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# The Prague Spring and the 1968 Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia in an international context

Essays by:

Rick Fawn, Andrea Petö, Zuzana Poláčková, Michal Vít

## Foreword by Christian Kvorning Lassen

The overcoming of adversity and hope prevailing forms the core of great narratives, be they personal, national or international. The end of World War II and later the Cold War led to the proclamation of “the end of history”, reinforcing the utopian notion that hope had prevailed for good after seemingly endless struggles.

It is easy, even human, to view the trauma of 1968 in then-Czechoslovakia as just another temporary setback in the inexorable and inevitable advance of democracy, freedom, and, more ephemerally, hope.

Yet in 1968, hope died in then-Czechoslovakia. As tanks rolled into Wenceslas square, entire generations watched as their human struggle for independence and freedom was crushed by a superpower to whom fundamental rights, freedom and democracy were anathema. For a long time, entire generations were destined to a life under the yoke of oppression with no prospect of freedom or independence. For a long time, children would grow up in a world devoid of inviolable rights, a world where might made right. It would take more than 20 years until, on the very same square, hope was finally rekindled in the Velvet Revolution.

Since then, the Czech Republic has become an independent country, achieved hitherto unparalleled levels of freedom and prosperity, and developed into a fully-fledged democracy and valuable member of the international community. It is thus unsurprising, even human, that the trauma, hardship and tragedy of 1968 has slowly been relegated to the farthest recesses of our collective memory, its lessons and meaning slowly eroded or even forgotten.

It has been 50 years now since this fateful event. The international world order, to which the Czech Republic is now part of, is once again under threat, this time not only from external adversaries, but even more so from within as many European, primarily former Soviet-bloc, states turn their backs on the hard-won liberal democracy and instead turn to the very authoritarianism that their ancestors fought so bravely and admirably to defeat.

As cultural, societal and political upheaval once again rumbles across Europe, ruminations on the broader European historical contexts of the Prague Spring, and especially the cultural, intellectual, social and political forces driving it, are merited; it cannot and should not be viewed as a singular, national event only, especially given contemporary developments, which concerns us all. This

was one of the key goals of this project, which featured both public conferences bringing together experts with various scientific backgrounds from across Europe, as well as four essays written by accomplished scholars and experts on political science and history. They are essential reading for anyone interested in Czechoslovak history as well as transformative reformist movements in general.

Now, more than ever, it is time to reflect on the meaning of 1968 and rediscover the valuable lessons it taught us. Thus, it is our hope that the four publications enclosed within this project will give cause for reflection not only on 1968 but also the future, so that the flame of hope, after decades of subjugation and hardship, may continue to burn bright in the Czech Republic and Europe.

## Rick Fawn: How did the events of 1968 influence regional and European cooperation after 1989?

On the occasion of paying tribute to the courage of the Prague Spring reforms and marking the tragedy of their extinction following the military intervention of 1968, it may seem slightly contrarian to offer two observations on their impact on post-1989 regional cooperation. That is in no way to diminish the importance of the events of 1968 in Czechoslovak, European and global history. However, to address the question posed, it is argued here that the influence of 1968 on post-1989 regional cooperation was belated and indirect.

Indeed, if the events immediately prompted regional solidarity, it was of the eight (single-digit eight!) Soviet dissidents who protested in Red Square against the military intervention in Czechoslovakia, and who met punitive reprisals for their bravery.<sup>1</sup> A fiftieth anniversary commemoration was held in Moscow. Perhaps telling of Russia's current repressive atmosphere, it was already confined in numbers and while entirely peaceful nevertheless resulted in arrests.<sup>2</sup>

Otherwise, antecedents from 1968 for post-communist cooperation were deferred and indirect. Trying to achieve 'regional cooperation' at any level and in any way went against historical counterexamples. With 1968, the Warsaw Treaty Organization had become the first military alliance in history to have attacked itself. And both before and after that, the bloc's Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, the supposed common market for the socialist bloc, was said to spread inefficiency and poverty.

Czechoslovak dissident reflection not just immediately after 1968 but for succeeding years was very much, and understandably, directed inwards. True, Karel Kosík wrote a piece in 1969 entitled 'Co je střední Evropa?' (What is central Europe?), but it sparked neither immediate nor later debate remotely comparable to that of writings in the 1980s. Two leading examples of dissident concern in the decade that followed 1968 were Havel's letter to Prague Spring reformer Alexander Dubček in 1969, calling on him to stand his ground against intolerable Soviet pressure. The second was Havel's open letter of 1975 to Communist leader Gustav Husák, which addressed the apathy and humiliation that the post-1968 order imposed on Czechoslovak society. Important tracts these were, but not regarding possibilities of trans-border dissident cooperation.

The belated impact of 1968 on regional cooperation perhaps started with Havel's 'Power of the Powerless' of 1978. That essay provided a literary and exacting analysis of the socialist-type political system (and one better than the efforts of many political scientists). The tract was also a symbolic landmark in Czechoslovak-Polish cooperation, written for and dedicated to the emerging dissident connections between the two countries.<sup>3</sup>

But that cooperation was necessarily narrow. Participants from both sides spent enormous energy evading their respective security services simply to be able to meet in the mountains. Few dissident connections existed with Hungary, despite its relatively permissive political environment in the 1980s. That relationship lacked the cultural – and linguistic – connections of the Czechoslovak-Polish, even if Hungarian György Konrád's *Antipolitics* was known among dissidents and read internationally alongside Havel's work.<sup>4</sup> Cooperation with East Germany was even more confined. Polish underground media even stated that 'the natural representative of the interests' of East Germans was West Germany, which in turn

<sup>1</sup> Current reflection of the Soviet protest includes Mark Kramer, 'The August 1968 Red Square Protest and Its Legacy' (Washington, DC: Wilson Center, August 24, 2018), available at: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/the-august-1968-red-square-protest-and-its-legacy>.

