



The Czechs Return to Europe

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Executive Summary

The objective of this dissertation is to investigate how Czech historical events during the twentieth century influenced Czech society and politics in relation to Europe.

During the twentieth century, the Czech Republic experienced highlights and downfalls. The founding fathers, Masaryk, Beneš, and Štefánik, established the first democratic Czechoslovak Republic in 1918. The first Czechoslovak Republic is considered as one of the most successful transformations from an occupied nation into a well-functioning democracy. The euphoric stability was brutally interrupted by the Munich Agreement in which France and Britain agreed together with Hitler's Nazi Germany that a part of Czechoslovakia would be given to the Third Reich.

In March 1939, Hitler broke the Munich Agreement and the first Czechoslovak Republic (1920 – 1938) was completely dissolved. In the period 1939 – 1945, a Czech government in exile was formed. They fought for the liberation of the Czech lands, but the war for liberation was finally won by the Russian Red Army.

The aftermath of World War II was a chaotic period in which Communist influences were dominant. Even though the public opinion of 1948 showed that the communist party would not receive a majority of votes if elections were held, the party sought illegal ways to gain power.

In January 1968, Alexander Dubček became president of the Czechoslovak people's democracy. He implemented reforms that gave Communism a human face. The Soviet Union leaders disliked these reforms and arrested Dubček which caused a lot of protests and culminated in the landmark suicide of Jan Palach. During this period, dissident movements, such as *Charta 77* were established.

In 1989, the Soviet bloc fell. In Czechoslovakia, the transition occurred without violence and was therefore named the Velvet Revolution. Three years later, the Czechoslovak Republic was peacefully split into two separate independent states.

After becoming an independent state, the Czech Republic applied to become part of the European Union. Most of the Czechs were pro-Europe although there was also a sub-culture of Euro-scepticism. Regardless of their frequently-voiced scepticism, the general public of the Czech Republic voted 'yes' to the binding referendum on EU Membership, and the Czech Republic finally became Member of the EU on May 1, 2004. In 2009, the Czech Republic was granted the EU Presidency.

This thesis argues that the historical landmarks – such as the Munich Agreement and Communist occupation – were of clear and key importance to the development of the mentality by Czech society and Czech politics towards Europe, and especially toward the European Union.

Acknowledgments

In the third year of my studies, I had the possibility to study abroad. I chose to study in Olomouc, the Czech Republic. There, I attended lectures on Czech history and integration into the European Union. The Czech history intrigued me and soon I wanted to know more. It was therefore, a logical step for me to write my dissertation on how the Czech mentality has been influenced by historical events.

During my research and the writing process of this paper, I received a lot of support from different people. Here I would like to thank them for their everlasting support and belief in me. Special thanks go to Jenny Dalalakis, my internship supervisor at the OPCW, who read and commented on my dissertation. I would like to thank Lucie Prazak and Dan Marek for their comments based on personal experience and academic knowledge. Furthermore, I would like to thank my academic supervisor Mr. Pieter Pijlman, and my fellow students. Last but not least, I would like to thank my family and Ivan for their everlasting support. Without all of them, I would not have managed to complete my dissertation. I feel fortunate to have such wonderful people around me.

Glossary

Acquis communautaire

A general term used to refer to European legislation, and related matters

Charta77

A pressure group led by Václav Havel that opposed to the communist regime in Czechoslovakia

Civic Forum

A Czech umbrella organisation for the opposition such as Charter77 and VONS

Copenhagen Criteria

Criteria set for candidate nation states for membership of the European Union

ČSSD

The Social Democrats of the Czech Republic

Dissident

A person or group that opposes to a political administration

European Union Application

The process in which candidate states notify the European institutions that they desire to become member of the European Union

Euro-scepticism

Term used to describe criticism towards the European Union

Exile

To be forced to be outside ones' home country

League of Nations

Predecessor of the European Union

Normalisation

Period between 1969 and 1987, characterised by initial restoration of the conditions that prevailed during Prague Spring

ODS Party

Czech Republic's Civic Democratic Party

Politburo

The executive committee for several communist institutions

Pre-accession

The phase in which candidate EU member states need to fulfil certain criteria

Ruthenia

A small region in Central Europe, formerly part of the first Czechoslovak Republic

Sudetenland

Czech region at the border with Germany with mainly German rooted inhabitants

Titoism

Adaption of socialist ideology named after Josip Broz Tito, leader of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

USSR

Soviet Union

VONS

Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Prosecuted

VPN

Public Against Violence, Slovak version of Civic Forum

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1. Introduction

1.1 A growing Europe

During the last decade (2000 – 2010), several European countries entered the European Union (EU), and all of them had their struggles and triumphs in order to become a member. In 2004, the largest enlargement since the foundation of the European Union took place. Ten countries were granted full membership rights, of which seven were former Soviet Union bloc countries, one a former Yugoslavian country and two Mediterranean islands.

In order to guide the accession process, the EU decided on several criteria which candidate member countries had to fulfil in order to become eligible to join. The criteria were described in three different documents of which one are the Copenhagen criteria.

In this thesis, the focus will be on the Czech Republic, one of the two states that once were Czechoslovakia. The Czech Republic has had a difficult and harsh history full of occupation and suppression. For more than half a century, the Czechs were prevented from being themselves, and ideologies as well as external political decisions were forced upon them. The main focus here will be the historical events that took place during the twentieth century on the Czech lands.

1.2 Central question and sub questions

The central question that will be investigated is:

How did historical events during the twentieth century influence Czech society and politics towards Europe?

In order to get to the answer through sub questions, I have divided my thesis in seven separate chapters. Each of them will deal with a historical landmark in history. The first chapter will first deal with the foundation of the First Democratic Czech Republic, just after World War I. The chapters after will discuss the events during the Second World War, the Communist occupation, the Velvet Revolution, the Velvet Divorce, and I will end with Czech Republic and the way towards EU membership. The thesis will conclude with the answers to the question above.

During the investigation, several questions arose, such as how did the Czech Republic cope with the accession to the EU? They had not even been independent for a decade before

they applied to start the accession procedure. Even though they voluntarily applied to become part of the EU, there is a Euro sceptical tone in their current EU policy. How did the historical events shape Czech opinion towards the European Union? What were the main reasons to apply? What were the main historical events that shaped Czech society as it is today? Are the Czechs really as Euro sceptic as the other EU Member States think? The fact that they endured such a history can explain the sceptical tone towards the European Union, yet is this truly the case, or were there other factors that can be named as a cause? The answers to these sub-questions will emerge in the conclusion.

1.3 Objective

The main purpose of writing this thesis is to provide a description of the history of the Czech Republic during the twentieth century, and specifically how the Czechs were forced to live under several ideologies and how they finally became independent. The objective is to give a clear view on how Czech society and politics have been shaped by historical events. This is important to link the historical events to more recent events such as the Velvet Divorce and the Czech accession to the European Union. After reading this thesis I hope that the reader has a better view on how recent policies by the Czechs emerged as they did.

1.4 Justification of research method

This investigation is mostly based on desk research. Mainly, online reports, websites, as well as books that discuss the historical events of Czechoslovakia have been used. The book *Brief Histories: Czechoslovakia, 2002* by Maria Dowling, which provides a brief history on Czechoslovakia, has been a valuable source since it discusses all the important aspects and events that happened to Czechoslovakia in the twentieth century.

Furthermore, I have done some field research by discussing the objective of this thesis with several persons who are close to the subject both on academic expertise as well as personal experience.

In 2008, during the third year of my studies, I had the possibility to study abroad. I went to the Palacký University in Olomouc, Czech Republic. The EU integration and Czech history were the main topics in my courses and therefore, I also use my personal observations and knowledge.

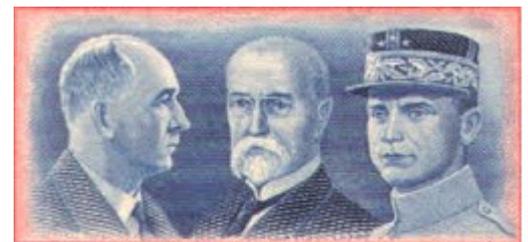
2. Czechoslovakia after World War I

2.1 Czechoslovakia: 1918-1938

In 1620, the Czechs lost their independence to the Habsburg Empire at the battle of the White Mountain. As a result they were ruled by the Austrian Monarchy for about 300 years (Dowling 2002, p7). Despite the fact that the Czech lands had been ruled by foreigners for so long they did dream of an independent state. In this dream they longed for a state in which they could live freely, in which they could live in peace, and most importantly could rule themselves. In 1918 this dream became reality. A new Czechoslovakia was born out of World War I and the collapse of the Habsburg Empire.

