

CZECHS AND GERMANS: YESTERDAY AND TODAY

Milan Hauner

"Germany can be as large as it wants to be as long as it is democratic." These words were pronounced by the newly elected Czechoslovak president Václav Havel in front of the Brandenburg Gate in East Berlin on 2 January 1990,¹ barely three days after the election of the dissident playwright. For a majority of the Czechs this statement was less explosive than the one Havel had made earlier as a private citizen in a letter to West German president Richard von Weizsäcker. Havel touched upon the great taboo, "the guilt of our country over three million of its own citizens of German nationality who were expelled from their homes." Havel wrote:

I personally, like many of my friends, condemn the postwar expulsion of Germans, which has always struck me as a deeply immoral act, inflicting heavy damage not only on the Germans but perhaps even more on the Czechs, both moral and material. To respond to evil by committing another evil does not eliminate evil but allows it to go on forever. I believe that the time will come when this event will be openly discussed in our country, when the official representatives of our country will...cease to identify themselves with it and to defend it, and will offer the Germans for an apology, similar to that which the Germans themselves have already offer to several other nations who suffered from them so terribly during the Nazi era.²

The appropriate form of apology Havel had in mind could have been the formula used in 1965 by the Polish bishops who, in their letter to the German Episcopate, wrote, "we forgive and ask for forgiveness," and who were then condemned by the Polish communist authorities as traitors. Twenty-five years later, the Czech communist leaders, facing a hostile public in the streets, had no other recourse than that of *Schadenfreude*. The Communist newspaper Rudé Právo's gleeful revelation of Havel's private apology to the Sudeten Germans in January 1990 led only to a few public protests in Prague and elsewhere and to

¹ See Serge Schmemmann, The New York Times, 3 January 1990.

² Václav Havel. Letter to Richard von Weizsäcker, 5 November 1989. Czechoslovak Documentary Center, Scheinfeld, cited with permission of the director, Dr. Vilém Prečan.

a token hunger strike by one eccentric, hardly damaging Havel's stupendous popularity.³ Speculation in the German press as to whether Havel's original term *odpuštění* = *Entschuldigung* (apology) was mistakenly translated as *politování* = *Bedauern* (regrets)⁴, could not detract attention from the incendiary nature of the statement, which shattered deep-rooted Czech and German nationalist stereotypes of long standing.

* * *

If Havel's first thoughts as Czechoslovakia's new president were directed at the German question, it was also the German question which, in the author's view, provided the strongest catalyst for the November Revolution in Prague--the more lasting effects of the "Gorbachev phenomenon" notwithstanding. This point is missing from most current interpretations of the Czechoslovakia's "Velvet Revolution."

Without the thousands of East Germans escaping to West Germany via Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Austria, without the East Germans crowding into the garden of the West German embassy in Prague as if it were a football stadium, and without the spectacular crumbling of the Berlin Wall on 9 November, the Velvet Revolution would not have taken place. The student demonstration of 17 November 1989 might have been a mere repetition of the previous, routine, street protests by a politically conscious minority that characterized Czechoslovakia between November 1988 and January 1989. Without the external German factor, the student demonstration would not have accumulated the necessary momentum to mobilize the masses and to undermine the authorities. A new sort of "German question" was thus present in the subconscious of the demonstrators.

Since January 1990 Havel has had several opportunities to reiterate his faith in a democratic Germany: on the occasion of the first visit by President von Weizsäcker to Prague on 15 March; on the fifty-second anniversary of Hitler's occupation of Prague; and, again, on 3 October, when the two Germanys were united. Havel denounced the immorality of collective guilt which his compatriots had applied forty-five years earlier to the three million Sudeten Germans, expelled from Czechoslovakia. Havel stipulated as his first task as president the dispelling of the Czechs' long-standing fear of the Germans (*Furor Teutonicus*) because the new Germans, he was convinced, were different: it was they, after all, who tore down the walls dividing Europe.⁵

³ *Svobodné Slovo*, 5 January 1990; see also Craig R. Whitney, "Glee for Communists: Havel Suffers a Miscue," *The New York Times*, 6 January 1990.

⁴ See Jan Křen, "Dvě německé otázky," *Lidové noviny*, 14 December 1990, p. 11.

⁵ For speeches of Václav Havel and Richard von Weizsäcker, *Svobodné Slovo*, 16 March 1990, was used. See also interviews with Havel in *Die Welt*, 10 March 1990, and *Der Spiegel*, no. 40, 1 October 1990, pp. 198-211.