<sup>2</sup> See 'Russian Police Detain Three People Marking 1968 Red Square Protest' (RFE/RL, August 25, 2018), available at:

<https://www.rferl.org/a/russian-police-detain-three-people-marking-1968-red-square-protest-czechoslovakia/29453057.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Communist-era full English language publication of the three tracts appeared together for example in Vaclav Havel, *Living in Truth* (London: Faber & Faber, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> György Konrád, *Antipolitics* (New York: Henry Holt, 1987).

seemed to infer that the nascent dissident discussion of the possibilities for 'Central Europe' had both a format and a content that was 'without Germans'.<sup>5</sup>

Dissent became formalised in Czechoslovakia around the Charter 77 document, which politely asked the Czechoslovak regime to observe its domestic law and to abide by the norms to which it agreed in the Helsinki Final Act two years prior. Leading Czechoslovak opposition figures were arrested as they went to mail their otherwise innocuous document to Czechoslovak government officials.<sup>6</sup> As Czechoslovak activists faced court and jail in the late 1970s, regional solidarity grew with Polish activists.

Once the strikes led by the self-governing trade union *Solidarność* (Solidarity) began to paralyse Poland in 1980, Poles were less able to aid Czechoslovakia. Rather than replicating the military intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968, a learning lesson by being multilateral rather than the unilateral Soviet intervention in Hungary in 1956, Moscow settled on having Warsaw's communists confront the unprecedented unrest. Homegrown repression took the place of a bloc intervention, and Poles faced the agonies of martial law in 1981. Retrospectively, *Solidarność* leader Lech Wałęsa said that he imagined coordinated anti-communist resistance after martial law, and that 'We held consultations and talked with an eye to maybe mounting another more powerful struggle through organizing East Central Europe'.<sup>7</sup>

Such direct cooperation, of course, did not materialise. Some dissidents in Czechoslovakia in summer 1989 to whom I later spoke gained encouragement from *Solidarność* friends of the late 1970s being able not only to travel to Czechoslovakia but as parliamentarians, and on diplomatic passports.

Certainly dissident-era regional cooperation is remembered and has been mobilised. But in that way, 1968 still only projected indirect, if symbolic importance on post-1989 regional cooperation.

One can judge diplomatic successes by how many claim the origins of something successful (while defeat, as Kennedy said of the 1961 Bay of Pigs fiasco, is an orphan). The birth of Visegrad has been adamantly claimed in subsequent years by all four member states.<sup>8</sup> But it is Havel, as Czechoslovak president, who mobilised the dissident-era cooperation as both a practical and also, and especially, a symbolic basis for post-1989 cooperation.

Less than a month in the post of Czechoslovak president, Havel addressed the Polish Sejm and Senate. With historical irony, Communist General Wojciech Jaruzelski, overseer of martial law, remained President of Poland and was one of Havel's official hosts. Havel invoked two important measures that underline the pre-1989, and thus the post-1968, ethos of dissident solidarity.

He reminded this now external audience that his New Year's speech, broadcast throughout Czechoslovak, had emphasized that 'the Hungarian and the Poles bled for us. We are well aware of this and we will not forget it.' He wanted Czechoslovaks to know that, and then he was reiterating that importance to Czechoslovaks' immediate neighbours.

Havel quickly translated that communist-era, post-1968 experience, into an idea for urgent post-1989 foreign policy coordination, proclaiming: 'We should not compete with each other to gain admission into the various European organizations. On the contrary, we should assist each other in the same spirit of solidarity with which, in darker days, you protested against our persecution as we did against

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<sup>5</sup> See the reference in Jacques Rupnik, 'Central Europe or Mitteleuropa', in Stephen Graubard (ed.), *Eastern Europe ... Central Europe ... Europe* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), pp. 253-4.

The post-1989 Czechoslovak government worked with East Germany on a proposal to the CSCE but East German representatives were not invited to multilateral forums in 1990. Germany, however, was included in many formats thereafter.

<sup>6</sup> Still perhaps the best account of Charter 77 remains that by Canadian H. Gordon Skilling. The first page recounts how Havel,

actor Pavel Landovský and author Ludvík Vaculík tried to evade police simply to deposit the Charter in mailboxes. *Charter 77 and Human Rights in Czechoslovakia* (London: Allen Unwin, 1981).

<sup>7</sup> 'Lech Walesa: Overcoming Fear', in the Václav Havel virtual library, available at: <http://www.vhlf.org/havel-archives/lech-walesa-overcoming-fear/>.

<sup>8</sup> A draft paper by the author (if not also by others) has sought to delineate these many positive if retrospect claims.

yours.<sup>9</sup> Common cooperation now could serve all well together. He followed that message within his speech by calling for a meeting in Bratislava. On that he delivered only three months later, if also hastily-arranged.<sup>10</sup> Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland were the core participating countries, but Austria, Italy and Yugoslavia were included also.

Limited efforts at other trilateral cooperation emerged in the course of 1990 and we might debate why exactly it was in February 1991 that Visegrad would be launched. And there, and I think cleverly, Visegrad introduced itself to the world as serving to reaffirm the region's intrinsic European values.<sup>11</sup> The Group did not simply seek to 'join' Europe, in the sense of institutional memberships, but to signal that the region had always been fundamentally European – it was not only a consumer but a common producer, with the West, of those values. Visegrad was geoculturally and existentially moving itself westward, without of course going physically anywhere. Kundera's landmark text of 1983/84 (which, apparently, he never subsequently wanted republished),<sup>12</sup> of a kidnapped West forcibly dragged East, had now been released from geocultural captivity. Better still, within the space of two years, the name and symbolism of Visegrad was established. As but one example, already in 1992 the EC not only referred to Visegrad, but met with Visegrad as the so-named group at its European Summit. Other post-communist countries were quickly left behind in this apparent fast-march West, and even their leaders mentioned Visegrad as a standard for their own.<sup>13</sup>

Visegrad cooperation stumbled and collapsed in the mid-1990s and was resurrected in 1998 and formally in 1999, briefly even being called Visegrad II. The imperative of continuity won out and the name remained unqualified as Visegrad. The Group's member-states necessarily had to negotiate NATO and EU accession alone and entered neither organization as the Visegrad Four.<sup>14</sup> It retained its format thereafter, smartly retaining its original membership despite calls from outsiders to join, while inviting others to join its 'Visegrad +' platform when mutually beneficial.