2.1.1 The founding fathers

Three men could be named as the founding fathers of this newly formed state. These men were Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Edvard Beneš and Milan Rastislav Štefánik (Dowling 2002, p1) (see figure 1). Their own backgrounds and characteristics have been of great influence of the forming of the new created Czechoslovakia. Now a brief portrait of the founding fathers will be given in the following subparagraphs.



The founding fathers Beneš, Masaryk and Štefánik.

Figure 1

2.1.1.1 Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk

Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk was born in 1850 in Moravia. His father was Slovak and his mother Czech, and so some say this caused the sense Czechoslovakism on his part, yet this has always been debatable and never been proven. Masaryk was considered an extraordinary and controversial figure. In the political sense he became a democratic liberal with he believed that church and state should be strictly separated. To him, religion was a private matter and not a public one (Dowling 2002, p1).

2.1.1.2 Edvard Beneš

The second founding father was Edvard Beneš. He saw the light of life in 1884 and came from a Czech peasant family. He studied at Prague's Prestige University, Charles University, where he acquired a doctorate in law. Then moved to France where he obtained his second

doctorate in law and worked as a journalist for the Czech international press. He was able to use his journalistic skills and his knowledge of law and politics during the war to serve the Czechoslovak action abroad about which more detail will be given in sector 3.2 (Dowling 2002, p2).

2.1.1.3 Milan Rastislav Štefánik

Milan Rastislav Štefánik was the third founding father. He was born in the year 1880 to a Slovak Lutheran pastor. In addition to having studied in Slovakia and Hungary he also managed to acquire a doctorate of philosophy at the Charles University of Prague. In the year 1904, he went abroad and studied astronomy in several countries. He finally settled down in France where he worked in an observatory. When the war broke out in 1914, Štefánik eagerly wanted to fight the Habsburgs and therefore volunteered for the French air force. He eventually became a French citizen.

2.1.2 The collaboration of the founding fathers

Both Beneš and Štefánik assisted Masaryk in different ways, both using their expertise. Beneš assisted Masaryk on the political and propagandic field, where Štefánik served him with his military expertise. Besides the specific competences they brought, the fact that they both studied and worked abroad helped them in having a wider and more international view (Dowling 2002, p2&3).

2.2 The road towards independence

During the First World War many of the subject nations of the Austrian-Hungary empire hoped that the war would result in enough pressure to ensure an independent state or at least more sovereignty within the bigger empire. Masaryk already proclaimed in 1909 the need of an independent Czech state, and he was even more convinced after a meeting he had with Ernst von Koerber, a former Prime Minister of Austria who convinced Masaryk that if the Austrians would win the war, no reforms or autonomy to subject nations would be implemented. Masaryk was now determined to strive for freedom in the Czech lands. However, it was not possible to achieve this goal on Czech ground, and he therefore had to move abroad (Dowling 2002, p3).

2.3 The action abroad

Masaryk settled in the neutral nation of Switzerland where he kept himself informed. When Beneš joined him in Switzerland they decided to move to Paris where they united with Štefánik. The route to get recognition as the Czech and Slovak official representatives abroad by the Allies was a difficult and long one. They founded the Czech Foreign Committee on November 14, 1915 in Paris and immediately declared independence for the Czech lands. The Committee became the National Council of the Czech lands in February 1916. Masaryk was appointed as President, Štefánik and Jaroslav Durich became the Vice-presidents and Beneš became the General Secretary. The final recognition came rather late. France gave its recognition on July 13, 1918, Britain on August 9 of that same year, and the United States as late as September 3, 1918. The way towards recognition took over three years. They could only have achieved this if it was not for their patient and persistent work. The three founding fathers divided three areas of expertise among themselves on the fields of propaganda, diplomacy and military activity, so as to make sure that they all used their talent on the right subjects (Dowling 2002, p5).

A key point in the preamble to an independent state was the assurance by the French Prime Minister George Clemenceau that the Czechoslovaks had a place at the forthcoming peace conference. And thus it was not only the good conduct of diplomacy that helped with the recognition but it was also the creation and help of the Czechoslovak army in exile during the war that pleased the allies and caused them to vote in favour of an independent state (Dowling 2002, p11).

The only obstacle left was the full support of the Slovak and Ruthenes people. Slovaks and Ruthenes living in the United States called conferences and decided that they would fully support the Czechoslovak cooperation since alternatives were or not feasible or had simply failed in the past. They voted to join the new state of Czechoslovakia on a federative basis (Dowling 2002, p13).

Earlier Masaryk had made the Czechoslovak Declaration of Independence. He did this on October 18, 1918, in Washington. The whole process of becoming an independent nation state had been supported by United State's President Woodrow Wilson who very much liked the principles and character outlined in the declaration which stated that:

“The Czechoslovak State will be a republic. In a continuous effort for progress it will guarantee full freedom of conscience, religion, science, literature and art, speech,

press assembly and of petition. The church will be separated from the state. Our democracy will be based on an equal right to vote; women will be politically, socially and culturally made equal to men. The rights of minorities will be secured by proportionate representation, national minorities will enjoy the same rights. Privileges of the nobility will be abolished (Dowling 2002, p15).

2.4 The first democratic Czechoslovak Republic

Finally there was an agreement between the representatives abroad and the representatives in Prague. These representatives were led by Karel Kramář. The new state was to be a Republic as Masaryk had stated in his Declaration of Independence. On November 5, 1918, Kramář proclaimed a free, independent and democratic Republic in Prague. By November 14, the revolution was complete when the Czechoslovak National Assembly formally deposed the Habsburgs and elected Masaryk as first President of the Republic by acclamation. Kramář became Premier, Beneš became Foreign Minister and Alois Rašín became Minister of Finance (Dowling 2002, p16). As for Štefánik, he became Minister of War. He unfortunately died in 1919 in a plane crash near Bratislava.

The first major task for the newly formed government was the establishment of their territory. This was partly undertaken at the peace conference which took place in Paris on January 18, 1919, the main problem was the fact that the newly formed government had to deal with different national minorities who had become inhabitants of Czechoslovakia after the setting of the borders (Dowling 2002, p19&20). The new Czechoslovak Republic contained seven different ethnic groups, seven million Czechs, two million Slovaks, three million Bohemian Germans, three quarters of a million Hungarians, 500,000 Ruthenes 80,000 Poles and an unknown amount of Roma. The fact that not only the Slovak territory was added to the Republic but also the Ruthenian (see figure 2) had a strategic aim, in this way Czechoslovakia would have a border with Romania Dowling 2002, p22).

Although the Slovaks and Ruthenes had a different cultural background they voluntarily joined the Czechs in their desire for independence. The Slovaks were by far not equal to the Czechs in the sense of economical and technological development. The Czechs were considered to have a bourgeois character while the Slovaks were described as peasantry. Though, the opportunities for



Figure 2

freedom were enough to make them strive to overcome these inequalities. Yet, in the 75 years of unity they never have been able to overcome their differences. Therefore, there have always been some tensions (Dowling 2002, p24).

2.5 Betrayal by the West?

The Parliamentary Democracy of the first Czechoslovak Republic lasted about 20 years. The collapse of the Republic lay not just in the internal affairs they faced. It was mainly caused by external international affairs and interference (Dowling 2002, p39).

Edvard Beneš had been the representative for the Czechoslovak Republic on the international stage. He kept close contact with the western countries and was present at international meetings such as the meetings held by the League of Nations.

However, the international atmosphere changed in the early 1930s when Germany came under Nazi control. Germany had become a member of the League of Nations in 1926 but was withdrawn by Hitler in 1933 (Dowling 2002, p41).

Hitler had a great hatred for the Czechoslovak Republic, mainly because in his eyes it was an artificially created nation which was also home to Sudeten Germans. He detested the Paris peace conference and was determined to reunite all Germans within one state. Despite the fact that the Sudeten Germans caused difficulties in Czechoslovak internal affairs, without the interference of Nazi Germany, Czechoslovakia would probably never have collapsed (Dowling 2002, p49).

