meet 12 of 21 interoperability objectives suggested by NATO.¹²⁵ The analysis made by military experts at the beginning of 1997 clearly showed, however, that the armed forces were behind in accomplishing six of these objectives, while it had hardly started to work on the other half. The Czech armed forces were expected to meet another 31 objectives set in the second PARP cycle.

Many diplomats, experts and policymakers would allude to the backwardness in the whole process of preparation for the Alliance. However, most addressed critical remarks to others. Nevertheless they would all agree that the government was not fully realising that accession to NATO was not just a military business, but that it impinged on industry, transportation, finance and environmental protection. 'We neither have had a discussion on these issues, nor have they been considered in depth', admitted the Prime Minister's spokesman.¹²⁶

Thus Czech diplomacy had to work hard to convince NATO on the admission of the Czech Republic. During his visit to the United States in April, Defence Minister Vyborny continued to assure his American counterpart that the Czech Republic and its army was fully committed to accomplishment of all the prerequisites of NATO membership. He argued that the high level of professional skills of the Czech contingent in SFOR operations in Bosnia, which consisted no longer exclusively of elite forces but also of regular army units, well demonstrated the qualities of the country's soldiers.¹²⁷ His remarks to a leading Czech economic newspaper, however, sounded a little bit too optimistic:

'I am convinced that the Czech army is not as behind in its modernisation programmes as it may seem. From the point of view of NATO accession the key element is the ability of co-ordination of thinking, ways of dealing with problems and personal approach. In these we are far ahead of other countries'.¹²⁸

Such words might have applied to the performance of Czech soldiers in Bosnia but not to the armed forces in general. As the Madrid Summit was drawing closer, however, Western officials would make a number of indications that the actual

¹²⁴ Cf. *The Czech Foreign Policy Documents*, no.8/97, (The Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prague, 1997).

¹²⁵ Among these objectives were, amongst others: improvement of personnel policies, enhancement of training effectiveness, introduction of the new communication systems and adoption of NATO standardisation procedures. For a complete list of PARP objectives, see *Merrily about the Army*, (AVIS, Prague, 1997).

¹²⁶ See *Mlada Fronta DNES* (13 February 1997).

¹²⁷ *CTK* (20 April 1997).

¹²⁸ Vyborny in an interview with *Hospodarske Noviny* (15 May 1997).

enlargement decision was going to be based more on political rather than military criteria.

This was a great relief to the Czech Republic. The Czech diplomatic effort intensified in the last two remaining months before the summit, focusing not only on the country's commitment to the Alliance, but also on its determination to maintain solid relations with those countries that might not be in the first wave of enlargement. At the NACC meeting in Sintra at the end of May, which saw a transformation of this structure into the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), the Czech Foreign Minister seemed to have rediscovered the usefulness of regional co-operation:

'The Czech Republic will remain actively involved in instituting these new co-operative and consultative ties... In this respect, let me mention the CEFTA, which is an extremely well working regional undertaking, or the Central European Initiative. The Czech Republic has always supported the openness of these organisations for those who wish to join...'.¹²⁹

Two weeks later, Minister Vyborný – in his address to the meeting of defence ministers of the EAPC states – similarly stressed a need to provide for the security of the entire continent without creating any new divisions:

'We are aware of the fact that building a robust structure of security is not an end in itself but, on the contrary, that it responds to the new challenges and needs of the security risks by the end of the century. The Czech Republic intends to contribute to all these structures. In this context, I would like to underscore that it is because my country aspires to become a full member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation soon, that we attach a lot of importance to the overall security in Europe'.¹³⁰

The last opportunity for the candidate countries to pursue their diplomatic activity was the NATO Workshop held in Prague in June 1997. Given the context of words of the Czech policymakers mentioned above it was interesting to observe their attitude towards Slovakia.

Although it became commonly known a long time before the Madrid summit that Slovakia would not be among the first group of those invited to join the Alliance, yet it was expected that the Czech political representation would at least comment on the importance of eventual Slovak membership in NATO, which had been often described as something of a 'vital interest' for the Czech Republic.¹³¹ However, even though support was expressed for membership of both Slovenia and Romania, and President Havel mentioned also the Baltic States whose eventual membership is absolutely unacceptable to Russia, Slovakia was left out of the discussion.¹³²

¹²⁹ For full text of Mr. Zieleniec's address, see NATO web page: www.nato.int/docu/speech/sp97.htm

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ The main obstacles to inclusion of Slovakia in the first wave of enlargement were political conditions, namely the inobservance of some of fundamental civil liberties such as freedom of press and expression, unsatisfactory situation of ethnic minorities, activities of the Slovak intelligence service and very close military co-operation with Russia.

¹³² See *Lidove noviny* (24 June 1997).