References to post-1968 regional cooperation among dissidents appear unevenly in contemporary cooperation. In the lengthy annual presidency programmes and annual reports, each country presidency varies in its reference to communist-era dissident cooperation. Some Visegrad programmes and reports make no reference, while Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski was probably most explicit when he wrote that Visegrad drew from the communist-era spirit of 'joint struggle for democratic change' that Havel subsequently used to ignite Visegrad.<sup>15</sup>

However, now the use of similar words, such as 'opposition' in Visegrad documents refer to resistance in the EU, and to EU policies.<sup>16</sup> That is particularly to do with the so-called 'migrant' crisis and quotas for the relocation of entrants into the EU.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps ironically, Visegrad has generated for itself the most international rénomé of its now-considerable history. Inspirational historical legacies are hardly static: rather, they risk having multiple uses far beyond original intentions.

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<sup>9</sup> Office of the President, 'The Polish Sejm and Senate. Warsaw, January 25, 1990', available at: [http://old.hrad.cz/president/Havel/speeches/index\\_uk.html](http://old.hrad.cz/president/Havel/speeches/index_uk.html).

<sup>10</sup> Every contemporary to whom I have spoken or whose recollections are available in print suggest that the meeting, if a landmark, was still poorly organised. The important measure was to get regional together and initiate an ethos of discussion and then of cooperation.

<sup>11</sup> See the text 'Visegrad Declaration 1991', available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/visegrad-declarations/visegrad-declaration-110412>.

<sup>12</sup> See the commentary in the introduction in George Schopflin and Nancy Wood (eds), *In Search of Central Europe* (London: Polity, 1993).

<sup>13</sup> Examples from the 1990s are given in Rick Fawn, 'The Elusive Defined? Visegrad Cooperation as the Contemporary Contours of Central Europe', *Geopolitics*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Summer 2001), pp. 47-68.

<sup>14</sup> Slovakia did not enter NATO with the other three in 1999; and the Four were joined in the 2004 EU enlargement by the Baltic Republics, Slovenia and non-socialist Cyprus and Malta.

<sup>15</sup> 'Foreword of Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland Radosław Sikorski', in *Report of the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group, July 2012 – June 2013* (Warsaw, 2013), p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Drawn from a comparative study available from the author.

<sup>17</sup> A brief effort at synthesis is offered in Rick Fawn, 'External assessments of Visegrad since its international recognition over the "migrant" crisis', *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs* Vol. XXVII, No. 1-2 (2018), pp. 63-79.

## Andrea Pető: The Prague Spring and the 1968 Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia in an international context

There has been a lot written on 1968 recently as we turn to history in trying to understand contemporary developments. The roundtable upon which this paper is based followed this vein by exploring five issues each illustrated with a quote, which are neglected topics of the discussion: how to understand the revolt, how geopolitical factors influencing the process of remembrance, who were the intermediaries and what did they understand the situation using historical analogies and how the 'dissent culture' made women invisible in the opposition. The questions were formulated and selected by Andrea Pető and commented by Petra James and Jakub Machek.

### 1. The context: what was 1968? A "global disruption"? How to move from the cultural and Cold War logic determined definition to understanding Revolt?

"There was no nihilism in the contestation that burned up that month of May 1968; instead it was **a violent desire to rake over the norms** that govern the private as well as the public, the intimate as well as the social, a desire to come up with new, perpetually contestable configurations. This desire for an exhilarating and joyful "permanent revolution" was perhaps just part and parcel of young people abreacting their "second Oedipus," i.e. their adolescence, on the back of an obsolete State and a prurient consumer society. But by all accounts, it was sexual and cultural contestation that spearheaded events, and young people were rightly mistrustful of the political "co-opting" the trade unions and leftwing parties tried to impose on that "spring," as well as the workers' intrinsic "consumerism."

(Julia Kristeva, *What's Left of 1968?*, *Revolt, She Said. An Interview by Philippe Petit*, Semiotext(e) 2002, 12.)

In response, Petra James pointed out that we could think of the "1968 revolt movements" as of a global moment of the re-negotiation of the norm (aesthetic, social, political). We could give the example of the European reception of the Beat Generation. Indeed, in countries as varied in terms of political structure as Spain, Portugal, Greece, Norway, Iceland, Finland, Hungary, Poland or Czechoslovakia, the works and activities of members of Beat Generation served as a vector of challenge to the establishment (that of conservatism, conformism, consumerism, materialism etc.), even if the local constellations could take extremely diverse forms. The structuralist theory could be quite helpful here. We are thinking for example of the influential study of 1936 by Jan Mukařovský, *Aesthetic function, norm and value as social facts*. Indeed, we could understand the 1968 as a global effort of re-negotiating the "norm", in societies that differed dramatically in terms of their "structures." It certainly was a challenge of the establishment and figures (real or symbolic) of authority as referred to Kristeva.

### 2. What is the role of tradition of protest in Central Europe: 1953, 1956, 1968, 1981 in the time of "mnemonic security" becomes a geopolitical factor?

"Central Europe therefore cannot be defined and determined by political frontiers (which are inauthentic, always imposed by invasions, conquests, and occupations), but by the great common situations that reassemble peoples, regroup them in ever new ways along the imaginary and ever-changing boundaries that mark a realm inhabited by the same memories, the same problems and conflicts, the same common tradition."

(Milan Kundera: *The Tragedy of Central Europe*, *The New York Review of Books*, April 26, 1984; 33)

Petra James underlined that the great merit of Kundera of bringing and keeping "Central Europe" in public debates of the 1980s in the general context of competing causes of numerous human rights initiatives and movements of international solidarity (for example the important Anti-Apartheid movement or movement of solidarity with victims of Latin American dictatorships.)