The question one should ask is: if President Havel has been able to overcome the traditional Czech stereotyping of the Germans, is the same true of the bulk of his compatriots, especially those bearing bitter memories of the last world war? While the majority of the Czechs may have accepted Havel's hopeful message about a united democratic Germany, whose territorial limits were irrelevant, they were much more reluctant to accept his apology (which was made privately but in less than two months became public) for the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans. Havel's two statements opened a Pandora's box containing many taboos about the Czech-German relationship of which most Czechs preferred not to be reminded. Several questions about this relationship require elaboration.

For centuries, the Czechs lived with the Germans not only as their immediate "external" neighbors who on three sides, but also as their "internal" neighbors, sharing the territory of the Bohemian Principality, an independent kingdom since the thirteenth century, but politically and culturally closely connected to the German Empire. Moreover, this close geopolitical and cultural propinquity between the two peoples traditionally exposed the Czech state and its inhabitants, more than any other people in Central Europe, to the full impact of German "universalism."⁶

While analyzing both the traditional and contemporary Czech stereotypes contributing to the complexities of the wider "German question," we must also pay attention to the recent genesis of the unorthodox views on the traditional "German problem," originated during the last two decades of "normalization," by the intellectual opposition inside Czechoslovakia which has found in Václav Havel its most respected moral authority. The central idea of this new thinking calls for the reconsideration of the old conviction that the very survival of the Czech nation within a sovereign state is irreconcilable with the existence of a strong united Germany. Has Havel abandoned the hitherto dominant axiom in Czech political thinking which dictated extreme caution on the assumption of the centuries-old German drive to expand eastward, the *Drang nach Osten*? The presence of over 8.6 million German settlers in eastern Europe in 1938, 3.5 million of them in Czechoslovakia alone, contributed to the image of the "people without space," *das Volk ohne Raum*.⁷

⁶ For lack of a better term, "universalism" has been selected as the common denominator. See below for further elucidation.

⁷ *Volk ohne Raum*, a 1926 novel by Hans Grimm (1875-1959), was one of the most popular books in the Third Reich and which also provided the Nazi propaganda with one of its most effective slogans. In 1938 over 8.6 million ethnic Germans lived outside Germany's borders in eastern Europe. Czechoslovakia contained the largest group of Germans, numbering almost 3.5 million. About 9 million Germans lived in the German territories east of the Oder-Neisse border, annexed to Poland and the USSR after 1945. Most of the ethnic Germans fled or were expelled in the aftermath of World War II. Out of the combined total of 17.5 million such Germans in 1938, their number shrank to about 4 million by 1960 through flight or migration. Today no more than 2.8 million ethnic Germans continue to live in eastern Europe, with the largest group, about 2 million in the Soviet Union. *Informationen zur politischen Bildung*, no. 222 (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1989).

There always existed some kind of conditional relationship, for Czechs, between the supposedly tolerable size of Germany in the middle of Europe and its political content. To make this Czech presumption clearer, I suggest that we, for a moment, reverse Havel's statement, replacing the priorities of the wishful moralist with those of a shrewd *Realpolitiker*: as long as Germany is not democratic it cannot be as large as it wants to be.

THE CZECHS AMONG GERMANS: A THOUSAND-YEAR-OLD RELATIONSHIP

President Havel's dauntless statements immediately raise a panoply of old and new stereotypes associated with the "German question." In order to appreciate the radicalism of Václav Havel's breakthrough on this question, we must understand how these two themes, approval of German unification and the need for a joint apology, differ fundamentally from the way the German question used to be perceived, even as recently as 45 years ago, by the main body of Czech political thinking.

Until the end of World War II two assumptions about the "German problem" dominated the Czech historical experience. First, the idea of a contest for power can be summed up in the typical Czech attitude that whenever Germany becomes weak and disunited, the Czechs must benefit from it. If we consult Czech political texts starting with the early twelfth-century chronicler Kosmas, or so-called Dalimil of the early fourteenth century, we find this central idea expressed both openly and covertly. A more contemporary manifestation of this idea can be found in President Beneš's statement of March 1939, when Hitler's forces invaded Czechoslovakia's rump: "As long as Germany remained a free republic, our two countries enjoyed the best kind of relationship."⁸ Beneš was somehow looking back nostalgically at the years of the Weimar Republic when, even though it may have maintained the status of a great cultural center, Germany's military status shrank to that of a third-rate power. (Even the new Czechoslovak armed forces were more powerful in the 1920s than those of Germany.) Second, there is the notion of an antagonistic ethno-cultural division, which during World War II went completely out of control and demolished the less harsh version of "ethnic polarity," as a competitive but balanced relationship between the Germans and the Czechs, as advocated by the great Czech historian and politician, František Palacký (1798-1876).