Only shortly before the Madrid Summit did the foreign ministers of the three candidate countries take a more accommodating attitude toward Slovakia by agreeing to support not only their respective countries but Slovakia as well. Similar agreement was made also by the speakers of the Czech and Polish parliaments, Milos Zeman and Adam Struzik.¹³³ But later it was the Polish President, and not his Czech counterpart, who officially voiced support to Slovakia's eventual accession to NATO. This again demonstrated quite cool relations between the two successor states of the former federation, especially in the field of foreign and security policy orientation.

The meeting between Havel and NATO Secretary General Javier Solana in the course of the workshop was seen as an overture to the summit, where the long lasting dream of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic became a reality when the invitation was extended to them to join the Alliance by 1999. Seven and a half year after the fall of the 'Iron Curtain', the Czech President was able to express the gratitude of the three invited states: 'by its decision on accession of the three countries – the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland – NATO has grown into the whole-European system of collective defence' he said.

In return the Czech-born U.S. Secretary of State Albright congratulated the three stating that 'they are ready' and that 'NATO is ready to benefit from their membership'. On the last point, however, not everyone in the Alliance seemed so optimistic. 'If it was just a question of military competence, we would be taking the Poles, the Romanians, and probably the Slovenians,' concluded one senior NATO official.¹³⁴

Domestic Political Scene and NATO Enlargement: Time to Awake

The domestic political agenda in the Czech Republic vis-à-vis NATO enlargement had been to a large extent determined by the results of the 1996 parliamentary elections. Taking into account the approach to security matters that individual political parties took in their programmes, it became quite obvious that most of the discussion (if there was any discussion to take place at all) would be carried out along the coalition-opposition lines.

All the three right-wing parties that had formed the governing coalition would voice an unequivocal call for the membership of the Czech Republic in NATO without seeing any need to make it a subject for public discussion. It is interesting to note that this issue was invariably linked with the reform of Czech armed forces, thus often creating an image that the two were somehow inseparable. For example, the strongest Civil Democratic Party (ODS) of Prime Minister Klaus in its programme *Liberty and Prosperity 1996* emphasised membership of the country of NATO as being an essential prerequisite for completion of political reform and anchoring the country firmly in the Western community. In this context, the Czech armed forces should evolve so that their core would be able to be fully integrated in NATO's military structure.

Two other parties – the Christian Democratic Union-the Czech Popular Party (KDU-CSL) that was in charge of the defence sector, and the conservative Civil Democratic Alliance (ODA) – similarly underscored the importance of NATO

¹³³ See *Pravo* (15 July 1997).

¹³⁴ See *The Guardian* (7 July 1997).

membership, the need to build a small but effective and professional army (KDU-CSL) and to retain a U.S. presence in Europe (ODA).

The opposite side of the Czech political spectrum was composed of two extremist parties, the leftist Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) and the extreme right-wing Association for the Republic – the Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (SPR-RSC). Both proclaimed a strong anti-NATO attitude and, though their rhetoric sometimes differed, the motives for their opposition to the Alliance were the same. Both parties represented the less wealthy and less educated strata of society, such as workers, older people and youth without higher education.

Appealing to this electorate, these parties would use simple demagogic arguments, referring to NATO as an 'imperialist pact, threatening the independence and prosperity of the Czech people' (KSCM) or labelling it a 'tool of American hegemony in Europe' (SPR-RSC). Both parties would also demonise Germany as a traditional adversary of the Czechs and 'the most dangerous military and economic security threat to the country' – thus playing with the emotions of the older generation. Due to the fact that both parties had quite a stable electorate (on average about 11 per cent for the communists and 5-6 per cent for the republicans), it was not expected that they would exercise a significant influence on the majority of the public.

The only party thought willing to stir the still waters of the Czech political scene, in terms of inciting a serious public debate, was the Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD). In their programme *The Alternative for Our Country* approved by the party congress in March 1997, the social democrats voiced their support for NATO enlargement and Czech membership of the Alliance:

'The Czech Social Democratic Party declares itself in favour of membership of the Czech Republic in the transforming North Atlantic Alliance which, with the active participation of the United States, is a significant factor of European Security. The CSSD welcomes the NATO decision on its enlargement...'¹³⁵

At the same time they emphasised the need for a debate on the issue of Czech membership in NATO, with a referendum as a medium through which such discussion could be facilitated:

'We support the democratic principle of referendum, specially in the key issues of Czech foreign policy, namely those related to sovereignty of the state. We support consultation of the citizens of the Czech Republic through a referendum, for example on the issues of Czech accession to the EU or NATO, as we supported it before the division of Czechoslovakia. We, of course, assert that every referendum should be preceded by a real nation-wide discussion'.¹³⁶

It was this particular issue of a referendum that made the social democrats the target of criticism by the coalition parties who were opposed to any idea of a general discussion on themes they considered matters for governmental decision.

