

DEMOCRATISATION AND CZECHOSLOVAK FOREIGN POLICY

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The process of creating Czechoslovakia's own path to socialism cannot help but influence Czechoslovakia's foreign policy. Foreign policy, both from the viewpoint of its creation and that of its content, was closely linked to a certain model of socialist development which today is changing considerably. Even though this is a specific area which need not register every internal-political change, yet it is so important that it cannot fail to react to the fundamental changes in the social and economic system. Not just because these changes in themselves provoke a reaction from the outside world but, and at the same time, because the realisation of a new concept of political and economic development is very closely linked to cooperation between Czechoslovakia and other countries. This is particularly evident at first glance in the field of economics where the internal market of the ČSSR is so small that only with difficulty can a modern industry develop within it; in the military-political field, where a revolution in the development of modern weapons sharply points up the conflict between the needs of an effective defence system and the possibilities of individual states and where the defence system of the socialist countries will necessarily be of a coalition character; in the field of the scientific-technical revolution where the ČSSR, if isolated, cannot create the preconditions for participation in the scientific-technical revolution; and in a whole series of other areas. That is why in foreign policy as well there must be new forms and methods of work reflecting the process of democratisation of the whole of society, elements of its growing activity. At the same time, however, there must also be certain conceptual considerations corresponding to the new approach to life inside the country.

What is basic about present-day developments in the ČSSR that is so important for its foreign policy? It is the following: that all efforts by the progressive forces of Czechoslovak society are led and in-

spired by the policy of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia towards the development of socialism in a form corresponding to the conditions, needs, the democratic and revolutionary traditions of this country. Even though there is a break with many ideas and concepts about socialism that prevailed before, this is a singularly socialist development.

In view of the fact that the development of a socialist society is the aim of other socialist countries, Czechoslovakia therefore has a vital interest in continuing and strengthening its collaboration with them. Thus it is possible to emphasise the element of continuity in Czechoslovak foreign policy. If, in connection with developments in Czechoslovakia, we speak about the attitude to questions of Czechoslovakia's foreign policy concept we cannot but formulate as the basic aim an orientation towards cooperation with the socialist countries and the Soviet Union. All the more so since we live at present in a given, concrete international political situation which, despite prevailing tendencies to rapprochement and international cooperation, is characterised by a series of aggressive acts and phenomena, and which Czechoslovakia, given its geographical position and in view of its historical experience in the not too distant past, cannot overlook.

But what do we have in mind when we speak of the necessity of introducing deep political changes into foreign policy? What do we have concretely in mind when we speak of the need to give Czechoslovak foreign policy its specific shape? This question was answered by competent authorities and may be formulated as follows: in the frame of a basic foreign policy orientation, Czechoslovakia should to a maximum use the conditions and opportunities available to press its own foreign policy initiatives; Czechoslovakia should have its own ideas on the basic questions of international development, on questions of relations and collaboration among socialist countries; it should have its own opinions and concepts in

relation to individual countries, especially to socialist countries, and from these ideas it should build its foreign policy activities. Not always and everywhere was this individual approach accentuated to the same degree, yet this is a fact as irrevocable as the realities of Czechoslovakia's foreign policy orientation. At the same time it is clear that the practical realisation of an original approach depends on a number of factors which in politics cannot be ignored.

It should be noted that the demand for Czechoslovakia to have its own foreign policy is not being expressed for the first time today. If we look back at the development of Czechoslovakia's foreign policy since 1956, from the February meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in that year on questions of Czechoslovak foreign policy, we come across a number of party and government documents demanding the use of Czechoslovakia's objective, specific conditions to develop its own foreign policy initiatives. This demand appeared in Czechoslovak foreign policy in conformity with a general developing tendency within the socialist world. Therefore the root of efforts to use our own conditions and possibilities are relatively deep. If we take as our starting point the declaration on the needs of Czechoslovak foreign policy and the fact that in the field of international policy Czechoslovakia really did take a series of measures and steps corresponding to its conditions and needs, which certainly cannot be underestimated, it might seem that everything is in order, that Czechoslovak foreign policy is not faced with the problem of profoundly thinking through its conceptual questions, that Czechoslovak foreign policy is not facing a new task but has only to follow its former line, or possibly to put this line into effect more intelligently than in the past. This also how the question is very often understood. Simply as the continuation of a former concept of Czechoslovak foreign policy although on a different level in its practical application. Therefore emphasis is placed only on the element of continuity in Czechoslovak foreign policy — and certainly in the field of international relations there exist serious reasons for this — and

there is no mention of the second element of the present-day process, the element of discontinuity, evolving from the fact that something fundamental has changed in creating Czechoslovak foreign policy and in the sphere internationally of the political position of Czechoslovakia.