The year 1945 saw the tragic climax of this ethnic division between the Czechs and the Germans in its most negative and destructive form, namely in the brutal expulsion of the entire German population from Czechoslovakia. In a way it was the consummation of Palacký's interpretation of Czech history: after all, what should make up the "German question" for the Czechs after 1945, if that principal historical antagonist, the Germans, disappeared from the scene of action?

Indeed, Havel's radical departure from traditional Czech stereotyping of the "German

⁸ Libor Rouček, *Die Tschechoslowakei und die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1949-1989* (Vienna: Tuduv, 1990), p. 7.

question" occurred on more than one level. In order to appreciate fully this extraordinary hiatus one must review, in a very sketchy form at least, the salient features of the one thousand years of history of the Czech-German relationship, taking into account what the Czechs have in common with Germany's other neighbors and where they differ.

An intriguing Czech aphorism exemplifies the peculiarities of the Czech-German relationship and must be expressed in German because the Czech language does not have a word for "Bohemian": *jeder Tscheche ist ein Böhme, aber nicht jeder Böhme is ein Tscheche* (every Czech is a Bohemian, but not every Bohemian is a Czech). This reflects, even underscores, the mutual tensions between Germans and Czechs living together within one territory as "Bohemians."

It is useful to remind ourselves at the outset of the peculiar geographical location of the Czech lands in the very center of Europe. The natural borders of the Bohemian quadrangle certainly helped to protect the country from the encroachment of German invaders when the princely family of Přemyslids formed the first state in the middle of the tenth century. Of the German neighbors it was the Bohemian state, that is, the core consisting of Bohemia and Moravia, with which for centuries, it shared the longest common border of some 1,200 kilometers in 1938. This was twice as long as the German-Polish border, and three times that between France and Germany. After World War II Czechoslovakia became the only country to border two German states (and, if Austria is counted as a German state, one might say three).

Centuries of co-existence within one territory helped to create a very special and unique relationship which in order to appreciate its intricacies, one must study on three levels simultaneously. First, the Czechs have had Germans as "external" neighbors. There is, of course, nothing specifically Czech in stating this plain historical and geographic fact because any other of Germany's neighbors would fit into this category. For specific historic reasons, however, political irredentism among the Czech Germans was not supported by Prussia. Bismarck wisely opposed it during the 1866 war against Austria, although the Prussians issued propaganda manifestoes addressed to the "Illustrious Inhabitants of the Bohemian Kingdom." After the creation of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918, however (which was opposed by the Bohemian Germans), cross-border irredentism became one of the decisive political factors in the country's domestic life. Following Hitler's assumption of power in 1933, the majority of Sudeten Germans embraced his idea of a Greater Germany. After the 1938 Anschluss of Austria, no compromise proposal by the Prague government could satisfy the leaders of the Sudeten Germans, who were under direct instructions from Hitler to stay a step ahead of what the Czechs might offer.

Second, inside Bohemia and Moravia the two nations had co-existed within one territory since time immemorial. The number of German settlers had increased to about one-fourth of the total population in the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, after the Czech kings had invited German farmers, merchants, and craftsmen to colonize the undeveloped border regions and to establish towns. Advanced German municipal law was

introduced and new royal cities were founded. The discovery of silver was a major reason for the prosperity and international prestige of the kingdom, and it brought scores of German miners into the country. The Hussite Wars, since regarded by the Czechs as the peak of their national and religious endeavors, reversed the trend of Germanization for some time. A number of formerly German-speaking cities in Bohemia gained a Czech majority. After the devastation brought by the Thirty Years' War (1618-48), when the Czech lands lost half of their inhabitants, further German colonization increased the number of German settlers in Bohemia and Moravia by about one-third. Their economic importance, however, exceeded their numbers, as did the impact of German culture, particularly in the cities and at the royal and imperial courts later, under the Luxembourg and Habsburg dynasties, respectively. Similarly, if one includes the other two hereditary provinces of the Bohemian Kingdom, small Lusatia (lost in 1635 to Saxony) and large and rich Silesia (lost to Prussia in 1742), which had been solidly Germanized since the Middle Ages, one might argue that the German element prevailed when all the hereditary crownlands were counted together. And yet despite their relative numerical advantage, prior to 1918 the Bohemian Germans never regarded themselves as a genuine German tribe, *sui generis*, like the Bavarians or the Saxons; they did not develop their own historical and cultural individuality.⁹ Instead, they saw themselves as part of the wider German national cultural body, as Austro-Germans under the Habsburgs and, after 1918, inescapably together with their Austrian compatriots, as part of Greater Germany, headed after 1933 by Adolf Hitler, himself an ex-Austrian citizen.