¹³⁵ *Alternativa pro naši zemi (the Alternative for Our Country)*, a program of the Czech Social Democratic Party, March 1997.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

Several factors contributed to this attitude. The governing coalition had been in power since 1993 and for almost four years had faced no serious challenge, mainly due to a significant parliamentary majority. That disposed it to disregard any criticism or alternative policy. This situation changed after the 1996 elections in which the social democrats scored significant gains. Parties of the governing coalition suddenly found themselves forced to learn how to cope with opposition. Moreover, the field of security policy became particularly sensitive, mainly due to problems in the area of defence, which was entrusted to the Christian democrats (KDU-CSL). In the case of discussion on NATO membership, there was a concern in Klaus's Cabinet that their inability to present reasonable and convincing pro-NATO arguments would be damaging. However, Prime Minister Klaus declared: 'I am not interested... I do not see the point. I am absolutely sure they (the public) are sufficiently educated. To me, education of people is not a real issue'.¹³⁷

It was a real issue, however, to Western journalists and security policy experts, for the virtual non-existence of a serious public debate and lasting low rate of public support of the Alliance enlargement began to be seen as a strong handicap for the country on its path to NATO membership. The Czech policymakers, though, found it much easier to target the social democratic opposition, as did the otherwise moderate Foreign Minister Zieleniec in one of his interviews:

'It is important for the social democratic policymakers not to be afraid to discuss the issues related to the Alliance and not to try to avoid taking unambiguous standpoints by replacing them with a discussion on substitute themes. There is no wonder then, that the polls on the attitude of the public towards NATO show a decrease of support to a membership in the Alliance just in the columns representing the CSSD electorate'.¹³⁸

By 'substitute themes' he meant the issues of a referendum and a sustained public information campaign. It seemed that the coalition was opposed to open public discussion out of fear that, given the overall bad state of preparedness of the country and its military, it might lose its political credit and, due to the worsening economic situation and internal party struggles, consequently be removed from power.

While the coalition-opposition fights over the public say in security matters continued, some eleventh-hour steps were taken to reassure Brussels that preparation for NATO membership was under way, no matter how delayed. A long-awaited *National Defence Strategy* was finally submitted to the government on 16 March, 1997. This document outlined the basic principles of the state's defence policy based on its geopolitical position, possible risks and threats as well as the international interests of the Czech Republic. It defined main missions in peacetime, in a state of emergency, in the event of threat and finally, in the event of war; and it stipulated the division of responsibilities among respective sectors of state administration.

The National Defence Strategy also describes the forces and means of defence and the tasks and missions of key institutions. It also touches upon the issues of defence planning and resources and concludes by stating that

¹³⁷ Vaclav Klaus quoted in the *International Herald Tribune* (19 June 1997).

¹³⁸ Josef Zieleniec in an interview for *Pravo* (12 April 1997).

'Implementation of the measures of the national defence strategy is a continuous process influenced by the development of the security situation and security systems on both a European and global scale, by economic abilities of the state, conditions on the integration of the Czech republic into NATO and, consequently, into the European Union and the West European Union, and by a number of other political, economic and military aspects. The national defence strategy makes the basis for adoption of laws, conceptions, and partial strategies of the ministries and state institutions in the area of defence'.¹³⁹

The *National Defence Strategy* was approved by the government, and on 24 April also by the parliament, subject to annual review. The country was thus given a much-needed basis for any other measures in the field of security and defence to be taken in the future.

Together with the *National Defence Strategy* the government approved also a document entitled *A Proposal of the Concept of the Build-up of the Army of the Czech Republic until the Year 2000 With a Perspective to the Year 2005*. This text identified the types of threats that the armed forces are to deal with and outlined concrete measures to be taken in the course of the army build-up. It categorised the armed forces into three groups: the forces of immediate reaction (state of readiness within 2 days), the forces of rapid reaction (within 30 days) and the main defence forces (within 180 days). The document further provided for the:

- retention of a conscript system with mandatory military service of 12 months;
- total number of 55,000 soldiers (25,000 professionals and 30,000 conscripts);
- placing of a contract for 72 subsonic L-159 combat aircraft; and
- the introduction of new types of portable anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons and the introduction of training and simulation devices.

For the first time, this text also mentioned units to be assigned to NATO – a rapid deployment brigade, one squadron of supersonic combat aircraft and one helicopter squadron.¹⁴⁰

Despite these positive steps in the area of military legislation and outline planning, the general attitude of the Czech people towards the NATO expansion and their country's membership remained lukewarm, if not indifferent. As late as the beginning of June, public support for the Czech Republic's membership in the Alliance would range between 28 to 42 percent, depending on how the question was phrased. These figures clearly showed the least public support to NATO enlargement among all the three candidate countries.¹⁴¹ 'The Czechs feel secure', concluded

¹³⁹ *The National Defence Strategy*, (Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic, Prague, 1997).