The Sudeten German party, led by Konrad Henlein was subsidised by German Nazis, and the investment paid off, Henlein gained great popularity among the Sudeten Germans in the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia (Dowling 2002, p47). From then on, Henlein started to campaign among the Sudeten Germans to fight for an independent German state, and this Sudetenland became feasible and desirable after Austria allied with Nazi Germany in March 1938. In May of that same year, the French and British heads of state, Édouard Daldier, George Bonnet, Neville Chamberlain and Lord Halifax, sensed the upcoming escalating situation and strongly recommended the Czechoslovak President, by now Edvard Beneš, and his prime minister Milan Hodža to come to an agreement with Henlein. They refused (Dowling 2002, p50). On September 15, 1938, Chamberlain met with Hitler in Berchtesgaden, in Hitler's house, in order to discuss the Sudeten German situation, he did not bother to inform Beneš. In this meeting Hitler again demanded that the Sudetenland belong to the Third Reich. On September 17, 1938, Chamberlain discussed Hitler's demand with his

own cabinet, Daladier and Bonnet. They made an agreement and presented the Czechoslovak government with the demand that areas with at least 50 percent German population should be transferred immediately and voluntarily to the Third Reich. This demand was followed by an ultimatum. This demand and ultimatum was made with the idea that if Czechoslovakia gave up the Sudetenland, Hitler would slow down his desire to occupy greater parts of Europe. Beneš and his government, as expected, rejected this proposal. In the opinion of Beneš this demand followed up by an ultimatum was outrageous. It was then that Czechoslovakia recognised the first signs of betrayal by nations that were considered allies (Dowling 2002, p52). Yet, worse was still to come. On September 29-30, 1938 the famous Munich negotiations took place. The negotiators were Hitler, Daladier, Bonnet, Chamberlain, Halifax and Benito Mussolini (see figure 3). During the conference they decided that the Sudetenland would be occupied by Nazi Germany in five territorial stages between the first and tenth of October of that year. Even so, Nazi Germany took 6 territorial stages (Dowling 2002, p53). Most striking was the fact that no Czechoslovak representative was invited to these negotiations. It was only after the negotiators made their decision that the Czech representatives were informed about the decision. The Czechoslovak delegates were left to go home and tell the news that their country had been sold over their heads. The Czechoslovak government did discuss the possibility of armed resistance, but, without the help of any allies they did not see the possibility to succeed and had no other choice than to capitulate (Dowling 2002, p54).



The Munich agreement 1938

Figure 3

2.6 Conclusion

The founding fathers, Masaryk, Beneš, and Štefánik, established the first democratic Czechoslovak Republic in 1918. Even though the new country faced difficulties in the building process, the first Czechoslovak Republic is considered as one of the most successful transformations of a former occupied nation, and many neighbouring nations envied their independence. This historical and social achievement would set the precedent for future peaceful and democratic transformations. In the opinion of Masaryk, a democracy is the best political system since it is the only one that is suited to the dignity of man.

Unfortunately, the euphoric sphere was brutally interrupted by the Munich Agreement in which France and Britain agreed together with Hitler's Nazi Germany that a part of Czechoslovakia would be given to the Third Reich.

In 1937 Masaryk died, and it may have been fortunate for him that he never had to experience the destruction of the democratic Republic that he built and cherished (Dowling 2002, p38). Up until today, The Czech Republic still celebrates the Independence of the first Czechoslovak Republic every year with Masaryk as national hero.

Until this day, the betrayal of France and Britain in the Munich Agreement has greatly influenced the Czech mentality towards Western European countries. As a result, cooperation between the Czech Republic and Western European countries is always looked at with suspicion. On the other hand, Czechoslovak people still look back at the first Czechoslovak Republic with pride, but also with disappointment because of the destruction. In their eyes they lost thirty years of a well functioning market economy, which could have resulted in a state that could have been comparable to Switzerland; a state equally neutral and stable within the region of states which were searching for stability.

3. Czechoslovakia during World War II

3.1 The Nazi take over

The disastrous Munich agreement meant the end of the carefully built and relatively well functioning Czechoslovak Republic. In March 1939, Hitler broke the Munich agreement and invaded the whole of Czechoslovakia and dissolved the Democratic Czechoslovak Republic. Edvard Beneš was forced by the Nazis to resign and left the country for London under pressure. Soon Czechoslovakia was no longer Czechoslovakia but became more like Czecho-Slovakia, one nation divided in two parts. Slovakia wanted to seek independence and did not fear to seek help with the Nazi Germans. The deconstruction of the Czechoslovak Republic was finalized in agreements made in 1938 - 1939. Most of the Czechoslovak territory was transferred to Hungary, Poland and Germany (see figure 4). The final strike came in the night of March 14-15, 1939 when the Third Reich invaded and occupied the Czech lands and claimed it as a German 'protectorate' (Dowling 2002, p 58&59).



The successor of Beneš was Emil Hácha. He was a highly respected elderly judge with no political experience. He did try to stop the Germans from overtaking the whole of the Czech lands, but, his effort failed. Meanwhile the Germans took great advantage of the Czech natural resources. Huge quantities of metals, minerals and agricultural products were transported directly to the German Reich.

Besides the export of natural resources, a big personal sacrifice by the Czech people was forced. As in other occupied European countries, Jews, Roma and other by the Nazis so-called 'untermensch' were deported to concentration camps to perform hard labour or simply to be exterminated. The biggest camp in the Czech lands was Terezín. In this concentration camp prisoners were forced to do hard labour, and they were starved to death. It also functioned as a transit camp where many Jews from Germany, Austria and the Netherlands transited to finally be exterminated in camps further east (Dowling 2002, p62).

3.2 The action abroad

Abroad Beneš was still dealing with his 'Munich complex'. In that he still felt personally and nationally betrayed by his allies France and Great Britain. After his brief stay in London, he moved to North America where he became a lecturer. He worked hard to get in contact with

American Government agencies in order to gather support for an official Czech and Slovak émigré organisation and to make sure the Czechoslovak situation would get attention. Beneš managed to have informal and unofficial talks with President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and these meetings were definitely the basis for the eventually recognition by the USA of a Czech government in exile (Dowling 2002, p65).

In the second half of 1939, Beneš returned to London as a private citizen. He was requested by the British government not to practise any politics, but eventually the British came to realise that Beneš was the best choice to lead a Czechoslovak action abroad. On the other side, the French were not as willing to give that kind of power to Beneš. They had already made some agreements with Slovak officials in exile. Pressure by the British, resulted that French admitted that Beneš was the most competent for the job (Dowling 2002, p65). With the acceptance of France and Britain for Beneš to be the leader of the Czech action abroad, Beneš called himself the president of the pre-war First Republic in exile. He justified this on the facts that the Nazi occupation of the Czech lands was illegal since the agreements set in the Munich agreement were broken, and therefore his resignation as president was invalid due to the pressure in which he was forced to leave the post. Even so, Beneš did send his congratulations to his successor Hácha, giving the impression that he accepted the status quo. Beneš and his followers agreed on this gesture because they thought that it was better to have a government of Czechs who followed instructions from Nazi Germany then to have a fully Nazi government. In their eyes, the Prague government was one in captivity (Dowling 2002, p66).

Although the French and British agreed on the leadership of Beneš, and a Czechoslovak National Committee, they did not recognise a government in exile. Things changed when France fell in 1940 which meant now that many Czechoslovak political figures concentrated in Great Britain.

The final recognition came painfully slowly, as the allies had already declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939, and did facilitate the Czechs with the possibility to sent messages through radio broadcasting to the Czech people in the occupied Czech lands. Finally the Czechoslovak National Committee in Paris was recognised by the French on November 14, 1939, and by the British on December 20 of that same year. The full recognition of a Czechoslovak government in exile did not come until July 1941. Beneš officially declared war against Nazi Germany in name of the Czechoslovak nation on December 16, 1941. From

now on, he and his government in exile had the authority to make policy decisions on behalf of the home population (Dowling 2002, p68).

Beneš and his fellow Czechoslovak politicians had the consensus that it would be better to have a Czech puppet home government than to have a direct rule from Berlin, but their attitude changed when the Soviet Union entered the war. He asked President Hácha and Prime Minister Eliáš to resign by secret message brought by the Czech underground. Hácha and Eliáš hesitated, though the arrest of Eliáš on the suspicion of having secret contact with Beneš was the final strike, and so they resigned. Alois Eliáš was convicted for treason and received the death penalty (Dowling 2002, p69).

3.3 The battle for liberation

A key point in the relation between Czech politicians and the Nazi Germans was the assassination of the highest placed German officer in Prague, Reinhard Heydrich (see figure 5). From the beginning, Heydrich caused terror in the Czech lands. Many Czechs found their death under the reign of terror that Heydrich released. How the assassination was organised still remains unclear, but it is certain that Heydrich was attacked on May 27, 1942, as he was



Reinhard Heydrich

driving his car. The attack did not kill him immediately. He died some days later of septicaemia (Dowling 2002, p72). After his assassination the situation worsened. In retaliation, about 1331 Czech people were killed. The assassination of Heydrich meant a great sacrifice by the Czech people. The poor and grim situations in the Czech lands were now hard to deny by the allies, and it certainly caused awareness abroad.