It was František Palacký who deliberately identified the essence of Czech national existence, the so-called Czech question, with the "German question." According to Palacký, Czech history was nothing but a continuous struggle between Slavdom and Germandom, being at the same time a contest as well as an emulation, a rejection and an acceptance of German customs and laws by the Czechs:

It is a struggle waged not only on the borders but in Bohemia's interior, not only against foreigners but among native inhabitants, not only with sword and shield but with spirit and word, laws and customs, openly and covertly, with enlightened zeal and blind passion, leading not only to victory or subjection but also to reconciliation.... Even today history and geography pose the same task to the Czech nation: to serve as a bridge between Germandom and Slavdom, between the West and East in Europe in general.¹⁰

⁹ Some of the finest representatives of the German culture were born in Bohemia and Moravia: Franz Kafka, Reiner Maria Rilke, Adalbert Stifter, Berta von Sutner, Karl Kraus, Max Bord, Franz Werfl, Johannes Urzidil, Egon Erwin Kisch, Louis Fűrberg, Johann Gregor Mendel, Sigmund Freud, Gustav Mahler, Edmund Husserl, Karl Kautsky etc.

¹⁰ F. Palacký, Dějiny národu českého v Čechách i v Moravě (The history of the Czech nation in the Czech lands and Moravia), vol. I (Prague, 1848), pp. 12-13.

The expulsion of Bohemian Germans after World War II thus constituted a definite breach in the continuity of the centuries-long co-existence and co-habitation between Czechs and Germans. Until 1968 when the Prague Spring created, overnight, preconditions for a free discussion, Czech historians considered this profound rift in the continuity of Czech history a taboo. The year 1945, therefore, also meant the end of the "Czech question" as Palacký understood it. After all, how could one continue to talk about the "Czech question" if the main antagonist, i. e., the Germans, was no longer present in Bohemia, and if all historical memory of their centuries-long presence had been wiped out? The other violent disruption was the establishment of two totalitarian systems, Hitler's and Stalin's, which followed each other in rather quick succession.¹¹

Finally, there is the third dimension of the Czech-German relationship: "German universalism," with a whole scale of negative and positive attributes, ranging from the obvious cultural manifestations of German literature and music to legacies which are much less unanimously accepted, such as the universal mission of the Reich, the *Sacrum Imperium*. The Czechs were frequently contrasted with the Germans as if throughout history they had been merely a "small" nation, whereas the Germans had achieved greatness because they embodied the *Reichsidee*, the continuity of the universal idea of empire inherited from the Romans and merged with that of medieval Christendom, this *Orbis Europeus Christianus*,¹² probably best epitomized by the three emperors, Charlemagne, Charles IV (whom the Czechs, of course, regard as their own *Pater Patriae*), and Charles V.¹³ What else, apart from undisputed Christian zeal, would have driven Saint Adalbert (Vojtěch), the second bishop of Prague and the first archbishop of Polish Gniezno, on his missions among the heathens of East Prussia, where he died a martyr's death? If this was the dreadful *Drang nach Osten*, then not only the Teutonic Knights, but much earlier the Czech and Polish missionaries had played an important part in it. For the monarchs the temptation to achieve glory was even greater. The "iron and golden king," Přemysl Otakar II (1230-78), conducted a crusade against the heathens of East Prussia to avenge Christendom's martyr, Saint Adalbert. And it was in honor of this powerful Czech king that the Teutonic Knights named their citadel, the future Prussian capital, Königsberg after him. Under his son and grandson, Wenceslas II and Wenceslas III, who also happened to be the last Přemyslid kings, the three eastern kingdoms of Bohemia, Poland, and Hungary were briefly united under one dynasty.

There was usually one powerful reason for such fundamental geopolitical restructuring in eastern Europe: a deadly outside threat in the form of a Tatar, and later

¹¹ See Milan Hauner, "Recasting Czech History," *Survey* (London), Summer 1979, p. 220.

¹² See the penetrating observations of the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka, "Co jsou Češi?" (Who are the Czechs?), in *150.000 Slov*, vol. 4, no. 12 (Paris, 1985), pp. 1-32. See also Otto von Habsburg, *Die Reichsidee* (Vienna: Amalthea, 1986).

