

The Czech Republic and the OSCE

The two decades after the first Helsinki Conference brought several considerable changes for Czechs: a revolutionary change of socio-political order in 1989, and in 1993 a change of their state as such. Czechoslovakia, as an original signatory of the CSCE Final Act under the name of Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, became as the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic an active participant in the process of putting an end to the two blocs system. On 1 January 1993, the Czech Republic was admitted to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe as a new participating State.

There would be little sense in recounting the history of Czech foreign policy after 1 January 1993. In any case, regardless of the inherent elements of continuity and discontinuity, this policy grew out of the foreign policy of former Czechoslovakia. In order to better understand present attitudes and approaches, it is therefore reasonable to trace the relations of Czechs and the OSCE back to the outset of the Helsinki process.

From the Helsinki Final Act to "Velvet Revolution"

A search for individual Czech or, more precisely, Czechoslovak contributions to the early developments of the CSCE process might be frustrating as collective approaches were preferred by the Warsaw Pact countries. Nevertheless, an indirect Czechoslovak influence in the very beginning of the Helsinki process cannot be overlooked: the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia and the crushing of the Prague Spring in August 1968 poisoned the atmosphere in Europe and among the great powers in such a way that it caused a noticeable delay in the actual start of the Helsinki process.

Local hardliners who were allowed to run Czechoslovakia as a result of the August 1968 invasion could certainly not be expected to contribute to the CSCE process in a positively creative way. The course on "normalization" in domestic policy, meaning a movement back to the strictest "socialist" orthodoxy imaginable, ran contrary to the CSCE stress on human rights and fundamental freedoms, rule of law, etc. A state of tension was rather typical for the relationship between "normalized" Czechoslovakia and the CSCE on the issue of implementing human rights commitments.

From Euphoria to Disillusionment

An unequivocally positive attitude toward the Helsinki process was one of the most conspicuous elements of post-November 1989 Czechoslovak foreign policy. This might have been partly explained by the influence of former dissident intellectuals who held the CSCE in great esteem for its record in human rights and in eroding totalitarian systems on an international scale. But in essence, it was a genuine belief in the CSCE's potential to assume a leading role in building a new European security order.

The resulting approach was not limited to mere identification with and admiration for the CSCE. Czechoslovak foreign policy 1989 - 1992 was very active in trying to make these beliefs bear fruit. Two initiatives (documents) should be cited in this connection: in April 1990, a Memorandum on a European Security Commission was presented, identifying the CSCE process as an optimal basis for creating a unified pan-European security system and proposing "second generation Helsinki arrangements" with "effective mechanisms of a new type".

The Memorandum of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic on European Security a year later summarized the developments, among others the utilization of some ideas from the European Security Commission concept in the CSCE mechanisms created by the Charter of Paris. The uniqueness of the process, offering at the same time a pan-European platform and the trans-Atlantic bond of solidarity, was again underlined. The necessity of making proper use of existing organizations as well as further institutionalization of the Helsinki process were stressed.

It is well known that the Czechoslovak foreign policy of that time did not limit itself to theoretical proposals. Among the practical results of our energetic efforts was the establishment of the CSCE Secretariat in Prague, servicing the meetings of the Committee of Senior Officials (now: Senior Council) and holding the historic Prague Ministerial Council in 1992 enlarging the Organization dramatically, as well as the Czechoslovak Chairmanship in the same year.

Paradoxically, the year 1992 which doubtlessly entailed considerable expectations of Czechoslovak foreign policy, ended by the quiet disbandment of the Czechoslovak Federation.

The Czech Republic: Disenchantment and Scepticism

Czech foreign policy, although logically trying to maintain continuity with the policy of the larger state, had to adjust its ambitions to its smaller geo-

political weight and to other facts of life. Some different philosophical approaches were also taken into account.

One of the more pragmatic traits of Czech foreign policy is a conviction that the Czech way into the Western structures of its choice (an ambition shared with the previous Czechoslovak Federation) should be as direct and speedy as possible. Ensuring security to cope with any contingency is a high priority. Consequently, the interest in security-related structures is profound but differences in effectiveness among the structures are felt. Among organizations relevant to security NATO is rated highest. The Czech Republic is a member of the OSCE like all the others. OSCE is relevant to security but its impact on it is considered to be limited. In short, there is a visible difference between past Czechoslovak and present Czech policies and policymakers with regard to their assessment of OSCE potential.

A vast potential of the OSCE process and OSCE as an organization is recognized, but it is no longer regarded as unlimited.

Perspectives and Expectations

The key difference between the former Czechoslovak and present Czech policymakers in viewing the OSCE centers around the problem of how to guarantee security. Alliance mechanisms providing for collective self-defense are considered to be the safest way to solve this problem. Therefore, NATO and, after it, WEU are seen as the proper structures.