¹⁴⁰ For the full text of the document, see the Czech Army web page: www.army.cz/gs/karta4.htm.

¹⁴¹ See the *International Herald Tribune* (13 June 1997). According to the same source, the public support for NATO membership in Poland was about 88 per cent and in Hungary 47 per cent. For more details on the development of public opinion in the Czech Republic vis-à-vis NATO expansion, see

Zdenek Borkovec, director of the department for NATO co-operation in the Defence Ministry, as a way of explaining the lack of more substantial support. 'They are occupied with private problems. And Czechs are not informed about NATO; they need more information'.¹⁴²

The government, however, continued to pretend that the low level of public information was not really a big deal. Although many individual officials in the defence and foreign ministries thought the situation in this respect was more than critical, yet there was no public information campaign. The first public lecture sponsored by the defence ministry was held only at the end of May. Similarly, the first NATO manuals and various explanatory brochures – to be delivered initially to soldiers – were printed just about two months before the Madrid summit. In fact the chairman of the parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee and former Defence Minister Holan and his deputy chairman Michal Lobkowicz were prompted to found an informal group of deputies that was to begin providing information on NATO.¹⁴³ This group was joined also by some of the Social Democrats, mainly those who did not favour their party's insistence on a national referendum.¹⁴⁴

A bit more active approach was taken by the Czech Atlantic Commission which focused its 'educational' attention on high school teachers and students through 'Seminars on Defence Issues' arranged in co-operation with the Military Academy in Brno and held so-called 'NATO Days' in several cities throughout the country. The latter, however, were counterproductive, mainly due to the perceived obsolescence of 'mass gatherings' that were described in the media as too reminiscent of the past.¹⁴⁵

As the time of the Madrid summit was rapidly approaching, the government focused on some measures to be taken at the institutional level. On 26 June it formed a special committee for integration in NATO. This had three strata. The first comprised the Prime Minister and selected members of the Cabinet; the second consisted of the Deputy Foreign Minister, individual ministries, the Office of the Government and the Office of the President; and finally there were nine working groups.¹⁴⁶

On the same day a meeting was held at Prague Castle between President Havel and both the coalition parties and the opposition. Here all parties agreed to the country's membership in the Alliance. However, the social democrats again made their agreement conditional on public support to be expressed in a referendum, and asserted that the Czech Republic must remain a country without nuclear weapons and without foreign troops stationed on its territory.¹⁴⁷ This meeting thus symbolically concluded the pre-Madrid activities of the Czech Administration. Despite its positive outcome it was clear that the period between the 1997 Madrid summit (invitation) and

Stefan Sarvas, *One Past, Two Futures?: The NATO Enlargement Debate in the Czech Republic and Slovakia*, (Centre for European Security Studies, Groningen, 1999).

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ See *Lidove noviny* (14 June 1997).

¹⁴⁴ There was a group within the CSSD that was generally perceived as a 'reformist wing' within the party, which would oppose the 'hard core' consisting mainly of former communists. Among the social democrats who did not share the proclaimed party's view on a referendum were the then Deputy Speaker of the House of Deputies (lower chamber) of Parliament, Mrs. Petra Buzkova and individuals such as K. Korinkova, J. Basta, M. Titz and P. Dostal.

¹⁴⁵ Noted by *Mlada Fronta DNES*.

¹⁴⁶ *CTK* (26 June 1997).

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

the 1999 Washington summit (formal accession) would have to be filled with efforts to tackle numerous problems on the country's security agenda.

2. Aftermath of the Madrid Summit

Even though the outcome of the Madrid summit could, on the one hand, be considered one of the greatest triumphs of Czech foreign and security policy makers since the fall of the communist regime, there was, on the other hand, no great reason to celebrate it. Given the low public support for NATO membership, the virtual non-existence of a systematic information campaign and continuous disputes about the referendum issue, it seemed that the Czech authorities had achieved a victory of whose value they still had to convince their own people.

Public Reaction: As Cool As Usual

A public opinion poll conducted shortly after the Madrid summit showed that the people's interest in the event was quite low. About 25 per cent of Czechs did not know what the summit was all about, 28 per cent followed the proceedings just superficially, 37 per cent noticed the event just by chance and only 10 per cent followed the meeting in detail.¹⁴⁸ This attitude reflected the continuing trend of a rather indifferent approach of the citizenry to matters of their country's security, which stood low in their priority ranking.