¹³ See Ferdinand Seibt, *Karl IV: Ein Kaiser in Europa* (Charles V: The emperor and the reformation) (Munich, 1978), and, *Karl V: Der Kaiser und die Reformation* (Charles V: An emperor in Europe) (Berlin, 1990).

a Turkish, invasion. Marriage contracts between the ruling houses of eastern Europe were the method through which larger units capable of withstanding attack were skillfully put together. The Habsburgs excelled in these transactions and thus laid foundations for a new Eastern empire. A fractured eastern Europe would have been easy prey for the Tatars and Ottoman Turks. It was here that the necessity of defending the *paries proximus nobis* of European Christendom was recognized, and not in the obsession to reconquer the Holy Land, as Bishop Bruno of Olomouc implored the Pope in 1273; only the strong hand of the Bohemian king could do it, not the weak and divided German princes.¹⁴

The Bohemian state, unlike the other two Christian kingdoms of eastern Europe, Poland and Hungary, had been considered part of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation right from its inception in the tenth century, and the Bohemian king thus became the most respected among the four secular prince-electors of the emperor. As there were no other kings within the Empire, his rank was the highest and, on several occasions, under the Luxembourg and Habsburg dynasties, the King of Bohemia successfully reached for the imperial crown. Consequently, Prague also intermittently became the imperial capital. A Bohemian nobleman of an adventurous disposition, Albrecht Wallenstein, the generalissimus of imperial armies during the Thirty Years' War, dreamed about modernizing the empire in northern Germany and on the Baltic. Exploiting the *Reichsidee* he aimed to transform Germany into a centralized state like France and Spain. Even after the dissolution of the German Empire by Napoleon, the Bohemian crownlands, a part of the German Confederation (1815-66), continued their somewhat mythical attachment to the *Reichsidee* under the supranational Habsburg dynasty.

Golo Mann is surely right when he argues that one of the most important characteristics of the Empire was that it functioned as the repository of memories, ideas, and legends about Christian Universalism. This delayed the development of a modern German nation-state and gave the Germans the wrong feeling of cultural superiority. They were led to believe that the Empire had been theirs and that they inherited the civilizing mission of the Romans.¹⁵ Although one could argue that the idea of the Empire was never more than a figment of their imagination, the *Realpolitik* of a number of German rulers used that dream for its own aims, from the Hohenstaufen Emperors who wanted to revive the Imperial Idea by conquering Italy to the Austrian parvenu, Adolf Hitler, who usurped power in an attempt to establish a Third Reich, which was to last a thousand years.

In contrast to the western boundary of the Empire, its eastern borders were fluid. The so-called *Drang nach Osten* served as a common denominator for the evident

¹⁴ Josef Šusta, *Poslední Přemyslovci a jejich dědictví* (The last Přemyslids and their heritage) (Prague, 1917), p. 286.

¹⁵ Golo Mann, *The History of Germany since 1789* (London: Pelican Books, 1974), pp. 20-24. An east European author, who wrote about the importance of the imperial idea in *Misère des petits États d'Europe de l'Est* (The misery of the small states of Easter Europe) (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986), pp. 27-47.

geopolitical reality which stretched across several centuries; here in the East, the Germans were simply outgrowing the confines of the Empire, as Golo Mann observed, first in fact, then also in form. The two most powerful German states of the modern era, Austria and Prussia, had their centers of gravity pushed eastward outside the confines of the Empire. But long before that, German settlers, both farmers and townspeople, penetrated even those eastern confines of the Reich.¹⁶ In the era of imperialism this led to the false perception that somehow German *Kulturträger* were in charge of the East, which stretched, if one included tsarist Russia with its many bureaucrats and army commanders carrying German-sounding names, all the way across Asia to the Chinese frontier. Thus, the dangerous conclusion was drawn that the Empire's proper field of activity and expansion, its true *Lebensraum*, was to be found only in the East, and the preservers and carriers of the supranational structure were Germans outside the confines of the medieval Reich. This fixation, exacerbated during World War I by the German military occupation of the whole of eastern Europe and the Balkans, was fed by a number of Baltic Germans who fled to Germany after the Bolshevik Revolution. This fateful delusion helped to nurture the Nazi doctrine of an eastern *Lebensraum* in Hitler's program of world dominion, and led to the Germans' terrible defeat in the East.¹⁷