Therefore an orientation to some sort of improvement of the existing foreign policy concept and foreign policy practice would, in my opinion, be a very formal approach to the decisions and results of the plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the KSC (Communist Party of Czechoslovakia), in January, 1968, and show a lack of understanding of the new historical situation, of the new conditions for action of Czechoslovak foreign policy. It would defend the policy of fear to go beyond the confines of a limited and very narrow area, although a similar policy in the past was held up as one of Czechoslovakia's great advantages. It is not important that in the past considerations were formulated about the need for Czechoslovakia's own policy since the reply to the questions is — whether and how far the objective and subjective conditions permitted these considerations to be implemented in practice, how far it was possible under these conditions to conduct an independent and unhindered Czechoslovak foreign policy. The fact that in drawing up Czechoslovakia's foreign policy the internal conditions changed and, therefore, the new possibilities for the creation of this policy have changed in many ways, including relations within the socialist world, is undoubtedly the reality of today. As a result there cannot be just a continuation of certain positive features in the development of Czechoslovakia's foreign policy in the past.

What is the main thing from the viewpoint of conditions and needs of the new situation? In my opinion it is that the development of foreign policy activities in conformity with the internal conditions and needs of the Czechoslovak state become the leading concept of Czechoslovak foreign policy, the decisive viewpoint in approaching one or another question, this or that country. This is to say that not in its basic foreign political orientation of course, but in this sense Czechoslovak foreign policy must

react in its contextual approach to the conditions and needs of the internal development in Czechoslovakia, to the conditions and opportunities of development internationally. In this regard, Czechoslovak foreign policy must be given its own shape; this means that it must, in the full sense of the word, become the policy of Czechoslovakia. The development of an objective, and particularly, economic position for Czechoslovakia leads more and more to the necessity of emphasising to a much greater extent and bringing forward the interests and needs of the ČSSR, if Czechoslovakia's continuously worsening position in world economics is to be halted. For instance, the results to date of collaboration in the socialist world within the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance do not give great cause for optimism and yet it is clear that it is not within the power of one country, and that means Czechoslovakia as well, to achieve a change in the situation without the understanding and support of the other countries.

The question might arise whether this emphasis on the national interests and needs of Czechoslovakia is not in contradiction with the interests of world socialism as a whole and with internationalist elements in Czechoslovak foreign policy. I think this is not at all so. I do not share the view that the international element is sufficiently contained in a policy which leads to the strengthening of the national authority of the communist party, which raises the prestige of the socialist ideas in the national realm. In the field of foreign policy it is therefore necessary to take into account the common interests and needs of the socialist countries as a whole and chiefly the distinct developing tendencies inside the socialist world where questions of common and special emphasis have different interpretations in different stages. If, in the past, the accent was on common relations in the form of having the individual countries of the socialist system submit to the concept of a "leading party", at the present time this accent is placed rather on a specific quality in the sense that this too is a given stage of development, that it creates the prerequisites for the common interests of

the socialist countries to find their application and expression not just in proclamations on unity, as was the case heretofore, but chiefly in a common approach and common attitude and on the basis of principles of the independence and equality of the individual countries and parties. A correct understanding of this developing process is therefore one of the most important prerequisites to formulating a policy which would respect both the social interests of the socialist countries in a given concrete situation, along with the national interests, which simply cannot be disregarded and left out of the picture. At the same time it goes without saying that furthering national interests has nothing in common with a nationalistic policy.

From the viewpoint of the developmental tendency within the socialist world, an orientation on emphasising one's own interests and needs is in conformity with the situation in which the policies of the individual communist and workers' parties of socialist countries more markedly express the objective, specific conditions internally and internationally.

The diversity of such conditions, which could be richly documented, in the development of the world socialist system has led not only to a variety of views among communist and workers' parties on one or another question, but also to a variety of considerations of a conceptual character and, in connection with this, to a new formula of unity of the socialist countries and the international communist and working class movement: unity not on the basis of denying this diversity but on the basis of its recognition. In conformity with these objective, developing tendencies in relations between the socialist states the principle of the right of each party and each socialist country to formulate its independent internal and foreign policy in conformity with the conditions and needs of one or another country, was gradually and generally accepted. This principle was accepted as a result of the efforts of the socialist countries to attain not just formal but real unity. At the present time we are concerned with the practical realisation of this right of each socialist country to formulate its policy

and ideas in conformity with its conditions.

We are not dealing therefore with the foreign orientation of Czechoslovakia but the content of this orientation, with the forms and methods of cooperation between the socialist countries, with the principles of their mutual relations and with their practical realisation. The content of Czechoslovak foreign policy, and as a result the relations of the ČSSR to the socialist countries and to other countries and areas of the world, cannot be something that is laid down once and for all, something unchangeable. This content must continuously change and develop in conformity with the inner-political development of the ČSSR and specially then in conformity with the development of international politics, with the objective, long-range tendencies going on inside the socialist world. It must also continuously develop and change its form and methods of realisation on the basis of the foreign political orientation of Czechoslovakia, the forms and methods of ensuring the living and vital interests of the ČSSR. It cannot be mechanically repeated ad infinitum that the basic line of our foreign policy is cooperation and alliance with the Soviet Union and with the socialist countries; it is necessary to think about the process of enforcing this basic line, the process of its concretisation, of its forms in the different stages of development.