Although Czech policymakers began to see that such a situation might pose a serious problem vis-à-vis the ratification process in the parliaments of all NATO countries – and, specifically, in the U.S. Senate – they did not seem to be inclined to do anything about it. 'The duty of responsible government is to provide information. I do not think, that the government has a duty to pull a propaganda stunt concerning our entry to NATO', said Foreign Minister Zieleniec in an interview.¹⁴⁹ Certainly, nobody in Brussels and Washington asked for propaganda. Nevertheless, even the basic information was something that the ordinary Czech citizen still had to wait for. It was no wonder, then, that public support for the Czech Republic's membership of NATO continued to decline. Whereas, for example, in September 1997 some 45 per cent of respondents were in favour of NATO enlargement, this number had dropped to about 42 per cent by December.¹⁵⁰ The results of this survey also showed that President Havel, who seemed to be the only enthusiastic proponent of NATO membership among the Czech officials, had had only little impact on public opinion. Other Czech leaders, like Prime Minister Klaus, would rarely discuss the importance of NATO in public.

The managing director of the Factum poll agency said that the results reflected 'a lack of discussion on NATO', since those who remained undecided were still a

¹⁴⁸ CTK (9 July 1998).

¹⁴⁹ See *Lidove noviny* (27 October 1997).

¹⁵⁰ Results by FACTUM agency cited in the *International Herald Tribune* (24 December 1997).

substantial group of about 27 per cent.¹⁵¹ Under such circumstances the Czech officials could only cherish the hope that the media campaign for NATO membership that was to be launched in January 1998 would bring some change.

In the style of Czech politics, where one extreme is often replaced with the other, from the very beginning of 1998 all media began to pour out informative programmes whose quality varied. The TV stations took the lead. The state-sponsored Czech TV channel broadcast a twenty-episode series entitled 'Co my NATO?' (What are we to say to NATO), prepared and partly financed by the Defence Ministry¹⁵². The five-minute spots would address various topics related to the Alliance, focusing on those to which the people reacted rather negatively (enlargement costs, nuclear weapons, state sovereignty and so on). The private TV station Nova, an implacable competitor of the state TV, came up with a series of short items in which popular figures of the Czech cultural and entertainment scene would make rather populist pro-NATO comments. This kind of very superficial treatment, which focused on affecting the emotions of people rather than providing any sound information, was positively evaluated by some sociologists, but disliked by most military people.¹⁵³

The most controversial publicity, however, turned out to be a private initiative by a group of alternative artists, that included about 600 billboards, TV and radio spots that would relate the issue of NATO membership to that of a Russian military threat. People would be thus surprised to hear the radio broadcast of the Soviet-led invasion to Czechoslovakia in 1968 and see a double of the former Soviet leader Brezhnev thanking the Czechs for having chosen not to join NATO. Although the authors asserted that this campaign was not meant to be offensive to Russia and that it was intentionally designed to be thought provoking, a majority of the people took a reserved attitude toward this campaign. Though there was no official negative reaction to it some Russian diplomats expressed mixed feelings.¹⁵⁴

Also the extremist political parties, and mainly the republicans, made their 'contribution' to the awakening public debate. Their billboards and posters – with a skull wearing a Nazi helmet with a military cross and German tricolour – were quite self-explanatory and in line with the hateful and chauvinist anti-German and anti-NATO rhetoric of the republican leaders.

Despite these efforts to bring the issue of NATO membership and its various aspects to popular attention, the results lagged far behind expectation. The increase of public support was minimal and oscillated between 45 and 61 per cent, depending on the poll agency and the question asked.

Accession and Ratification Processes: The Real Kick-off

After the Madrid summit the relatively slow pace of the process of adopting all the necessary legislative and military measures in order to bring the country closer to the

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² The English translation does not fully convey a true meaning of this title, which plays with the acronym.

¹⁵³ See *Lidove noviny* (12 February 1998).

¹⁵⁴ The spokesman of Russian the Embassy in Prague said that the campaign reminded him of 'old ways of thinking'. See *Lidove noviny* (12 February 1998).

Alliance was replaced by an acceleration vis-à-vis the pending parliamentary ratification of the Czech Republic's accession.

The first of the follow-up steps taken by the government was its decision to establish a Working Committee for co-ordination and evaluation of further preparatory steps. The committee was appointed as an umbrella organ that would involve in its activities all the ministries, the Office of the Government, the Office of the State Material Reserve, the State Office for Nuclear Security, as well as the Office of the President.

At the beginning of September 1997 the Czech delegation to NATO had received the Alliance's Defence Planning Questionnaire (DPQ). This called for information on the Czech Republic's defence and its armed forces, requested by the NATO authorities for their annual review process and other stages of joint defence planning. The information would be important too especially for the ratification process of the Czech Republic's NATO membership in individual countries.¹⁵⁵

Some weeks later a decision was made by the NATO Council that the candidate countries could participate in the Council's meetings as associate members, which made it possible for them to attend sessions, but without a right to vote. The new attendees could thus also take part in discussion on the Alliance's new Strategic Concept.