There is no parallel in history to this powerful German mythology of the *Reichsidee*. It was mirrored not only in the amazing metamorphosis of empires since Charlemagne (the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, the Confederation of the Rhine, the German Confederation, the North German Confederation, the Second Reich, the Third Reich, alias The Greater German Empire). The warlike derivatives of imperial culture also tried during both world wars to bring about questionable and even perverse concepts such as Pan-Germanism, *Drang nach Osten*, the Berlin-Baghdad Axis, *Mittleuropa*, *Grossraumwirtschaft*, even Himmler's racially inspired, mystical "Holy Germanic Reich of the Germanic Nation," and others. All of them left deep marks on the Czech nation and state. All these latter structures had military forms and were designed to be used against "the barbarians from the East." There was no place for the Russians in these structures other than as subjugated slaves. This negative message, unfortunately, was still present in the revivalist article on the nostalgic topic of bygone *Mittleuropa* by the Czech writer, Milan Kundera, which aroused considerable controversy.¹⁸ Mikhail Gorbachev's recent flirting action with the theme of Russia as part of the "common European home" has not removed the basic fear from the minds of many Europeans about how big a portion of Russia would fit under the roof of that home: as far as the Volga or beyond to the Urals or as far as Vladivostok?

Some authors argue that the strongest unifying bond of the Czech state was from the

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 23-24.

¹⁷ For a discussion on the influence of the German geopolitical and racial views, see Milan Hauner, *What is Asia to Us?* (London and Boston: Hyman & Unwin, 1990).

¹⁸ Milan Kundera, "The Tragedy of Central Europe," *The New York Review of Books*, 26 April 1984.

beginning the language,¹⁹ but within the Bohemian quadrangle many languages and dialects were certainly been spoken before the Czech tongue developed into a written language, which did not occur until the early fourteenth century. The glittering, thirteenth century courts of the Přemyslid kings naturally absorbed the more sophisticated German culture within a largely illiterate society where the command of Latin remained confined to a very small percentage of trained ecclesiastics. It is quite conceivable, however, that among this cosmopolitan Latin-trained clergy, who may well have despised the barbarous local vernaculars there were individuals who would use their native Czech background to advance their interests against rival colleagues with no roots in the region, who had entered the country recently as the king's favorites and did not speak the vernacular. Thus, social conflicts and competition for influential positions may have generated the rise of an embryonic ethnocentric consciousness. This seems to be the case with the first Bohemian chronicler, Kosmas, who recorded with approval that Prince Spytihněv II (d. 1061) had allegedly ordered the expulsion of all Germans, whether rich or poor or merely visiting, from Bohemia within three days. Among those expelled was his own German mother, Princess Judith.²⁰

In the course of German colonization beginning in the twelfth century, language became the principal yardstick by which the two ethnic groups could be distinguished. Soon the Czechs would insist that all secular and ecclesiastical dignitaries understand the Czech language.²¹ Strong anti-German overtones can be found in the first chronicle in the Czech language, written in the early fourteenth century by a certain Dalimil.²² The German version of the chronicle had the anti-German passages removed and stressed instead the difference between alien and resident Germans in Bohemia.²³ The golden era of the Czech Kingdom under Emperor Charles IV transformed Prague into a cosmopolitan metropolis of the Empire. In the crownlands of the expanded *Corona Bohemiae*, consisting of Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, Upper and Lower Lusatia, Mark Brandenburg, and smaller fiefs in the Upper Pfalz, German vernaculars predominated. The creation of the archbishopric (1344) and, especially, the foundation of the first university in eastern Europe in Prague (1348) by Charles IV brought more foreigners, most of them German-speaking, to Bohemia. *Universitatis Carolina* attracted, by the end of the century, about 2,000 students, a very large number in those days half of them German-speaking. Here, too, on the seemingly neutral and Latinized ground, ethnic frictions soon surfaced and mingled with

¹⁹ F. Šmahel, *Idea národa v husitských Čechách* (České Budějovice, 1971), pp. 184-85, and "The Idea of the 'Nation' in Hussite Bohemia," *Historica*, vol. XVI (Prague: Academia, 1969), pp. 143-247, and vol. XVII, pp. 93-197.

²⁰ *Kosmova kronika česká* (Kosmas's Czech chronicle), vol. II (Prague, 1947), p. 14.

²¹ Graus, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

²² *Dalimilova kronika česká* (Dalimil's Czech Chronicle), vol. II (Prague, 1947), p. 14.