The deep changes which came about in Czechoslovakia this year could not help but be reflected in the ČSSR's position in the world socialist system, could not help but find their way into the position of the individual socialist countries to developments in the ČSSR. Not simply this, but the position of the ČSSR within the socialist system, or better said its European part, is changing qualitatively. This necessitates a certain comparison.

If we analyse the position of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia until now towards conceptual questions dealing with cooperation and the unity of the socialist countries and the communist and working class parties in the development of a socialist system, we cannot help but reach the conclusion that the KSČ in

this stage was chiefly a critic of a number of progressive suggestions and ideas which appeared inside the socialist world and in the communist movement in general. The KSČ even stood at the head of this criticism of these progressive efforts and developed extraordinary initiatives in this regard. We have but to recall the criticism of the well-known polycentristic concept of Togliatti in 1956, which has been proven correct to a great extent; criticism of "Yugoslav revisionism" in 1958 and in the following years in connection with the programme of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia; the approach of the KSČ to questions of the form and methods of criticism of parties adopting an incorrect position; the attitude of the KSČ to the question of the "leading party" and "leading country", and the like. Of course, the KSČ was not the only party adopting such a position, but on the other hand it belonged mostly in the past among those communist parties which more from a conservative position came out against different views and ideas, among those parties whose position for the most part did not contribute to the objective needs and conditions of development of relations among socialist states, even though the subjective intentions might have been of the purest. I do not mean, in saying this, to underestimate the contribution of Czechoslovakia particularly to the economic development of the socialist countries, its economic help to underdeveloped countries of the socialist system and the undeniable contribution of Czechoslovakia to the peaceful foreign policy of the socialist states, its support of the Soviet Union's efforts to peacefully resolve international problems. But if we bear in mind questions relating to the concept of collaboration and unity among the socialist countries, and consequently the questions concerning the very position of the ČSSR among the socialist states then, in this sense, the KSČ adopted an attitude expressing a viewpoint that looked back into the past rather than one looking to the present or to the future.

At the present time the situation has changed considerably. If in the past the KSČ belonged mostly among the critics

of those who were seeking — often making mistakes — a new path of socialist development and its mutual relations, then at the present time the KSC has itself become a subject of criticism by the conservative forces existing within the socialist world, a subject of a certain lack of understanding and doubt. The meeting of several communist parties in Dresden, which took place in April of this year, evidently threw only little clarity on the questions which the communist working class parties of the other socialist countries are asking, on questions of how to evaluate developments in the ČSSR. This is quite understandable, if we compare the differences in approach of the KSC to the question of form and methods of building socialism with the concept that applied until now in the other socialist countries. Yugoslavia is the only exception. In connection with a radical break with the application of forms and methods of socialist construction employed heretofore, we cannot but expect a certain lack of understanding towards developments in the ČSSR, and an inexact evaluation of this development and it would certainly be unreal to reject the idea of certain attempts to influence developments in the ČSSR from outside. It would be illusory to expect that changes that are so far-reaching will be welcomed generally with enthusiasm and maximum support. On the other hand, it would be a mistake to dramatise this lack of understanding of these changes, their incorrect assessment, and it would be a mistake especially where such considerations have not been expressed by official persons and on official grounds. In this sense, in its own interests Czechoslovakia should try to have its open discussion on the national level applied to the international one. It would be a contribution to overcoming the abnormal state of relations among the socialist countries where every word expressed in the field of science and that of journalism must be seen as embodying the official standpoint and is often accompanied by official protests.

A lack of understanding of the internal processes and needs of the ČSSR by any

communist or working class party and socialist countries cannot, however, hold back the internal developments in the ČSSR, be a barrier to realising the changes in its social and economic system. Czechoslovakia's place in a system of military-political and economic collaboration among socialist states, which is the basic orientation that ČSSR does not wish nor can change today, should not and must not become a barrier to changes which are necessary from the viewpoint of ČSSR's needs. The contribution of these changes to the development of socialist theory and practice is unquestionable. Even though the interests of national security and, to a given extent, the interests of economic development determine very clearly the foreign policy line of the ČSSR and a certain objectively existing link to the socialist countries, it is not possible in the present situation to use these objectively existing facts as a means of pressure.

If we assess the developing tendency inside the socialist system with the developing tendency in international relations, we cannot help but conclude that there exist basically favourable conditions for the development of the democratisation process in Czechoslovakia. Although one can come across voices linking this development with hopes for a return to non-socialist conditions, these are isolated voices which do not prevail either in the capitalist or in the socialist world. The fact that Czechoslovakia has cut a new path of development has aroused extraordinary attention throughout all of world public opinion and has created in itself conditions for the development of a foreign policy of initiative by the ČSSR. As a result of this development ČSSR's authority has unquestionably risen and there has been an unusual growth of sympathy and hope in socialism within the communist and socialist movement. Therefore, in the present stage of development of the socialist system and developments internationally, there is no greater danger to the democratisation process in Czechoslovakia than our own indecisiveness or lack of consistency.