Jakub Machek quoted Vladimír Macura, who said that from the 19<sup>th</sup> century that Czech intellectuals were alternately propagated connection of Czech nation to the East or to the West depending on the situation and their political orientation. The notion of Central Europe was developed in 1970s and 1980s as a counterweight to the division of Europe into Eastern and Western part, to show, that there a specific area, distinct from the eastern soviet lands, with different development, distinct culture and so on. After the 1989 velvet revolution, the idea of Central Europeaness of Czech republic was replaced by the notion that Czechs are returning back to western Europe, and they are more culturally and economically western than the other post socialist countries, so they can see it as a return to the east/west divide of the Czech mentality. Surprisingly, in the last years, the idea of Central Europe as the area of common culture, experiences and specific values is back, appropriated by conservative and extreme right-wing speakers. It is based on refusal of the western world as decadent, neo-Marxist, under the dictatorship of European Union and so on. Therefore, in this conception, the Central Europe is connected by the common historical experience of German and Russian occupation, living under external dictatorship with huge propaganda, so the population learnt not to be naïve and trustful as people living in Western Europe. The people of Central Europe have experience in how to not believe in propaganda (it also means western liberal and neo-Marxist propaganda), to be cautious about the domination of big power (it is meant EU) and of invasion (of refugees). The experience of the lost protests and occupation can be also seen in the strong distrust in elites, who started the protests and then betrayed it. In this process, conservative and extreme right concept of Central Europe, the Czech experience of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which was full of invasions and dictatorships, taught people to look at the outside world as a danger, so it is better to lock themselves away, not to have any ambitions and only care about themselves.

**3. What were the forms of control, “politics of intervention” and how what was the impact in Czechoslovakia and in other Warsaw Pact countries? Who were the intermediaries? What did they gain? What were the**

**consequences as far as political imagination and symbolic are concerned?**

“That’s why, when the Russians occupied Czechoslovakia, they did everything possible to destroy Czech culture. This destruction had three meanings: first, it destroyed the center of the opposition; second, it undermined the identity of the nation, enabling it to be more easily swallowed up by Russian civilization; third, it put a violent end to the modern era, the era in which culture still represented the realization of supreme values”.

(Milan Kundera: The Tragedy of Central Europe, The New York Review of Books; April 26, 1984; 33.)

Petra James pointed out that Kundera, somewhat uncharacteristically of him, is using in this famous text strategies of deliberate emotional appeal. These tools of public communications have been actively developed and put into practical use within human rights groups such as Amnesty International, an important player from the 1970s in the field of human rights. The Helsinki Conference of 1976 did give fundamental basis for the legalistic nature of Eastern European dissident movements. At the same time, it gave rise to numerous human rights initiatives that throughout the 1970s and 1980s created numerous causes thus competing with the dissident cause for the attention of media and public. The emotional narrative strategy of Kundera’s text could be interpreted within this larger context.

Jakub Machek emphasized that it is usually described as a characteristic for the 1970s and 1980s normalization period, but in fact has started already in 1960s or even 1950s, as it is nicely depicted by writers as Vladimír Páral or Josef Jedlička as well as in films of Miloš Forman and Jaroslav Papoušek. The new authorities emerging after 1968 just utilized the desired return to the “normal” society, ordinary life based on middleclass (or petit bourgeois) values including consumerism and access to western popular culture (or its local variant) of the 1960s society yet offered it to the citizens without the possibility to participate in public sphere, as was the other demand of the 1960s. This politics used to be described a kind of deal or consensus, possibility to live a quiet, private, relatively safe



materialistic life instead of a participatory democracy. The other part was the deal was the concept of technocratic governance, that the society should be led by experts and their expert knowledge not by "the people." As Vítězslav Sommer recently stated, this idea also emerges in 1960s, when the experts should be better managers than the communist authorities, but in the 1970s the technocratic governance replaced the democratic control, which was seen as chaotic, populist and not sufficient. That paved the way for the 1989 smooth velvet revolution.

**4. *Historia est magistra vitae*. What is the role of historical analogies? How do interpretations of past event influence epistemological frames, symbolic imaginaries and present political action?**

"[T]he current events [in Czechoslovakia] are not a repetition of the events of 1956 in Hungary. In Hungary the popular masses revolted against the party and Central Committee, whereas in Czechoslovakia, the masses are speaking out only against the conservatives and the group around [the hard-liner Antonín] Novotný and are supporting the [KSČ], the Central Committee, and friendship with the Soviet Union". (Quoted Petro Shelest on 21 March 1968)

"In Hungary in 1956, the imperialists urged the local reactionaries to embark on an armed attack to seize power, whereas in Czechoslovakia they are trying to establish a bourgeois order by "peaceful means." That is, they are trying gradually to change the situation so that the reactionaries can gradually seize one position after another. . . . [The anti-Soviet elements in Czechoslovakia] do not dare to speak out openly in support of anti-Communist and anti-Soviet demands. They understand [from the decisive Soviet response in 1956] that this game is over once and for all. The enemies provide cover for themselves with demagogic statements about "friendship" with the Soviet Union, while at the same time sowing doubts about some sort of "inequality" and about the pursuit of a special, "independent" foreign policy. They are also trying to undercut the leading role of the [Communist] Party". (Petro Shelest on 25 April 1968)

(The Prague Spring and the Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Edited by Günter Bischof, Stefan Karner, and Peter Ruggenthaler, Rowman and Littlefield, 2010. 43 and 44.)

Petra James warned that there was a crucial divide and substantial misunderstanding of the meaning and efforts of the Prague Spring by Western leftist intellectuals. The French case was commented on par example by Pierre Grémion. This is certainly a divide that is still very visible in the memory of those who lived in Czechoslovakia and in Western Europe in 1968 and would deserve more profound analysis.