²³ Ferdinand Seibt, *Deutschland und die Tschechen* (Germany and the Czechs) (Munich: List, 1974), p. 78.

confessional adversities which foreshadowed the approaching Hussite revolution. In 1409 the king approved the radical change in the University's statutes in favor of the Bohemian nation (*natio*), composed of Czechs, Bohemian Germans, and Hungarians, as opposed to the three other constituent "nations," Bavarians, Saxons, and Poles. German teachers and their students condemned the Prague alma mater as a seat of heresy and left to establish the University of Leipzig.²⁴

During the Hussite era, according to František Šmahel, the Czech "nation," or those who spoke on its behalf, already possessed three distinguishing features: language (*lingua*), origin (*sanguis*), and faith (*fides*).²⁵ The subsequent wars helped to mobilize nascent Czech nationalism in defense of the fatherland against foreign intervention and helped to bring together quarrelling Hussite factions.²⁶ Other medievalists maintain that faith rather than the notion of fatherland and nation (linguistically defined?) proved more important in the religious conflict.²⁷ In addition, many Germans became prominent in the Hussite movement, including its leader, Prokop the Great.²⁸ Thus, already during the fourteenth and especially the fifteenth centuries the Czechs created a very lively national consciousness: still, it would definitely be premature to call it a precursor of the modern nationalism of the nineteenth century.²⁹

Although there is no detailed comprehensive study of Czech national stereotypes such as Golczewski's book on Polish interwar imagery of Germany,³⁰ contemporary Czech authors including Jiří Rak have recently turned their attention to this subject.³¹ Even from Rak's sketchy study it appears that the argument for antagonism is formulated by Palacký had numerous precursors and embraced the familiar clichés: Czechs are peaceful and industrious, Germans aggressive and cruel. Whole chapters of national history were twisted by Czech authors to serve the everyday demands of political propaganda by denigrating the Germans. German authors retaliated by exaggerating German cultural imports to Bohemia.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 74, 104.

²⁵ Šmahel, *Idea národa*, pp. 20-21.

²⁶ Josef Macek, "Národnostní otázka v husitském revolučním hnutí," *Československý časopis historický*, vol. 3 (1955), p. 17.

²⁷ Šmahel, op. cit., pp. 101, 105.

²⁸ Seibt, op. cit., pp. 102-103.

²⁹ Graus, op. cit., p. 48.

³⁰ Frank Golczewski, *Das Deutschlandbild der Polen 1918-39* (The German image of the Poles 1918-39) (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1974).

³¹ J. Rak, "Stereotyp Němce v českém historickém vědomí (The stereotype of the Germans in historical Czech)," *Dějiny a současnost*, vol. 3 (1990), pp. 34-37.

Czech national stereotypes based on black-and-white contrasts were temporarily fortified by the acceptance of forged manuscripts in the early nineteenth century. These false manuscripts masqueraded as the earliest Czech texts from the tenth century, and very few Czechs had the courage to investigate them impartially: even Palacký accepted them as genuine. His own interpretation of the Czech question as the perennial "conflict as well as emulation" between the two ethnic groups, where the Czech element represented freedom and democracy and the German one Catholicism and feudalism, unfortunately served as a template for the perpetuation of these stereotypes. It was the revolutionary year 1848 which exacerbated the ethnic relationship to such an extent that the Czech press began to label Czech Germans as "hereditary enemies."

THE CRITICAL HUNDRED YEARS OF THE CZECH QUESTION: 1848-1948

The events of 1848 fatefully divided the Bohemian intelligentsia, which until then had had a strong, and well-developed sense of regional patriotism and loyalty toward their historic kingdom. Bohemia's German intelligentsia quickly identified itself with the national objectives pursued by revolutionary movements in Austria and the neighboring German states.³² With the fall of absolutism in Austria epitomized by the flight of Chancellor Metternich, the political leaders among the Czech middle classes fought for two major political objectives: the guarantee of basic civil rights--an aim they shared with their liberal German counterparts--and equal status for the Czech and German languages. They were not yet ready to demand an independent state. Neither was the historian František Palacký, their acknowledged political leader. He developed the doctrine of Austro-Slavism, which stipulated that the Czech lands remain part of the Austrian multinational monarchy, to be transformed into a federation of equal nations: German, Czech, Polish, Hungarian, Slav, Italian, etc., self-governed, with their own institutions, schools, and national languages. For those historical provinces in the monarchy which were ethnically homogeneous, Palacký's concept seemed sound. But this, of course, was not the case in the Bohemian Kingdom. The Czech lands were a classic example of commingling of the Czech- and German-speaking populations, where it was impossible to draw clear-cut ethnic borders.