In July 1942, the British government finally renounced the Munich agreement, on the grounds that it had been invalidated by the Nazi invasion of March 15, 1939 (Dowling 2002, p73).

Meanwhile there existed two camps with Beneš and the Allies on one side, and Klement Gottwald and the Russians on the other. Although both wanted their side to be the liberator of the Czech lands, they also could foresee that a successful end of the war could not be reached without cooperation. In the end, they made a concession that when Beneš would return to Prague, he would not come from the Allies' side, but through Moscow. Furthermore, Ruthenia, one of the former Czech provinces would now become part of Ukraine. Beneš was not at all in favour of this consensus, though Britain did not give the ultimate word to come and help him out (Dowling 2002, p76). Beneš and his government left London in March 1945

for Moscow. There he and the Russians build a new government for the Czech lands. The Communist party was highly represented in this government. According to the private secretary of Beneš, Edward Taborsky, Beneš wanted to be a democratic president who would stand above the different parties. He also thought that the Communists might soften down by the responsibility of governmental office and that they could be restrained by the democratic forces in politics (Dowling 2002, p77).

In April 1945, Bratislava was liberated by the Red Army. In May, Prague rose up in revolt against the Germans, and much blood was shed. The question of which side, Russia or the Allies, would liberate Prague became pressing. The Russians were coming from the east and the Americans under General Eisenhower were coming from the west and had already liberated Plzeň. The Americans came within 25 kilometres from Prague where they stopped. General Eisenhower was not willing to risk incurring American casualties for purely political, as opposed to military reasons. Thus, it was the Red Army that liberated Prague (see figure 6) (Dowling 2002, p77&78).



The liberation of Prague by the Red Army

Figure 6

3.4 Conclusion

In March 1939, Hitler broke the Munich Agreement with the result that the Nazis invaded the Czechoslovak Republic, which meant that the carefully built and relatively well functioning Czechoslovak democratic Republic was dissolved. Due to good diplomacy, Beneš managed to form a government in exile which has not been easy, since he still suffered from the Munich complex. Moreover, since the occupation by Nazi Germany, the relationship between the Czechs and Sudeten Germans had not been easy. As a result many Sudeten Germans moved to Germany.

The battle for liberation was finally won by the Russian Red Army, though the Americans were close. The fact that the Russians were the ones that liberated Prague has been of great influence of future historical events, since the same army that liberated the Czech

lands, came back years later and forced Communism upon them. The Americans on the other side, stopped 25 kilometres from Prague. After the betrayal during the Munich Agreement, the West let the Czechs down again by not continuing the liberation further east. The Czech lands were caught in the middle of the ideological battle between East and West. In the end, the Russians prevailed and they cleared the road to finally extend their communist ideology.

4. 1948- 1988 Czechoslovakia under Communist occupation

4.1 The aftermath of World War II

The return of Beneš to Prague in May 1945 was celebrated thorough the whole country. Although the euphoric sphere felt good, yet, Beneš did understand that he was facing a lot of difficulties reconstructing the state as a democracy. Communist partisans gained a lot of positions in the newly formed government, mainly by request of the Russians. The Communists and Social Democrats held the Ministries of Information, Education, Social Welfare, Agriculture and the Interior. This last one meant that they had the control over the police, security and intelligence service. The only genuine non-Communist partisan was Jan Masaryk, son of the First Republic' President Tomáš Masaryk, who was in charge of foreign affairs (Dowling 2002, p80).

Another difficulty was the German minority who now, maybe understandably, became victim of retribution. On January 25, 1946 a transfer begun in order to transport Germans back to Germany. From a pre-war population of two million Germans, only about 165,000 Germans remained in Czechoslovakia (Dowling 2002, p81).

The Russian and Czech Communists benefitted greatly from the internal tensions and the unstructured society. They used it to infiltrate in every possible way. Although it had become obvious before the end of the war that they were taking all efforts to gain power, now it became more feasible. It was just a matter of time when this would happen.

The Communists had yet another different strong weapon in order to win support. The Czechoslovak Communist party, like the Soviet Union, had never accepted the Munich agreement, and thus, they could use this as propaganda to emphasise the betrayal of France and Britain in 1938. In addition, they could present this example as one of the weaknesses of a democratic system. They only had to use the word "Munich" as an accusation and could therefore portrait the Communist system as a valid alternative to the system that had gave away the Czechoslovak First Republic to Hitler's Third Reich (Dowling 2002, p83).

In 1947, the Communists already started on their way to a coup, slowly infiltrated Slovakia, since the support for their party was not high enough, and they made sure that the Slovak people would hear as much propaganda as possible in order to switch loyalties. Besides propaganda, the Communists also caused scandals by democratic politicians in order to set them in bad light. Striking was the bombing of three democratic politicians who received bombs in the form of perfume bottles, and in this way the Communists tried to cause

panic. Fortunately, none of the ministers were injured or killed. Nonetheless, the Communist coup had begun (Dowling 2002, p85).

4.2 1948: The Communist coup

In January 1948, public opinion showed that the Communist party would gain fewer votes in the coming elections. This forced them to change strategy and find other ways to gain power, such as illegal ways. Help came for them during the crisis of February 1948, because Václav Nosek, the Minister of Interior, had ignored a government decree of February 13 which ordered him to reinstate eight high-ranking non-Communist police officials whom he had dismissed the previous day. Because of his disobedience, 12 democratic ministers resigned on February 20. At first, Beneš did not accept their resignation, though he finally did on February 24. The resigned ministers had figured that their resignation would cause the fall of the government and elections would be called immediately. They figured wrong, since only a minority of ministers had resigned, and so, Gottwald was able to form a new cabinet on February 25, a cabinet now comprised out of Communist ministers. The Communist had now full control over Czechoslovakia (Dowling, 2002, p86).

From now on, the hope for a Democratic Republic vanished. The Communists used brutal force in order to take over Bratislava. In the rest of the country, democratic politicians were prevented from entering their office, and the Communists together with their compliant parties took over all seats in all possible government bodies. On the afternoon of February 25, Gottwald announced the new government from a balcony in Wenceslas Square in Prague (Dowling 2002, p87).

Many democratic ministers, party leaders, and officials managed to leave Czechoslovakia. Jan Masaryk was found dead in a courtyard of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs beneath a bathroom window, and whether he jumped or was pushed remains unclear. Beneš had been ill for a long time. On June 7, he gave up his presidency due to illness. He died on September 14, 1948, at the age of 64. Beneš had been deeply devoted to democracy. In his opinion, democracy is the solid and permanent basis for human life, honesty and dignity. Moments before he died, he told his secretary Taborsky: 'My greatest mistake was that I refused to believe to the very last that even Stalin lied to me, cynically both in 1935 and later, and that his assurances to me and to Masaryk were an intentional deceit.' His last words illustrate both Beneš personal tragedy as well as the dilemma that Czechoslovakia faced historically (Dowling 2002, p88).

4.3 1968: Prague Spring and the Soviet invasion

In February 1948, when the Communists definitively took power in Czechoslovakia, the country was declared a "people's democracy", and this was the first step towards socialism, and eventually, communism. Bureaucratic centralism under the direction of KSC leadership was introduced. Dissident elements were removed from all levels of society, including the Catholic Church. The ideological ethics of Marxism-Leninism and socialist realism were introduced in intellectual and cultural life. The entire education system was now under state control. The Communist party also introduced a central planned economy and abolished all private ownership. Czechoslovakia became a protectorate of the Soviet Union. In this position they were a founding member of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) in 1949 and of the Warsaw Pact in 1955 (Dowling 2002, p99-101).

At this time Beneš was succeeded by Gottwald. Although in theory Czechoslovakia remained a multiparty state, in fact the Communists were in complete control. Gottwald died in 1953, and was succeeded by Antonín Zápotocký. Zápotocký, in turn was succeeded by Antonín Novotný in 1957 (Dowling 2002, p99-101). Novotný stayed in position for quite some while, and under his authority, Communist officials were prosecuted under the suspicion of treason, espionage or Titoism (an adaptation of socialist ideology named after Josip Broz Tito, leader of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia). The economy had a great setback and the whole political and socioeconomic sphere changed (Dowling 2002, p101).