Jakub Machek pointed out that in the Czechoslovak 20<sup>th</sup> century history usually the very important years ending with number 8, as the beginning of Czechoslovak republic in 1918, its end starting with Munich Agreement in 1938 and subsequent Nazi invasion in the next year. The communist putsch in 1948, the Soviet invasion. In 1968 and also the velvet revolution in 1989 is sometimes seen as the 8th anniversary (just one year delayed). In these years usually started different regimes has started in Czech history, so the looking for analogies and comparison is very popular nowadays. Usually they compare the 1939 and 1968 as far as invasion is concerned or 1968 and 1989 as far as democratic movements are concerned. More interesting is to compare 1918, 1968 and 1989 as the moment for looking for the new democratic organization of the society. Yet what he found most interesting is the comparison of the capitulations in 1938 and in 1968, when both of them started as an external pressure but ended as establishing of the new regime with very active domestic authorities, who immediately and radically settled accounts with previous, more democratic regimes and its authorities. Both new regimes after 1938 and after 1968 radically denied previous development and ideas, the previous regimes were based on. And implemented a change of elites. As all the previous regimes lasted maximum 20 years, ended usually by occupation or revolution, the last 30 years of Czech history is a rare exception. There is no military occupation now, but society has a stronger and stronger feeling that outside pressure still exists, which they have to resist. In that scope, even the EU is seen as occupying forces or as a dictating

power. Similarly, Czechs can observe the rejection of existing elites, its western orientation and so on, which resemble the post-1968 normalization, including the already mentioned the escape to “a private domain” and technocratic form of governance, symbolized by our present prime minister.

**5. Rethinking opposition and protest. Vaclav Havel and other male intellectuals created the heroic, elitist figure of “The Dissent” based Václav Havel’s essay, *The Power of the Powerless*. Women are invisible in this logic no matter that dissents were operating in “spousal units”: men were visible as acting in public, and women were supportive as resistance is a spectrum. Czech women saw themselves as powerful due to the legacy of interwar Czech women’s movement and statist emancipation. Most women oppositionists operated in this “grey zone,” (Jirina Siklova) not because they were conforming, but because oppositionist activities could be carried out in the private, or domestic sphere, giving women greater scope for anti-regime activities. In 1968, the birthrate in Czechoslovakia fell dramatically, reaching an all-time low in 1968. The post-1968 normalization shifted women with social welfare incentives to private sphere to motherhood where women reclaimed the private sphere and exercised their own power by determining how this sphere would appear. What are the consequences for present protest strategies the legacy of “The Dissent” as the only strategy? How the rhetoric of traditional feminine qualities as an element of emancipation might be utilized when the political influence and liberal rhetoric of “western” feminism reclaiming the public sphere is declining, and anti-modernist emancipation rhetoric is**

### **on the rise not only in Czech Republic but elsewhere?**

“I thought – and I do not think I was alone in that – that this was the only solution for how to change the society. For me, there was no other alternative than these so-called communists or socialists. Because I never – and I was a sort of half-adult at the time – had never really experienced a different regime. And I saw that a reform process had started and that there are possibilities here. Secondly, this was after we’d seen a similar process occur in Hungary [crushed by tanks in 1956] and that it started the changes here in the beginning of the 60s. At this time, I was in the Faculty, and the atmosphere there was different. In the 60s, I was a young mother as my children were born at the beginning of the decade, but when the changes started in the mid-60s, then I participated. Not only at the Faculty, but we had also started a so-called high school ‘student committee’ which I think was relatively progressive for the time. I thought that changes were possible, and I remember that in the summer of 1967, the writers’ congress was stopped and what was a very famous paper at the time, Literární [Noviny or] Listy, was shut down. For me it was an impulse that it was important to start with some activities and to support the writers that had been dismissed. So, then I started to not only be a member of the communist party, but at the beginning of 1968, I was the head of one organization at the Philosophical Faculty. (...) But you need to understand that we had plenty of emancipation from above. It was organized. Here, there was a duty to work. In fact, it was not only a duty but really the only possibility. It was normal for us and our women had different experiences than the women from the West. And when these Western European and American feminists arrived in the country, we could see that we were different here.”

(Interview with Jirina Siklova, 2012, 23 July <http://www.radio.cz/en/section/one-on-one/jirina-siklova-from-sociologist-to-dissident-smuggler-to-pre-emancipated-feminist>, Jiřina Šiklová, ‘The “Grey Zone” and the Future of Dissent in Czechoslovakia,’ Social Research, 57, 1990, 2, 347-363.)

Petra James pointed out that the question of female presence in the dissident movement is indeed a topical one.

Research was initiated by Jonathan Bolton and his monograph *Worlds of Dissent* (2012). Bolton bases his analysis of the Czechoslovak dissent on interpretations of literary creations of various members of the dissent, be it fiction or essayistic production. In his insightful commentaries Bolton reveals clear narrative and discursive strategies that give the community of Czechoslovak dissidents a mythical structure and dimension. He addresses the absence of women from these master narratives of dissent and gives first clues to how to understand and further investigate the topic.

Jakub Machek underlined, that in case of the Czech Republic, one cannot talk about decline of the feminism and its reclaiming the public sphere as feminist voice has been weak and diverse for the last 30 years. Maybe, the youngest generation are more open to the feminist ideas, so there is chance that the society will change in the future. But as a current discussion shows, the majority of Czech society considers women traditionally in the first place as mothers, who should give up their work and carrier for the benefit of their children. In the following example he wanted to show how the conservative rhetoric is embedded in the Czech society. The 1950s state socialist attempts of full emancipation were refused already in 1960, and the conservative attitude has been strengthened during the 1970s and 1980s normalization regime and continuing till nowadays. In the 1950s, it was propagated the collective crèches for very small children in order to mothers can return to work as soon as possible. But Czech psychologist and childcare reformers stated already in late 1950s that this crèche system will lead to the psychological deprivation of the children, and in the 1960s longer maternity leave was introduced. The paid parental or rather maternity leave had been prolonged during 1970s to increase the birth rate, a trend reinforced repeatedly in the post-communist era, making maternity leave 4 years as of now. The last recent public debate was heated when the government tried to guarantee the Kindergarten for every child older than two years. The majority refused it, perceiving it similarly as in the 1960s as dangerous for children and as selfish demand of carrier-oriented so-called 'bad women.'