This does not necessarily mean underestimating the OSCE in security-related matters. The results that can be ascribed to the Helsinki process in defusing accumulated tensions, including through disarmament measures such as the CFE Treaty, or the Confidence-Building Measures, are known and recognized. But, in contrast to the previous set of politicians, the present Czech policymakers would not think of giving the OSCE the role of an umbrella organization overseeing the European security architecture and its functioning. The security environment created by the OSCE's existence and efforts is considered a sort of general standard available to all. The self-defense structures offer a more "customized" level of security for those who can qualify for the club and are prepared to share the relevant burdens. Czech policymakers - with the population's support according to repeated opinion polls - choose to seek membership in the defense organizations. This is, of course, only a simplified picture omitting the more subtle parts such as the importance of the trans-Atlantic bond in balancing the gravitational forces in Central Europe, etc.

From the above perspective, a considerable part of the OSCE's role is to be a forum for communication. For the Czech Republic practically all the vital contacts are located there. The participation of countries which emerged from the former USSR, Russia above all, is considered in the Czech Republic as a particular asset of the OSCE which must be utilized accordingly by carrying on a meaningful dialogue on all vital issues in the framework of the Organization.

If we focus our view on OSCE activities, the comprehensive approach is a principle the Czech Republic respects and would like to see applied fully, especially through a commensurate functioning of all three OSCE dimensions. Although Czech policymakers do not expect too much from the OSCE security dimension, serious interest in it is nevertheless a logical consequence of their overall security preoccupations. The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe is valued very highly, because its real impact can be described not only in impressive words, but also in precise figures (for instance 58,000 pieces of Treaty Limited Equipment destroyed, personnel strength limited by 1.2 million persons, 2,500 international inspections effected, etc.). Despite some initial hesitation, official Czech policy accepted the intrinsic value of the conceptual discussion on a Common and Comprehensive Security Model for Europe for the 21st Century, welcomed the general principles of the Model as formulated by the 1995 Budapest OSCE Ministerial Council and joined the widely-shared view that the work on the Model will develop into a strategic OSCE activity for some years to come.

The Czech Republic has supported wholeheartedly the tendency, which is gaining momentum, to revive the OSCE economic dimension, endorsed also by the 3rd and the 4th OSCE Economic Forum in Prague. It is a long professed Czech view that to put the economic dimension on the same footing as the security and human dimensions requires using consistently the same modus operandi as with the other two, namely formulating rules of behavior subject to review of their implementation.

Especially the conclusions of the 4th Economic Forum dealing with "Economic Aspects of Security and the OSCE Role" contributed considerably to the view that the OSCE economic dimension is finally finding its most relevant point of focus. These conclusions support the prevailing conviction that within the comprehensive approach to security the enhancement of the OSCE economic dimension will foster the other dimensions as well, particularly the security dimension.

Czech ambitions in the Organization are deliberately kept in proportion with the importance and possible influence of a state of our size. Among the long-term goals there is no ambition to create and play a role in special coalitions of, for instance, the Visegrád type in the times of the Federation, when the participants tried to unify their political stands on every possible issue. On

the other hand, it is quite normal to see the Czech delegations take part in spontaneous ad hoc groups of like-minded delegations united by an interest in solving a specific issue. The economic dimension, as discussed above, and the relevant conceptual discussions might be a good example for this approach.

Finally, what can the OSCE expect from the Czech Republic? It is safe to predict that the Organization can rely on us as a participating State interested in all agendas and in fulfilling its duties.

The recent parliamentary election, the first in the independent Czech Republic in fact, poses an obvious question: will it add some new elements to the already discernible Czech attitudes towards the OSCE?

Dramatic changes in the overall Czech approach to the OSCE are hardly imminent. This assessment has been confirmed by the Program Declaration of the newly formed Czech government, accepted by the parliament on 25 July 1996, where no change in goals and hence continuity in foreign policy is stressed. On the other hand, the wording does not exclude the possibility of Czech foreign policy becoming more comprehensive, a trend already suggested by some attentive observers. For the OSCE it could well amount to - depending on the OSCE's own performances - a more optimistic assessment of OSCE's potential and importance.

The present order of priorities with regard to international structures, as reflected in the Government Program Declaration, is as follows: European Union and NATO; in the second tier the UN, OECD, OSCE and Council of Europe. So much for the present concept of the coalition which will continue to run the Czech foreign policy.

The rise to importance of the opposition, more specifically the Czech Social Democrats, is the conspicuous element of this election. In contrast to the rest of the parliamentary opposition, the Social Democrats have shown little ambition to promote some conceptual line of their own concerning foreign policy which would be visibly different from that of the coalition. On the other hand, their proclaimed intention to exercise as much control over government policy as possible through the parliament might influence even the OSCE issue indirectly by enlarging the scope of themes under debate. What should be expected in such a case?

To be identified with the traditional Western European Social Democratic and Labour parties is a strong motivation for the Czech Social Democrats who, admittedly, do not share their line of descent with other similarly named parties in Central and Eastern Europe. Adopting the standard attitudes of Western European Social Democrats, including those to the OSCE, is therefore the logical choice for them.

Conjectures based on internal political factors only would be, of course, of limited value. Czech attitudes to the OSCE will be definitely moulded, re-

ardless of partisan inclinations, mostly by the performance of the Organization itself. With many important tasks to be accomplished on the road to Lisbon and with expectations for the Lisbon Summit, we find ourselves at an important juncture in this respect.