As the need for change grew, there was a slogan going around that called for socialism with a human face (Wallace 1977, p317). In January 1968, Novotný was replaced by Alexander Dubček, a 46 year old Slovak who essentially did not have the right qualifications for the job, and he happened to be the only candidate left after a night of discussion on whom should succeed Novotný. For the Czechs, it was a great surprise that a Slovak was chosen to be the new head of state. They were uncertain whether this was in their interest since the Czechs always received special treatment by all the former governments, and they now feared that this would change and more benefits would be given to the Slovaks (Dowling 2002, p106&107).

Under Dubček, many reforms were implemented, as well as the rehabilitation of



Prague Spring
Figure 7

former political prisoners. He took away most of the censorship and he organised the investigation on the number of show trials held verifying how many were accused. The outcomes were shocking. Between 1948 and 1968, some 62,000 people had been wrongly prosecuted and punished. All these reforms and introduction of a human government resulted in some intellectuals such as Václav Havel and Ivan Sviták argued for an opposition party. The Dubček government did introduce reforms, but did not want to float away from the original principals of Communism, meaning that they did not tolerate a three-party system, as suggested by Havel and Sviták. Therefore, restrictions were placed on the formation of new organisations or movements. The key aim for the Dubček government was to serve society rather than rule (Dowling 2002, p108).

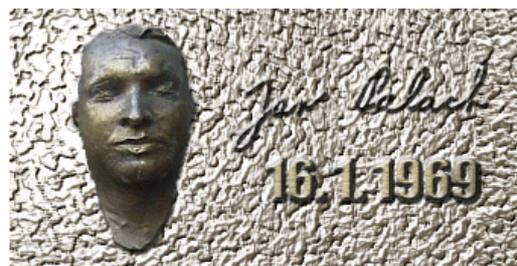
Dubček also decentralised powers, so that from now on the Slovak national council was an official legislative body, and the Slovak council of ministers would become an executive one, and their budget would no longer be controlled by the Czechs but by them directly. The Slovak nation was no longer the under-dog, from this point on, and the two nations were supposed to have equal rights and powers.

The events and implemented changes which gave Communism a human face took place between January 1968 and August 20, 1968, and this period is later referred to as Prague Spring.

The Soviet Union leaders had watched the changes in Czechoslovakia with a great dislike. In their eyes, the whole understanding and principles of a Communist state were diminished. Therefore, they called for intervention. In accordance with other Warsaw pact countries, they organised an invasion and finally invaded Czechoslovakia on August 20-21, 1968. Dubček, together with his Prime Minister Černík were arrested and transported via Poland and Ruthenia to Moscow. On the morning of August 21, the whole country was under Soviet control (Wallace 1977, p336&337).

4.4 Normalisation

Bit by bit, all the reforms implemented by Dubček during the Prague Spring were removed and all the old repressions were again introduced. Dubček remained first secretary until April 17, 1969. He was succeeded by the Slovak Communist Gustáv Husák.



The Czechoslovak people did not easily trust in the new situation.

Jan Palach
Figure 8

The persons who tried to oppose the new regime found out the hard way not to do so. A landmark in the protests was the shocking demonstration on January 16, 1969, which took place on Wenceslas Square in Prague, and where a young student, Jan Palach (see figure 8), of Charles University set himself on fire in protest of the normalisation. He died in agony some days later, and was widely regarded as a martyr for Prague Spring. He was almost immediately compared with the medieval Czech hero Jan Hus. Big demonstrations followed his suicidal sacrifice and he became the overall symbol of the protest against normalisation. Nowadays, there is a monument in remembrance of him at Wenceslas Square in Prague (Dowling 2002, p121&122).

Although only the two years after the Prague Spring were officially designated as a period of 'normalisation', this actually applied to the next two decades. Bernard Wheaton and Zdeněk Kavan indentified three pillars of normalisation: 1) A purge of all major economic and political organisations, including the Communist party itself, 2) Strict censorship, thus allowing the party to control access to information and ideas, one particular aspect of the censorship was the restriction of travelling abroad since many did not come back; and 3) The reinstallation of centralised control over the economy (Dowling 2002, p123).

4.5 Dissident

During the years of normalisation, many intellectuals and well-known Czechoslovak figures as well as normal Czechoslovaks fled Czechoslovakia. Among them were the writers Josef Škvorecky and Milan Kundera, the film director Miloš Forman, and the tennis players Martina Navratilova and Ivan Lendl. Some chose to stay, among them runner Emil Zátopek and philosopher, playwright and poet Václav Havel. The writers who had fled Czechoslovakia did not sit still. Kundera, who had fled to France, wrote many works making fun of and criticizing the Communist rule in Czechoslovakia, not only to protest, but also to keep the Czechoslovak situation under international attention (Dowling 2002, p127&128).

At home, Václav Havel proved to be a real hard-lined opposition voice to the normalised regime, and he signed a document addressed to the federal assembly called 'Ten Points' which condemned normalisation. He was blacklisted and his work was banned from libraries. It was probably a thorn in the eyes of the authorities that he received American and Austrian literary prizes. Furthermore, he wrote letters requesting the liberation of political prisoners, which the authorities denied (Dowling 2002, p128&129).

In 1977, Václav Havel was one of the founders of the pressure group Charta77. The

group was established after the prosecution of one of the Czechoslovak most popular rock bands called 'Plastic People of the Universe', who were arrested and charged with 'disturbing the peace' and 'hooliganism'. Their imprisonment was seen as over-harsh, and shocked many Czechoslovakians as well as people abroad. Their prosecution became symbol for the total ban of self-expression. The discussions that emerged after the treatment of the Plastic People led without hesitation to the creation of Charter77 on January 1, 1977 (see figure 9). Charter77 was formed by men with different backgrounds and convictions. It stated that citizens of the state were denied freedom of expression and of religious confession, freedom from fear, the right to study and to have access to information. It also enumerated other breaches of civil rights. It was not a political party but rather a pressure group that represented a broad range of people, from Catholics to reform Communists and Liberal Social Democrats (Dowling 2002, p 131&132).



Charta77
Figure 9

After Charta77, another pressure group was founded on April 27, 1978. This was the Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Prosecuted, also known by its Czech acronym VONS. VONS was created out of Charter77 and among its 18 members were Václav Havel and other chartists. VONS was concerned with specific cases of injustice and abuse of Human Rights. Both members of Charta77 and VONS were arrested and prosecuted for criminal subversion of the Republic. Many of them were imprisoned (Dowling 2002, p133-135).

The authorities knew very well that the worst punishment for intellectual dissidents was the fact that they were not able to use their minds and expertise professionally. Therefore, many artists and academics were forced to find uneducated manual jobs. Examples were, among others, Jiří Dienstbier, who was a television journalist and kept broadcasting during the Prague Spring. As punishment, he was fired and imprisoned, and after his release he found work as a night watcher and stoker. Václav Havel was also forced to do manual labour. Despite this, many of the intellectuals such as Dienstbier and Havel managed to publish their work during the manual labour in the underground press (Dowling 2002, p135&136).

1985 was in all aspects a momentous year for the Soviet Bloc, when Mikhail Gorbachev was appointed as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In the period 1985–1988, the faces of the dissidents became more known and the number of dissidents grew, not only abroad, but also throughout the whole Soviet Bloc. At the end of the

year 1987, Husák resigned as first secretary, though he kept the position of President. He was succeeded by Miloš Jakeš, a pro-Soviet survivor from the party leadership of 1968, who proved to be a harsh normaliser, just like his predecessor. His statement was: 'Let Moscow do as it pleases; Prague, like East Berlin, shall remain frozen and inert in Brezhnev's age of sclerosis' (Dowling 2002, p138).

The idea of change was in the air, even though the authorities violently crushed them. In January 1989, the twentieth anniversary of the protest suicide by Jan Palach was celebrated by week-long spontaneous demonstrations, and this week was revered as 'Palach Week'. The protesters called for the change to democracy within six days. Again, the police responded brutally with tear gas, water cannons, beatings and arrests. Among the arrested protesters was once more Václav Havel. His crime being that he laid flowers on the place where Palach had set himself on fire. It seemed that normalisation would carry on (Dowling 2002, p139).

4.6 Conclusion

In the aftermath of World War II, the influence of the Communists was already feasible. Even so, in January 1948, a public opinion showed that the Communist Party would not gain as much votes as they expected. Due to this, the Communists were felt forced to use illegal ways to gain power. Exploiting wrong decisions made by democratic politicians, the Communists had now full control over all the government bodies.