## **Zuzana Poláčková: Inspiring, supporting, but without any significant impact: the role of Western European countries during the events of 1968 in Czechoslovakia**

The two leading superpowers, the Soviet Union and the USA, played the decisive role in international relations after the Second World War. This bipolar division of the world has been one of the major international constants and characteristic features of the Cold War, which, since 1945, went through different phases. The superpowers were aware of the devastating consequences of their possible nuclear conflict. In the 1960s, the new level of strategic policy of *détente* was set up. The reality of the bipolar world required it, especially after the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. The outbreak of a global conflict with the use of nuclear weapons was potentially at stake. After the resolution of this crisis, the bipolar division of the world was consolidated. Both superpowers carefully protected their spheres of influence.

The superpowers therefore did not regard the use of violence in the sphere of the influence of its adversary as a reason for direct confrontation. This is the answer to the question why the United States and Western Europe did not actively engage in favor of occupied Czechoslovakia in August 1968.

The US was fully engaged on the domestic political scene due to demonstrations of the population against the Vietnam War as well. In Western Europe, the population

had been demonstrating against conservative governments, and in May 1968 large student demonstrations took place.

As far as Western Europe is concerned, the consequences of the 1968 military intervention of the CSSR can be divided into three categories:

1. the consequences for the European communist parties
2. the reflection in society and public opinion
3. the response of governments and institutions

1. Most of the communist parties criticized the military intervention, including the two largest: the French and Italian CPs, although the PCI in Italy was more radical in its criticism.

The interesting fact is that the Communist Party of Portugal actually supported the intervention.<sup>18</sup> This was related to its illegality in Portugal, dominated by the dictator Salazar and its consequent financial dependence on Moscow. Alvaro Cunhal, chairman of the party, spent many years in Prague and Moscow.

2. Public opinion in Western Europe encouraged the dissidents and condemned the intervention in Czechoslovakia, so the individual communist parties had to condemn the intervention as well in order to survive as a relevant political force in their respective countries. Of particular interest is the example of Luxembourg, where the CP supported the intervention. The CP did not suffer the consequences of this attitude, as it managed to get in the parliamentary elections in December 1968 with 13.1 % of the vote, i.e. 2/3 more than the CP parties in the Netherlands and Belgium usually got.<sup>19</sup> Newspapers in the Netherlands and Belgium reacted with horror and shock to the invasion. So did the general population, regardless of their political orientation. All left-wing parties in the Netherlands condemned the invasion, which they

<sup>18</sup> Szobi, Pavel. Portugalci v „komunistické Ženevě“. Praha jako středisko antisalazaristické opozice (1948-1974). In: Soudobé dějiny 4/2014, pp. 609-635

<sup>19</sup> Wehenkel, Henri/ Foety, Guy/ Hoffmann, André, 1921-1981. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Kommunistischen Partei Luxemburgs, Luxemburg 1981

interpreted as suppression of the attempt to introduce more freedom and democracy. The Communist party of Holland also condemned it. The majority of the Communist party of Belgium supported an attitude of its leadership, who condemned it. Only a minority in Liege did not. The invasion did not stop the growth of the Old Left (including the communist parties), even less the growth of the New Left (left wing socialists, anarchists, Trotskyists, Maoists). It mainly damaged the prestige of the Soviet Union.

**3.** In general, the governments in western Europe condemned the intervention. They adopted a critical attitude, but on the other hand, their priority was to maintain peace within the bipolar division of the world and, in this context, dialogue with Moscow.

In this context, it is perhaps useful to mention the specific position of Austria. As a close neighbor of Czechoslovakia, Austria was a mediator of positive Western European political and social trends there. Austria continued to mediate democracy even after 1969, when the border was closed and the "normalization" process started. Austrian radio and television ORF had a great impact on the social situation in the 1970s and on relations with Czechoslovak dissidents, and the same was true during the restoration of democracy in Czechoslovakia after 1989. At the same time, Austria was the most generous provider of asylum for immigrants from Czechoslovakia.

It is important to realize that only after 1955, after the signing of the treaty called the Staatsvertrag, Austria could begin to manage its own foreign policy independently. Therefore, Austria did not influence the rise of the Cold War. Until the end of 1955, Austria was occupied by the four powers, and at that time constituted a transitional territory in a polarized Europe, a territory that was controlled by the Western powers as well as the USSR. Austrian-Soviet relations were another determining factor which, besides Austria's proclaimed neutrality, played a decisive role in formulating the Austrian position on the invasion of the CSSR.

The first test of the new Austrian neutrality were the events in Hungary in 1956, when around 180-thousand Hungarian refugees passed through Austria. Kurt Waldheim,

the Austrian minister for foreign affairs in 1968, stated that the international situation in 1968 was more complicated than in 1956. In his opinion, there was a serious possibility that troops of the Warsaw pact could occupy Austria or that Austria might become a corridor for an invasion and attack on Yugoslavia and Romania. The invasion of the Warsaw pact in the CSSR triggered feelings of anxiety among Austrian government officials, as well as the population.

Chancellor Josef Klaus, on behalf of the Austrian government, emphasised that Austria would keep its neutral position and the rule of non-intervention in the affairs of neighbouring states. At the same time, however, he did not forget to add that Austria would provide Czechoslovakia with humanitarian aid and take care of any refugees possibly arriving.

In the process of communication between the populations of Austria and Czechoslovakia, Austrian radio and television played an important role, which had already begun with broadcasting in the mid 1960s. During 1968, Helmut Zilk, a former program director of ORF and later a well-known mayor of Vienna, struggled for a mutual understanding of citizens of both states by organizing the so-called Stadtgespräche. The population in the surroundings of Bratislava could watch Austrian television ORF and get from it more objective and independent information.