Following an agreement between the Czech government and the NATO International Secretariat, the accession talks, divided into five rounds, actually commenced on 23 September 1997. The individual rounds went according to the schedule. In the first round political issues were discussed. The topic of the second round was defence. The Czech Republic acknowledged its responsibility to provide forces for the collective defence and other missions, fully supported the military aspect of PfP, declared its agreement to Alliance's support for WEU missions, undertook to make efforts to achieve interoperability and to support the dialogue relationships NATO-Russia, NATO-Ukraine and NATO-Mediterranean. In addition, the Czech Republic endorsed the nuclear strategy of the Alliance and preparedness to engage in the activities of the relevant forums that deal with nuclear policy. The NATO defence planning system also was accepted, and the Czech Republic agreed to participate in the work of NATO military structures.

The third round was dominated by the topic of resources and the preparedness of the Czech Republic to provide resources for collective defence. The fourth round was about security in the technical sense, the major issue being the protection of classified information. This round proved to be the most challenging, since the Czech legislation of that time contained inadequate measures for dealing with such information.

In the course of the fifth round, which concluded the accession talks, the head of the Czech delegation, Deputy Foreign Minister Karel Kovanda, handed over three letters to NATO:

- the first (the Letter of Intent) asserted the Czech Republic's interest to receive an invitation by NATO to accede to the North Atlantic Treaty;

¹⁵⁵ See *CTK* (1 October 1997).

- the second letter recorded the government's decision to contribute to the NATO headquarters budgets a share of 0.9 per cent of their overall volume;
- the third letter confirmed the Czech Republic's intention to establish its mission at the level of Charge d'Affaires, until the appointment of a new ambassador.

Submitting these letters had been a prerequisite for the North Atlantic Council to approve the draft Accession Protocols. These had a twofold purpose: that is, to express the consent of existing NATO members to the accession of signatories to the North Atlantic Treaty and to extend the territorial applicability of the Treaty's Article Five to them. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the NATO member states signed the Accession Protocols in presence of their counterparts from the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland at a meeting of the North Atlantic Council on 16 December 1997.¹⁵⁶

In accordance with the letters mentioned above the Czech Republic had established its mission to NATO a few weeks earlier: it was headed by Ambassador Kovanda.¹⁵⁷

The fast pace of these activities was not disrupted even by sudden changes on the Czech domestic political scene viz. the resignation of the Foreign Minister Zieleniec at the beginning of November, which indicated a growing dissension within the largest coalition party, and the consequent demise of Prime Minister Klaus and the whole government, which was followed by a split-up of ODS. None had any negative impact on Czech foreign and security policy-making. Indeed, they were perceived abroad as natural processes taking place in the established democratic environment and therefore did not cause anxiety in NATO countries.

The provisional government of Prime Minister Tosovsky, appointed in January 1998 for a period of transition to the extraordinary election in June that year, assumed responsibility for successful completion of the ratification process of NATO membership.

At its meeting on 21 January 1998 the government unanimously approved the country's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty and passed the matter to parliament. The lower chamber of parliament then concluded the first round of discussions on this issue on 12 February. After the consent of six parliamentary committees had been obtained, the second round of discussion took place and, was concluded on 15 April 1998 by approval of the accession by a 154 to 38 vote.¹⁵⁸ With final approval by the Senate on 30 April 1998 the domestic ratification process was successfully completed.

In retrospect, the entire ratification process can be seen as a symbolic last act of the liberal rightist government which, after almost six years in power, would step down after the June 1998 parliamentary elections, passing to its social democratic successor the privilege of leading the Czech Republic to the historic Washington Summit in April 1999 where the country would officially become a member of the

¹⁵⁶ See in the *Yearbook of the Czech Armed Forces 1997*, (AVIS, Prague, 1997).

¹⁵⁷ *CTK* (26 November 1997).

¹⁵⁸ *CTK* (15 April 1998). Only the deputies representing the communist and republican parties voted against the accession. The social democrats revised their referendum policies shortly before the parliamentary sessions, stating that they would no longer condition their support to Czech membership in NATO by demanding a plebiscite on this issue.

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and thus achieve its cherished security policy goal.

The road to NATO membership required attention to a clear set of criteria and requirements, thus providing the much-needed vision and direction for the transformation process in the Czech armed forces and security policymaking. Pressure proved valuable also in the legislative process, where some statutes that had been in preparatory stage for more than five years were finally adopted in several months. Further, as a consequence of political discussions in the context of the ratification process, public debate concerning the issue of armed forces in a democratic society, costs of defence, as well as the foreign and security orientation of the country had been finally brought to life.

Another important consequence of this debate was the fact that it led to a final realisation that modern armed forces preparing for difficult tasks and integration into multinational structures need sufficient resources, committed on a predictable basis.

Although the influence of NATO membership should not be exaggerated and cannot be seen as the only factor in the play, its positive pressure in many issues that had to be solved anyway should be a lesson for the Czech Republic. Czech politicians ought to realise that now NATO will provide only indirect incentives and guidelines: decisions and priorities are the responsibility of every member state itself. At the same time the country's future choices will now face not only domestic appraisal but also close (and often critical) allied scrutiny in demanding formal review processes.

V. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The assurance of the territorial security of the state and its citizens' well being have always been and continue to be key criteria for the success of both domestic and foreign policy in the Czech Republic. The prime prerequisite for the country's security is its internal stability and further development of its democratic political system, economic prosperity and strict observance of fundamental human rights and civil liberties. Only a state that is capable of presenting its proclaimed will to become a part of the community of modern democratic countries not only through promises but also through practical deeds can expect a positive acceptance and effective support from the international community.

In a long term perspective it is therefore necessary that the Czech Republic will have a complex security policy that will not be reduced simply to membership in the various organisations which compose the European security architecture. This will have to be based on a systematic approach to developments on the international political scene; the strengthening of bilateral relations with its neighbours as well as with other continental powers; and the enhancement of regional co-operation.

On the basis of a descriptive analysis of the development of Prague's post-Cold War security diplomacy, policy-making and planning, it is possible to outline the following four parameters for the security policy of the Czech Republic for the period up to the year 2005 – that is for its initial phase of NATO membership (and anticipating EU membership).¹⁵⁹

1. The Czech Republic is a state with a stable political and economic system. The foreign policy of the Czech Republic in the field of security is a key factor for strengthening both the political and economic stability of the country.

The build-up of a democratic political system has started after 50 years of totalitarian regimes. Czechoslovakia, unlike other post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, could make a link to its democratic traditions from the period 1918-1938. The actual process of a transition to democracy was not even marred by the split-up of the country, which served as an example of a peaceful and civilised way of managing and resolving the differences between two nations. Becoming a new state reinforced the need to establish a firm democratic system. According to many views from abroad, including the EU, the Czech Republic has dealt with this challenge successfully. Changes of government in reaction to a worsening economic situation and financial scandals, unrest on the political scene, early elections – these are all quite common features of democratic regimes, and acceptable provided that certain constitutional rules are observed. Thus, a certain turbulence can be understood as evidence of the maturing of the system rather than of its fragility.

¹⁵⁹ Definitions of these objectives have been adopted on the basis of the 'Security Policy Concept Proposal', as outlined in the final report from a research project 'Security Policy of the Czech Republic', (The Institute of International Relations, Prague, 1996).

2. The Czech Republic is a full member of NATO and looks forward to early entry to the EU.

Admitting the Czech Republic to NATO in March 1999 has contributed to strengthening security throughout Central Europe. Having obtained the security guarantee embodied in Article Five of the North Atlantic Treaty, the Czech Republic, as well as other new members, has left the 'grey zone' or security vacuum and will become firmly anchored in the community of states that share and defend common values. In a broader context, NATO enlargement also concluded a process of multilateral integration of Germany, thus creating a new dimension for its relations with its Eastern European neighbours. This may ease some prevailing historical tensions.

From the military perspective, membership in NATO will have – indeed is already having – a positive effect on the transformation of the Czech armed forces. This is due to the following factors.

- The Czech Republic and its armed forces will progressively assume specific tasks within the Alliance's defence policy framework. This will bring to an end the long process of improvisation and non-systematic steps that has blighted the transformation effort for many years.
- The transition to standard procedures for the organisation and training of the armed forces will progressively overcome the lack of clarity about the issue of professionalisation, its scope and related financial questions.
- The defence budget will no longer be considered and dealt with purely as an internal matter, but rather as the country's share of the Alliance's defence costs. Active involvement in the system of NATO co-operation in procurement will create possibilities for efficient utilisation of the country's defence industrial base and should also lead to a reduction of costs of training and maintenance of the Czech armed forces.

However, the country still has to face some challenges in relation to its NATO membership.

Popular support of the country's accession to the Alliance has always been and continues to be a cause for concern. Public opinion polls show that it is pertinent to ask to what extent Czech citizens are prepared to defend the Alliance's values or to pay for them. This was clearly shown during the 1998-99 Kosovo crisis when hesitation – and in a certain way even reluctance – to stand firm for these values was fully revealed not only on the part of ordinary citizens but also (and worryingly) on the part of most of the country's politicians. It has to be said, though, that Kosovo caused problems in all NATO nations. The consensus on military operations – and on the conduct of the air campaign in particular – was fragile throughout the entire episode. In a sense, the Czech Republic had a baptism of fire (literally) on accession; and the fact that serious reservations were expressed about the operation was hardly surprising.

The issue of the country's willingness to ensure a certain extent of its security through its own means, and to share the burden of NATO enlargement costs, represents another challenge. As in any democratic country, matters of defence spending are very sensitive. Since 1993 Czech defence expenditure as a portion of GDP has been steadily decreasing. At the beginning of 1997 the government of the Czech Republic promised to increase spending as a portion of GDP by 0.1 per cent annually for four years, to raise the share to a 'benchmark' 2.0 per cent. Fulfilment of the plan, however, has been significantly constrained by the economic situation of the country.