In January 1968, Alexander Dubček became president of the Czechoslovak people's democracy. Under him, many reforms were implemented with the result that he gave Communism a human face. The Soviet Union leaders disliked these reforms and arrested Dubček. Dubček was replaced by Gustáv Husák, who normalised the country and removed all reforms introduced by Dubček. This caused a lot of protests; a landmark in the protests was the suicide of Jan Palach. Besides the street protests, also a dissident movement was established. The main figure was Václav Havel, who published many manifests as *Charta 77*, one of the most remarkable ones which led to the underground dissident movement *Charta 77* and many others.

The eagerness to fight the regime came out of an understanding of cultural loss. It is therefore remarkable that mainly artists, writers, and intellectuals that led and supported the dissident movements. Czech society highly valued their culture and the censorships that were forced upon every facet of cultural activities affronted them deeply. This was one of the reasons that the protests became rougher.

5. The Velvet Revolution and the Velvet divorce

5.1 The Velvet Revolution

November 9, 1989, is one of the most remarkable days in the twentieth century history. On this date, the Berlin wall fell. This was the beginning of the fall of communism through the whole of Central and Eastern Europe. Just like the rest of the world, the Czechoslovak people followed the events in neighbouring Communist countries closely.

Eight days after the fall of the Berlin wall, Czech students gathered together to commemorate the death of Czech student Jan Opletal, who had been killed fifty years before during an anti-Nazi demonstration. The number of students joining this march grew by the hour. Reaching 15,000 in an anti-fascist march where they yelled and held political banners. As they marched towards Wenceslas Square, they were attacked by riot police and special troops, known as the red berets. The most striking sight of the student march was them standing with open hand palms showing they were unarmed. Despite this, many ended up in the hospital. This brutal police action was the catalyst for the Velvet Revolution. The day after, students went on a strike and occupied university buildings, and they also called for a bigger strike on November 27. The students were joined by the actors of Prague, and as the news spread, many actors from outside Prague joined and travelled to the capital to show that the strike was not only taking place there, but throughout the whole country. Since theatre and film were popular among industrial workers, the strike was well received by population. On November 19, Civic Forum was formed in Prague as an umbrella organisation for the opposition, and it embraced all forms of opposition, Charter77 and VONS being among many others part of the Civic Forum. In Slovakia, a similar organisation was founded. Namely 'the Public Against Violence' (VPN) and it received similar support as its counterpart in Prague (Dowling 2002, p146&147).

On November 23, a delegation of 10,000 workers joined the demonstrations and declared that they would join and support the announced great strike of the November 27. Although they also realised what a day-long strike would mean for the economy, they decided to let the strike have a duration of two hours, just enough to make a strong statement (Dowling 2002, p149).

A day before the strike, the Czech people decorated the streets of Prague with political anti-communist banners and slogans. They also hung posters and pictures in the streets of their heroes such as Jan Palach, Dubček and Masaryk. Meanwhile in Slovakia, Dubček made



Dubček and Havel
Figure 10

his first public speech in twenty years. After giving the speech, Dubček travelled to Prague in order to join the discussions with the Civic Forum. On November 24, Dubček made his first speech in Prague since 1969 from a balcony facing Wenceslas Square, and beside him stood Václav Havel (see figure 10).

That night, the Communist authorities decided to make some changes in official positions, and Miloš Jakeš and the entire presidium of the politburo resigned. Jakeš was replaced by a normaliser Karel Urbánek (Dowling 2002, p151).

November 25, was another day of protests, but this time the protests were led by Cardinal František Tomášek, the Archbishop of Prague, so the intake was both religious and nationalistic. Tens of thousands of people joined this demonstration and millions saw it broadcasted on television. Later that day again, thousands of people joined the manifestations on Letna Plain in Prague, Dubček and Havel being amongst the speakers and declaring that the changes made by the Communist government were phony. That same day, Urbánek announced that the government was prepared to talk with the opposition, while some fundamental Communist governmental officers resigned. On Monday November 27, another general strike took place between noon and two o'clock. It has been estimated that four-fifths of the population stopped working. In order to diminish economic impact many workers agreed to compensate the lost time by doing two hours of overwork that same night (Dowling 2002, p152&153).

The last days of November were marked by negotiations between the opposition and the Communist party, both in Prague as in Bratislava. The main achievement was in the message that Urbánek told the central committee namely, that the Communists were no longer in the position to hold solid power. Furthermore, the dissidents assigned a commission that would investigate the events of November 17 during the student protests. The Communists became more and more desperate and tried whatever they could to turn the general opinion. One of their desperate acts was to denounce the invasion of 1968. On Sunday December 3, the politburo announced the formation of a new government, were five out of the twenty ministerial posts would be appointed to non-communists. This was unacceptable for the Civic Forum and they called for more demonstrations and strikes. The position of President Husák became fragile, and although he did not want to resign, he did hint that he might do so later

that same day. The next days the demonstrations, strikes and negotiations went on. Husák finally resigned as president on Sunday December 10 and again a new government was formed. Many dissidents gained a position in this new government; for example, Jiří Dienstbier was appointed as Foreign Minister. By Wednesday December 13, it seemed that all parties had agreed on what to do with the presidency, they all agreed that the elections should take place before the end of January and that the newly chosen president would be a Czech and not a Communist. Besides Havel there were other candidates for the presidency. On December 16, Dubček and Havel announced that Havel would stand for the Presidency with Dubček on his side. On December 28, 1989, Alexander Dubček was elected chairman of the federal assembly and was awarded the Andrei Sakharov prize for human rights by the European Parliament. On December 29, 1989 Václav Havel became the First Democratic, non-communist president of Czechoslovakia since the death of Edvard Beneš in 1948. He was chosen unanimously by all the deputies of the federal assembly. In a short speech held outside Prague castle in front of a crowd, he promised not to betray people confidence and to lead the country to free elections (Dowling 2002, p154-159).

5.2 The Velvet Divorce

The democratic rebirth of Czechoslovakia brought problems that affected both the Czechs and Slovaks in many different ways. Besides the debate over what to officially name the newly born state, free-market reforms engineered by the minister of finance, Václav Klaus, between 1990 and 1992 tended to benefit the Czech side more than the Slovak side. This had its origins in the fact that the Czech side was and is more industrialized than the Slovak one. The Czech side was also less economically connected to the USSR. Combined with the ever lasting Slovak desire for autonomy, this led to serious tensions in the government that became visible in 1992. The question of how much authority the federal government should have in relation to the power of governments of the two republics became a stressing issue, and one that the Federal Assembly could not resolve until after the 1992 election. While public opinion on both the Czech and Slovak sides showed that the majority wanted to preserve a common state, mutual suspicion of each other, rooted in historical critical landmarks within the relationship between the two states, indicated that this might not be possible. Expectations and images of each other were not likely to change, the Czechs felt that the Slovaks always took advantage of their life-or-death crisis, and they had not forgotten the cooperation between the Slovak leadership with the Nazis during World War II. On the other side, the

Slovaks felt that the Czechs would never take them seriously and that they would never be treated fully equal (Agnew 2004, p301). The uncomfortable relationship between the Slovaks and Czechs remained which was of great importance in the transition by which the government tried to define itself (Leff, 1997).

Václav Klaus' rightist ODS party won the elections of June 1992, and key point in his campaign were economic reforms. In Slovakia, Vladimír Mečiar won the elections with his party Democratic Slovakia (HDZDS), his key point during the campaign being to call for more autonomy for the Slovaks. It appeared at the 1992 elections that the Czech voters supported a centre-right government that favoured more rapid economic reforms, while their Slovak counterparts supported Slovak separatists and left-wing parties that favoured slower free-market reforms and the preservation of some aspects of the socialist economy. Mečiar became the Slovak Prime Minister and opposed the rapid privatization of the public sector as suggested by the Czech Prime Minister Václav Klaus. Neither of the two Prime Ministers was willing to compromise and their relationship reached an impasse. They only agreed on proposed plans of the separation of Slovakia from the Czech lands. Klaus did not seem to be disappointed in losing Slovakia since they were the cause of the obstruction of the implementation of his liberalization policies. Besides, Slovakia contributed little economically to the Czechoslovak country. Meanwhile, Mečiar saw an opportunity to finally reach the desire of a full sovereign Slovak state (BBC News 2003, Agnew 2004).