The ORF also broadcasted the speech of Chancellor Klaus on August 22, 1968:

*The federal government closely monitors the developments in neighboring Czechoslovakia with big empathy. Our concerns relate mainly to three things: respect for international law, for the Charter of the UN, and for the rights of small states. The policy of the Austrian government has already focused for a long time on reducing tension and on security and cooperation in Europe. The Austrian government, from the position of a neutral state, regrets that the present situation might compromise this process of détente in Europe, and that the promising*

*development of cooperation between the Danubian states might be interrupted.*<sup>20</sup>

ORF hosted representatives of the KPÖ (Austrian Communist Party) several times, who surprisingly condemned the invasion, despite the generally well-known fact that the leadership of the party was heavily dependent on Moscow and its ideology. The leadership of the KPÖ actually evaluated the invasion much sharper than the conservative Chancellor Klaus.

The CP of Austria, along with the French communists, tried to convene in October 1968, a separate meeting of the West European communist parties in order to discuss the causes and consequences of the crisis in the KSČ (Communist Party of Czechoslovakia). Representatives of the CP of the Soviet Union, however, banned it and so caused a crisis in the Austrian Communist Party. The party lost many members and became completely marginalised.

The US ambassador to Austria, Douglas MacArthur, communicated with Klaus in Vienna. He presented the opinion of the American president, Lyndon B. Johnson, that the invasion would harm the process of *détente* and exacerbate tensions in the bipolar world. Simultaneously, he rejected the idea that NATO should play an active role in helping to defend the Austrian border.

The occupation of Czechoslovakia was a test for Austrian-Soviet bilateral relations, which, paradoxically, it did not harm or interrupt. On the contrary, they improved since both sides wanted to continue to benefit from mutual economic cooperation and long-term stability. The invasion, however, had serious consequences for Austria on the domestic political level. It caused a governmental crisis and the fall of the Klaus government in 1970.

### **The influence of the 1968 invasion on the foreign policy of Czechoslovakia in relation to Western Europe**

The 1968 invasion somehow intensified both the antagonistic and the coexistential aspects of the relationship between Czechoslovakia and the West. The liberal reform policy of Alexander Dubček and the reform–communist government was suppressed with the argument that it had been anti-socialist and counter-revolutionary and had been inspired by bourgeois-democratic ideas and illusions. Any basis for coexistence would have to be defined in terms of negotiations between the two different social and political systems. For the post-1968 Czechoslovak government, Western Europe was the principal ideological and political enemy. On the other hand, the more liberal part of Czechoslovak society was deeply disappointed with no reaction and almost no help from Western Europe. In international relations, the invasion was characterized as an international crisis, not as a military occupation, because Czechoslovakia did not mobilize the army. Only one politician openly characterized the invasion as an occupation – President of Yugoslavia Josip Broz Tito.

On the other hand, the “normalization” of Czechoslovak society and the Soviet bloc’s consolidation was a priority.. This meant that the policy of *détente* and peaceful coexistence had to be continued and even intensified in order to enjoy a period of quiet and stability. The communist regimes were talking of peace, which is no coincidence as they needed a measure of *détente* and even pragmatic cooperation with Western Europe in order to feel secure and to be able to improve the economy. Their wish to further develop peaceful coexistence led them to engage in the Helsinki process of *détente* and cooperation. However, the human rights aspect of this was a “ticking time bomb” behind the façade. The founders of Charta 77 knew this.

However, autonomous Czechoslovak foreign policy ceased to exist step by step. Important decisions were made in Moscow, and after 1969, this trend was even strengthened. Moscow condemned the speech of Czechoslovak foreign minister Jiří Hájek in the UN assembly,

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<sup>20</sup> See Poláčková, Zuzana: Za oponou slovensko-rakúskych vzťahov v 20. storočí.(Behind the Curtain of Slovak- Austrian Relations in the 20th Century), Bratislava, 2013, p.140.

who accused Warsaw Pact troops of violating international law when occupying Czechoslovakia. His successor, Bohuš Chřítoupek, obeyed Moscow. The sovereignty of Czechoslovakia was further reduced by the Agreement on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Help signed on the 6th of May 1970. It was to be in force for 20 years. The most important diplomatic activity during the years of normalization, the bilateral agreement between Czechoslovakia and West Germany was initiated in Moscow as well. The most important outcome of this agreement was the annulment of the Munich Agreement, and of course collaboration in the context of the *Ostpolitik*. The next result of *détente* was the Helsinki peace process, which was based on the *Ostpolitik* of Willy Brandt and on *détente*, which had already started in Geneva between Nikita Khrushchev and Dwight Eisenhower in 1955. It was further developed later by US President Lyndon Johnson and Leonid Brežnev, which led in the 1970s to the most important period of *détente*, called the Helsinki Peace Process. It was composed of 3 baskets. The first one was dealing with security and cooperation; the second one was about cooperation in the economy and culture; and the third dealt with human and minority rights. The fact that the 1968 invasion meant another 20 years of communism, meant that many social and cultural changes taking place in Western Europe during 1968 - 1989 were not experienced and absorbed in Eastern Europe. This gave the Visegrad countries a rather provincial outlook on their own situation and on Europe.