3. The Czech Republic has its armed forces whose level of preparedness is comparable to that of the NATO countries. The armed forces are under democratic control and are respected by the society.

Preparedness and interoperability

Viewed from a purely military perspective, the Czech Republic yet does not meet all the requirements for NATO membership. The Czech armed forces have agreed Interoperability Goals, but do not meet all of them. Whereas the Czech army is fully interoperable in the field of military cartography for example, there are other areas, like that of communication systems and air traffic control, where there is still much to be done. But the most crucial aspect of interoperability is the 'interoperability of thinking' and the ability to communicate in one common language. These may be the greatest challenges for the Czech military.

It is expected that full interoperability of the Czech armed forces with those of their allies can be achieved in the course of, say, a decade. However, it is right to assume that the actual process of integration of the country will assist in the process of accomplishing the necessary requirements.

Civil and democratic control of the armed forces

The institutional foundations of a system of civil and democratic control of the armed forces were laid in the period 1990-1991 in the framework of the federal state. However, this system still lacks some essential qualities. There has been an absence of both a clear concept of security policy and some important legal provisions. In 1998-99 a certain movement forward was made as part of the process of joining NATO. A robust tradition of transparency in decision-making and full financial accountability remains to be established.

Respect for the armed forces in the society

The attitude of the Czech people towards their own armed forces has been very problematic, since the military continues to be among the least popular sectors of

society. Critiques of the military are often of a pseudo-historical nature. The army is blamed for 'failure' at key points in the contemporary history of the Czech state, namely in the years 1938, 1948 and 1968. The critics do not always acknowledge that the armed forces have always been subject to the decisions of a political elite.

The military's bad image is also reflected in a rapidly increasing number of persons who seek any legal and often also illegal means to avoid compulsory service in the army. This can be detrimental to the actual effectiveness and preparedness of the Czech armed forces. A solution to the problem of low societal esteem seems to be a long-term issue. It is likely that the generation change within the armed forces and their gradual professionalisation will make this problem recede.

4. The Czech Republic actively participates in the process of development of a new international system in Europe and in the world and, within the limits of its capacities, contributes to resolution of crises and conflicts and plays an active role in the enhancement of peace and stability.

Activity in the UN and OSCE

The Czech Republic has always been an active member of the United Nations. Its positive approach to this organisation has been demonstrated both by its participation in UN peace operations and its activities in many UN bodies, most notably as a non-permanent member of the Security Council in 1994-1995. The Czech representatives have been actively involved in the Commission on Global Governance entrusted with a task of reforming the United Nations' administrative structure. Continuation of the country's approach to this global organisation will thus be an expression of its commitments to the efforts for safeguarding peace and stability in the world.

The political representation of former Czechoslovakia became a strong advocate of the system of collective security in Europe based on the CSCE/OSCE. Through their proposals and diplomatic activities Prague's policymakers significantly contributed to the organisation's adaptation to the new post-Cold War situation. After 1993 the political elite of the new Czech state tended to regard CSCE/OSCE as an ineffective institution, which resulted in limiting the scope of the country's involvement in activities of this organisation.

Given the fact that the OSCE has established itself as an irreplaceable element of the European security architecture, and continues to play a significant role in the field of preventive diplomacy, conflict resolution, arms control and confidence building, the Czech Republic should be interested in strengthening the organisation's authority.

Regional co-operation and good neighbourliness

Despite NATO membership – and eventually membership of the EU – the geostrategic and geopolitical location of the Czech Republic remains unchanged. The country is in the easternmost part of the Western community. It is therefore necessary to maintain close relations not only with countries such as Poland and Hungary with whom it now shares a common security affiliation, but also with countries like Slovakia and Slovenia which are for the time being left out of the Euro-Atlantic structures *and* naturally with the East European powers such as Ukraine and Russia. The aim of regional co-operation is not to create any new institutions, but rather to facilitate co-ordination in policies that correspond with common interests. Good platforms for such co-operation exist in CEFTA, in the Central European Initiative and in the Visegrad forum which has shown signs of new life.

At present the Czech Republic is not in conflict with any of its neighbours. Although the relations with some of them are influenced by historical reminiscences – as in the cases of Slovakia and Germany – this does not pose any serious threat of tensions which could escalate into open conflict. The situation as it is creates a good basis for strengthening bilateral relations, which would be good for overall stability in the region.

In sum, with the benefit of hindsight it is clear that Prague's security diplomacy, policy-making and planning served the Czechs well in the final decade of the second millennium. However, further endeavour – respecting the basic parameters just outlined – will be necessary in the opening decade of the third.

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