Despite mutual support from the Czech and the Slovak people to stay one nation, the outcome of the 1992 elections together with the disagreements between Mečiar and Klaus were enough to lead to a split (Čornej and Pokorný 2000). Václav Havel, being a real federalist, stood with his back against the wall due to the increasingly strong push in the parliament toward a Czechoslovak split. Slovak representatives in parliament kept blocking Havel's second term of presidency in 1992, and so Havel reacted by resigning from the post in July of that year in order to avoid being the cause of the dissolution (Čornej and Pokorný 2000; Wolchik 1998).

In the same month that Havel stepped down, the Slovak parliament voted 113 to 24 in favour of the republic's independency. By the end of 1992, Klaus and Mečiar worked out an agreement that would formalize the divorce of Czechoslovakia into two sovereign nations. The law barely passed on December 27, 1992, and from January 1, 1993, Czechoslovakia would no longer exist. From that date on the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic were peacefully and simultaneously founded in this so-called "Velvet Divorce". Both states were

immediately recognized by all European countries and the United States (Čornej and Pokorný 2000).

5.3 Conclusion

In 1989, the Soviet bloc fell. In Czechoslovakia, the transition happened without the shedding of blood, and so the revolution was named the Velvet Revolution. After the establishment of the new Czechoslovak Republic, Slovak and Czech representatives came to the conclusion that they could no longer remain one nation. They therefore decided to split. This was also done without violence or other protests, and was therefore referred to as the Velvet Divorce.

The fact that both events occurred relatively peacefully and that they afterwards were named “Velvet” Revolution and Divorce encouraged Czech society and politics. The Czechs were proud that they could show the world that violence is not necessary in order to reach independence. It is generally the case that most revolutions and separations of states are violently reached. In the case of the Czechoslovak Velvet Revolution, the government was already weak and the army chose the side of the protestors. This meant that the fall of the Communist regime could happen without violent intervention.



Velvet Revolution
Figure 11

6. The Czech Republic and the accession into the European Union

6.1 Pre-accession

After the Velvet Divorce and the establishment of a relatively good functioning market economy and political stable democracy, it was time to take the country to another level. The next step was the application to start the procedure to become a full European Union Member State.

The EU had its targets already on the newly formed democracies in Central and Eastern Europe. It was obvious to the EU as well as for the former Soviet Union countries that accession to the EU could preserve and guarantee civil liberties and economic stability which they were all eager for.

Before the Czech Republic started the negotiations with the EU to become a Member State, there already was an important relationship between the two. Since 1989, the foreign trade of the Czech Republic was mainly focused on the EU, and the EU was already their biggest trading partner with more than a 65% share. In addition, the largest investors within the Czech Republic were European Union Members. In the geographical sense, the Czech Republic shared the longest part of its frontier with EU-member countries, meaning that they were already physically connected. What is more, the Czech citizens always felt they belong to European civilization and shared its cultural values. These feelings have their roots in their historical connection to Europe (Čornej and Pokorný 2000; Agnew 2004).

The European Commission was of the opinion that, even before the negotiations for the EU membership in 1996 began, that the Czech Republic had fulfilled the political criteria. The desire to be part of the EU encouraged the Czech Republic to make considerable progress in further consolidating and deepening the stability of its institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities (European Commission 2002).

In June 1993, the European Union's Member States declared in Copenhagen, Denmark, that the new democracies of Post-Communist Europe could join the EU if they fulfilled a number of convergence criteria. These criteria were called the Copenhagen criteria, and in addition to these criteria, there were two more documents that had set out guidelines for candidate nations: the Treaty of Maastricht, and the framework for negotiations:

1) The Treaty of Maastricht, Article 49

“Any European State which respects the principles set out in Article 6(1) may apply to become a member of the Union. It shall address its application to the Council, which shall act unanimously after consulting the Commission and after receiving the assent of the European Parliament, which shall act by an absolute majority of its component members.

The conditions of admission and the adjustments to the Treaties on which the Union is founded, which such admission entails, shall be the subject of an agreement between the Member States and the Applicant State. This agreement shall be submitted for ratification by all the contracting States in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements” (European Union, 1992, art. 49).

2) The Copenhagen criteria, June 1993

Membership criteria require that the candidate country must have achieved the following:

- Stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities. Shortly, they have to accept and implement all accept all of the *acquis communautaire*;
- The existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union;
- The ability to take on the obligation of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.

3) Framework for negotiations between the EU and the candidate state

A framework in which the EU and the candidate state set out the road towards the achievement of the criteria described above. The main objective was to establish a framework in which the candidate state worked towards fulfilling the requirements to finally be competent in entering the EU.

6.2 Application

The Czech Republic officially applied for membership in 1996, and the official negotiations started on March 31, 1998, after all Member States approved the European Commission's

positive Opinion on the Czech Republic's application in Luxembourg in December 1997 (European Commission, 2002).

Though the opinion of the Commission was positive, there were issues of improvement to be taken in account, these issues being noted by the Commission in 1998 and regarding the strengthening freedom of the press, corporate governance, and the financial system.

6.3 Euro scepticism in the Czech Republic

Full integration into the EU had been supported by a majority of parliamentary parties in the Czech Republic, and solidly by governments headed by ČSSD, the Social Democrats. Former Czech President Václav Havel is probably the most famous pro-EU politician. His arguments relied on ethical and moral grounds. He believed that state sovereignty was of secondary importance, he also was of the opinion that European integration was important for political reasons, for instance to prevent another World War or occupation by a dominant state. He also believed that European integration was the natural course for the Czech Republic because of their shared culture (Linden and Pohlman 2003).

According to Peter Bugge, Professor at the Aarhus University, Denmark at the department of History and Area studies (2000), Havel believed that Czech membership in the EU was the logical extension of Europe's status as "one civilization, based on a shared culture" that post-communist countries had already belonged to until they were brutally forced to depart from their natural path. Their 'return to Europe' was thus historically legitimate as a return to where they had already belonged".

Despite Havel's firm embrace of the EU, the Czech Republic is, and has been, arguably the most sceptical nation of the EU. The most prominent backer of this scepticism is President Václav Klaus, whose rhetoric has gained a great deal of support among the voters. However, Klaus is not totally against the accession, and for economical reasons he was a supporter of the integrations. His concern lies with the potential loss of the Czech sovereignty and other political and economic concessions due to European-level directives and regulations (Bugge 2000; Green 2003; Linden and Pohlman 2003). The sceptical tone of Klaus was not well received within the EU, and at one point the EU Commissioner Hans van den Broek told Klaus, "It is not the European Union which wants to join the Czech Republic" (Rhodes 1998, note 41).

Scepticism towards the EU is not only present with the elite of the Czech Republic. Ironically, though the country was widely considered a frontrunner for the EU membership prior to accession, citizens have been over and over again less than passionate about integrating in the EU. There has been a strong public debate over EU membership in the Czech Republic since the early 1990s which goes on to the present day. The Czech public support for EU membership had a typically drift below 50 percent from 1997 until 2002, when the public support finally exceeded the 50 percent mark, even elevated to the unprecedented 70 percent in 2003, when the referendum on EU membership was held (Gadzik, 2003).

Regardless of their frequently-voiced scepticism, on June 13-14, 2003, the general public of the Czech Republic voted “yes” in great majority in the binding referendum on EU membership. According to the Czech Statistical Office, 77 percent voted pro-integration, this was definitely higher than expected. (The expectation lay on 55 percent) (Green 2003).

The Czech Republic finally became a member of the EU on May 1, 2004 together with nine other nations, which until now is the largest enlargement the EU has undertaken.

6.4 The EU Presidency

In 2009, the Czech Republic took over the Presidency of the European Council for the first time since its entrance to the European Union in 2004 (see figure 12). It was the first former Soviet Bloc nation that held the EU Presidency (Druker, 2010, p.2). The Presidency knew several landmarks; in 2009, the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain was celebrated, and furthermore, it was also the year of EU



Parliament elections in all EU Member States.

The motto of the Czech Presidency was “Europe without barriers” (Weber Shandwick, 2008, p. 4-9). The main focus points were related to transatlantic relations, especially the relationship with the new U.S. administration, led by Barack Obama. Furthermore, the focus points were Western Balkans and the Eastern Neighbourhood policy, the Common Agricultural Policy and the worldwide financial crisis, which departed in 2008 (Weber Shandwick, 2008, p.8).

*Logo Czech EU
presidency
Figure 12*

The Presidency of the Czech Republic was challenging due to several issues. The relation between the Czech Republic and the EU has not always been consequently positive. For example, the Czech Republic was the last EU Member State which ratified the Lisbon Treaty within their national government. The position of their Presidency weakened because

in the second half of the Presidency the national parliament fell with the result that their credibility devolved (Druker, 2010, p. 2).