### **What do the events of the 1968 invasion mean for the Czech and Slovak Republic and Europe from today's perspective?**

The first lesson of the event is the importance and necessity of defending and working for democracy. Although liberal democracy is still the predominant political system and political culture in Europe today, it would be naive and historically wrong to claim that it is an uncontested or unalterable tradition. The course of the twentieth century has shown that Europe is susceptible to forms of anti-liberal democracy, of which Hungary's 'illiberal democracy' is a case in point, authoritarianism, and even

totalitarianism from east to west. The communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe after 1945 were the longest chapter in the *tragic story* of undemocratic regimes in Europe. However, the right-wing dictatorships of Portugal and Spain lasted until the 1970s, and Greece experienced a similar regime as well. The current developments in Poland and Hungary may be further proof of the structural weakness of liberal democracy in several parts of Europe, and it is by no means certain that only the post-communist countries are vulnerable to this. Right-wing populism and its promise of a post-liberal alternative cannot be categorized as a marginal phenomenon anymore, having risen to prominence both across the East and West spectrum of Europe, as well as globally as evident by recent political developments in Brazil and the US. . Thus, the second message of the Prague Spring is to this day still relevant: that it is necessary to defend European unity as much as possible lest Europe once again becomes the theatre of global struggles by superpowers, who may have different political and strategic interests than those of Europe.

In this context, the events of 1968 are still a relevant political issue because they show that authoritarianism does not work in the long run in Europe, and that only democratic participation of the mass of citizens can constitute a legitimate and viable basis for a democratic and social project.

## Michal Vít: How the events of the 1968 influenced regional cooperation?

The events of the 1968 in Czechoslovakia have significant impact of the way in which the cooperation in regional context has been shaped after 1990. The invasion of Soviet troops enabled Czechoslovakia to develop a myth of victimhood and betrayed state together with Hungary and later also Poland. When focusing on political cooperation of new (opposition) elite coming into power after the 1990, one can see how these events have been used when shaping political cooperation in Central Europe. The sort of common denominator for the cooperation can be defined as shared "post traumatic cooperation" that generated shared goal of foreign policy of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland. When evaluating these events in regional context, one can clearly see that these events have been used as a significant legacy that boosted intellectual and dissident cooperation in late 1980s and in early 1990s. One can even argue that the invasion, from regional perspective, significantly contributed to the impetus for the reintegration of Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia into Europe. Namely, using narration of the shared past experience of Soviet oppression was one of the main tools boosting regional cooperation. This allowed these countries to be treated as a regional group (Visegrad group) with shared past experience and same political goal; EU integration.

Even though dissident cooperation was the main driving force behind reintegration in early 1990s, the personal representation of intellectuals in politics has been reduced during the first subsequent decade significantly. This has resulted in the replacement of intellectuals sharing similar understanding of regional cooperation with representatives that shared a rather pragmatic approach to political praxis without grounded understanding and support of regional cooperation. The return of short-term oriented politics has also meant a decline of narrative power when it comes to 1968.

From a contemporary perspective, the debate about the events of 1968 is led by two main streams. The first one is defined by marginal interest in terms of the actual events but rather a questioning of the aims of the instigators of the uprisings under the communist regime. The second one still seeks to define the uniqueness of the events in Czechoslovakia. It adopts a Czech society-oriented approach trying to re-establish significant social impact in national and also regional context. Both these mainstreams in some way miss broader impact and consequences within Central Europe. Was the Czechoslovak experience really unique? Was the Prague Spring of 1968 different in a regional context? Or, from different perspective, did the Prague Spring followed by the invasion of 1968 yield a significant impact on understanding shared experience of Central European countries? When searching for answer to these question, one can find that there is significant lack of understanding and research seeking to answer these important questions.

With the erosion of the intellectual-led narrative based on the experience of 1968 in a regional context, one can observe that there is only limited aim to research the events in Hungary and Poland from similar perspective. On the contrary, there is still a preference to further develop own "national stories", which are part of social and political mainstream, but miss deeper understanding and meaning of events of 1956 in Hungary, 1968 in Czechoslovakia, and 1970/1980 in Poland. From a different perspective, Central European countries lack unifying intellectuals to lead the public debate when it comes to seeking common ground for understanding. However, this is very often developed and brought to the discussion by experts on Central Europe (meaning external interest) who understand individual countries as a region, more specifically - Visegrad Group. Thus, they de facto search for complex understanding of turbulent development in Central Europe, but they lack broader impact on regional/national political and social narratives in respected countries and often in V4 region and such. That being said, it is in to some extent regrettable that intellectuals in Central Europe sometimes shirk away from seeking patterns and answers to uncomfortable questions, such as if the national "trauma" of 1968 is really as important and unique an event in broader context as it is



made out to be, and if the use of 1968 in political discourse is not too artificial. In this context, the experience of events of 1968 – perceived by current circumstances – has not risen to prominence in terms of societal debate. Nonetheless, the invasion is still used as an identity-shaping event instead of a topic to be researched in terms of its impact on society. As a result, the debate is very concerned with the event as such and less in terms of regional development. In addition to that, since the political narration shortly after 1990 has been driven by intellectuals who lived through the regional cooperation in late 1980s and early 1990s, the Czech and regional debate miss the critical perspective when evaluating the broader consequences of the 1968.

Therefore, in the current debate, the impact in national context is heavily discussed contrary to what it means in the contemporary political and social discussions. This makes the discourse surrounding the event predominantly self-oriented and insular. However, it would be much more beneficial if the meanings and understanding of the event and its legacy, also for future generations, was developed more in contextual terms of regional cooperation over time. It means to tackle changes in time and to evaluate the crucial period of the end of communism in Central Europe and democratic uprising to evaluate the

added value of regional cooperation shortly after the collapse of communist regime

Nevertheless, this is not only the case of the Czech Republic, but also in Central Europe as such. Lack of intellectually-led discussions has resulted in a situation in which the debate is closed within its national boundaries and is heavily dominated by domestic political aims. Since Central European countries develop their common denominators of shared interests only with difficulties, it is, indeed, understandable that the implications of national uprisings in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland have played so significant role.

Evaluating the events of 1968, one can say that the past experience in the context of Central Europe was an important impulse for both reclaiming democracy as well as being an important impetus for strengthening joint-efforts towards integration into Western communities. At the same time, the impact of the events declines over time as they are repurposed towards perpetuating a myth of victimhood rather than developing a better understanding of the regional context. Even though Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic perceive their experience as unique, the origins, meanings, as well as impact on individual societies seems to be very similar.

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