Despite the challenges, the Czech Republic completed its Presidency well. Not all their aims were met, though this could be because of their great ambition and eager to prove their selves. In June 2009, they handed over the Presidency to Sweden.

6.5 Conclusion

After the Velvet Divorce, the Czech Republic wanted to become part of the European Union. Due to their shared values (democracy, market economy, room for opposition, freedom of speech), the Czechs always felt they belonged to European civilization. After fulfilling the criteria set by the EU, the road towards entering the EU had begun. Most of the Czechs are pro-Europe, yet, there remains also a culture of Euro-scepticism. Promoter of the Euro sceptic position is current president Václav Klaus. His concern lies with the potential loss of the Czech sovereignty and other political and economical concessions due to European-level directives and regulations. This sceptical tone by Klaus was not well received within the EU. Regardless of their frequently-voiced scepticism, the general public of the Czech Republic voted 'yes' in great majority to the binding referendum on EU Membership. The Czech Republic finally became Member of the EU on May 1, 2004, together with nine other nations.

Five years after the entrance to the European Union, the Czech Republic was granted the EU Presidency. This was a challenging period, though they managed it well and became a grown up Member State of the EU.

7. Conclusion

The historical landmarks of post World War I Czech history were clearly of great importance to the positive development of the mentality of Czech society towards Europe.

During the twentieth century, the Czech Republic experienced highlights and downfalls. In the period 1918-1938, Czechoslovakia was a well functioning democratic republic. Czechoslovak people still look back at the first Czechoslovak Republic with pride, but also with disappointment because of its having been dismantled. The cause of the destruction lay in decisions made in the Munich Agreement by France, Britain and Nazi Germany in 1938. As a result, cooperation between the Czech Republic and Western European countries is always looked at with suspicion.

During the Nazi occupation, the Czechs were once again restricted in their freedom in every possible way. Under the Communist occupation, Czech citizens, politicians and dissidents fought to keep their culture and dignity. In 1968, Dubček attempted to give Communism a human face. Unfortunately, this failed and Czech society was 'normalised' and placed again under strict Communist regime.

During the Communist occupation, Czechoslovakia had a broad dissident movement. The eagerness to fight the regime came out of an understanding of cultural loss. Czech society valued their culture highly and the censorships that were forced upon every facet of cultural activities touched them deeply. This was one of the reasons that the protests became rougher. The protests finally resulted in a peacefully fall of the Communist Regime in 1989. Three years later, in 1992, the divorce of Czechoslovakia was a fact, due to differences in future perspectives.

As the Czechs always have felt close to the rest of Europe, it seemed nothing more than a logical step to apply for the European membership. On May 1, 2004, the Czech Republic reached a new chapter in its history. They finally were granted full membership rights to the EU. In 2009, the Czech Republic faced the greatest challenge since their entrance in the EU: They were appointed the European Presidency. During these six months it was clear that the Czech Republic had the tendency to seek confrontations with other Member States and to show their independence within the bigger EU family.

Although the Czechs feel closely related to Europe, there has always been a tone of Euro-scepticism. After so many years in which they had not had the freedom to express themselves, it is understandable that they started to doubt whether the sovereignty that they

had fought for would remain. The fact that Western European countries had given them away in the Munich Agreement resulted in an ongoing feeling of suspicion towards Western European countries. Despite this mistrust, they did realise that the choice to become a European Member State is of great importance to prevent history from repeating itself.

In the end, the road was long, harsh, with both euphoria and sadness. Eventually, the Czechs became part of the European Union as an equal member. This time, they were able to voluntarily be a part of a bigger institution without an ideology forced upon them.

The Czechs managed to proudly return to Europe.

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Appendix 1

Timeline: Czechoslovakia

A chronology of key events

1918 Republic of Czechoslovakia proclaimed. Tomas Masaryk elected president.

1935 Masaryk succeeded as president by Edvard Benes.

1938 Munich Conference results in cession of the Sudetenland to Germany. Benes resigns.

1939 Nazi invasion of Czech Lands which become a German protectorate.

1940 Benes establishes government in exile in London.

1945 Soviet troops enter Prague.

1946 Czechoslovak Communist Party leader Klement Gottwald becomes prime minister in power-sharing government following national elections.

1948 Communists organize wave of mass protests and strikes. Government crisis leaves Communists with majority in government. Benes resigns as president. Gottwald succeeds him, imposes Stalinist-style rule.

1952 Leading Communist figures are convicted of treason and espionage at show trials.

1953 Gottwald dies. Antonin Novotny succeeds him. Antonín Zápotocký becomes president.

1957 Novotny becomes president after Zápotocký death.

1960 Czechoslovakia becomes Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.

1963 Victims of Stalinist purges rehabilitated.



Nazis take over



Prague, survivor city



1968 January - Alexander Dubcek succeeds Novotny, embarks on programme of liberalizing reforms known as Prague Spring with the aim of ushering in "socialism with a human face".

1968 August - Soviet-led troops invade Czech lands. Dubcek is taken to Moscow.

1969 January - Student Jan Palach burns himself to death in protest at occupation by Communists.

1969 April - Gustav Husák replaces Dubcek.

1975 Husák becomes president.

1977 A group of dissidents including playwright Vaclav Havel publish Charter 77 calling for restoration of civil and political rights.

1987 Milos Jakes replaces Husák as party leader.

1988 August - Mass demonstrations mark the anniversary of the 1968 invasion.

1989 Police scatter numerous mass protests against human and civil rights violations.

1989 November - Peaceful mass protests and strikes gain momentum. The Civic Forum, a broad antigovernment coalition, formed. Federal Assembly abolishes Communists' constitutional hold on power.

1989 December - Husak resigns as president. Dubcek elected chairman of Federal Assembly. Vaclav Havel elected president, completing the "velvet revolution".



Soviet tanks crush
Prague Spring



Dissident Havel,
spearhead of
revolution

- 1990** Country renamed Czech and Slovak Federative Republic. First free elections since 1946 lead to establishment of coalition government involving all major parties with the exception of the Communist party. Havel re-elected as president.
- 1991** February - Civic Forum disbanded. Members form two new parties, the conservative Civic Democratic Party (CDP) and the liberal Civic Movement. Legislation allowing privatization of state-owned enterprises approved.
- 1991** June - Soviet forces complete withdrawal.
- 1992** June - Elections see Czech voters backing the centre right while their Slovak counterparts support Slovak separatists and left wing parties. Vladimir Meciar, a fervent supporter of Slovak separatism, becomes Slovak prime minister. He is strongly opposed to the rapid privatization of the public sector proposed by Czech Prime Minister Václav Klaus. Negotiations between Klaus and Meciar reach deadlock as neither is prepared to compromise. The two agree to the separation of Slovakia from the Czech Lands, despite the objections of President Havel and a general lack of popular enthusiasm.
- Havel resigns as president after Slovak separatist parties block his re-election.
- 1992** November - Federal Assembly adopts legislation enabling the federation to disband.
- 1993** January - Czechoslovakia completes "velvet divorce" which results in two independent countries, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.
- 1993** January - Vaclav Havel elected president of the Czech Republic following Czechoslovakia's "velvet divorce". Vaclav Klaus of the Civic Democratic Party (CDP) carries on as prime minister.



Mass protests bring down Communists



Vaclav Havel: Dissident playwright became revered as icon of democracy

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- 1996** Czech Republic applies for European Union membership
- 1998** January - Havel re-elected president for a further five years.
- 1999** March - Czech Republic becomes full member of NATO.
- 2000** October- Start-up of first reactor at Temelin nuclear power plant causes outcry in neighbouring Austria which threatens to block Czech EU membership.
- 2002** December - EU summit in Copenhagen formally invites Czech Republic to join.
- 2003** February - Former Prime Minister Vaclav Klaus elected president. He succeeds Vaclav Havel.
- 2003** June - Czechs vote at referendum in favour of going ahead with EU membership in 2004.
- 2004** May, 1 - Czech Republic is one of 10 new nations to join the EU.
- 2007** December - The Czech Republic joins the EU's Schengen Treaty free movement zone.
- 2008** February - Vaclav Klaus re-elected as president.
- 2009** January - Czech Republic takes over EU presidency.
- 2009** March - Centre-right government led by Mirek Topolanek loses parliamentary vote of confidence. Mr Topolanek resigns.
- 2009** June – Czech Republic hands over the EU Presidency to Sweden.