National self-determination thus emerged as the major political weapon of the underprivileged ethnic minorities in eastern Europe and quickly displaced the ancient territorial loyalties of the supranational dynastic states which had ignored linguistic differences. As Hans Kohn rightly observed, the Czechs could perhaps be a part of a dynastic German Confederation but not of a German nation-state; similarly, the Slovaks could accept neutral Latin as the official language of the Hungarian Kingdom, but not

³² The split between Bohemian Czechs and Germans can be documented with great accuracy. Palacký recalls the last series of joint meetings of Czech and German writers of Bohemia which took place in Prague on 18-21 March 1848. Thereafter the Bohemian Germans decided to follow what Palacký calls "*inniger Anschluss an Deutschland*." Palacký himself responded three weeks later by writing his famous letter to Frankfurt. See F. Palacký, *Poslední slova* (Last words), J. Borovička, ed. (Prague: J. Otto), pp. 45-47. For the German versions, see *Palackýs politisches Vermächtniss* (1872) and *Schlusswort-Gedenkblätter* (1874).

Magyar without claiming the same status for Slovak.³³

Moreover, the relationship between the Czechs and Germans in Bohemia deteriorated because of the revolutions in Vienna and inside the German states themselves. At the end of March 1848, representatives of the German states met in Frankfurt to set a date for elections to the Constituent National Assembly of the future united Germany. This united Germany they understood as existing within the bounds of the German Confederation (*Deutscher Bund*),³⁴ to include the Czech lands, Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia. The 50-member *Vorparlament* (preliminary parliament) was supposed to take care of the election procedures until the convocation of an all-German National Assembly. Because only two Austrian representatives were present in Frankfurt at the time, the *Vorparlament* decided to invite six more, including two from Bohemia. The German Bohemians were to be represented by the publicist Franz Schuselka, the Czechs by František Palacký. The latter, however, turned down the invitation, outlining his reasons in his famous letter to Frankfurt.

Because Palacký's letter became such an important eastern European political document for Czech relations with Germany, Austria, and Russia, its contents should be elucidated. In the first part of his letter, Palacký made an eloquent argument on behalf of Czech nationalism, deliberately twisting the historical evidence of the continual political, dynastic, and ecclesiastical association of the Bohemian Kingdom with the German Empire for the sake of the nascent Czech national cause. Because the major task of the German National Assembly, as Palacký understood it, was to unify the German nation-state, there was no place for him in such a scheme because he did not think of himself as German. Although the Czech nation was small, Palacký continued, it had never considered itself, and was never considered by others, as part of the German nation. The entire union between the Bohemian Crown and the German Empire, Palacký argued, was always a purely dynastic liaison, which the Czech Estates hardly wished to recognize. Here, for obvious reasons, the Czech historian preferred to argue from the standpoint of natural rights of all the Austrian subjects. What Palacký deliberately overlooked in his passionate plea was the fact that one-third of the kingdom's population, namely those using German as their mother tongue,

³³ Hans Kohn, *Pan-Slavism: Its History and Ideology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1953), p. 74.

³⁴ The German Confederation became but one of many metamorphoses of the German Imperial Idea (*Reichsidee*). When Napoleon dissolved the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation (911-1806), he created the Confederation of the Rhine which excluded all the French-occupied territories in the west, all the lands of Austria, and the bulk of Prussia. Its successor, the German Confederation, was more than twice as large and roughly followed the outline of the defunct German Empire. It had 39 members, including the kings of Britain (for Hanover), Denmark (for Holstein), and the Netherlands (for Luxemburg). Austria and Prussia belonged to the Confederation with only parts of their territories. After the defeat of Austria by Prussia, the German Confederation was dissolved in 1866 by the Treaty of Prague. Prussia then headed the North German Confederation until 1871 when Prussian Chancellor Bismarck founded a new German ("second") Empire under the House of Hohenzollern as the new German emperors. After the defeat and loss of territory following the World War I, the new state retained the official title "German Empire," headed by an "Imperial President" (*Reichspräsident*), although its constitution was republican: hence the Weimar Republic.

might feel part of the German nation.

The second point in Palacký's letter addressed the principle of federation which he defended against the image of an absolute monarchy or a republic as personified by the French revolutionary experiment. If the negotiations in Frankfurt succeed in creating a united Germany, Palacký went on, this would inevitably result in the collapse of Austria as an independent empire. He was against it because the existence of Austria remained the best guarantee for the small nations of central and southeastern Europe. Furthermore, the Russian empire would continue to expand its influence precisely into these parts of Europe. Consequently, the many small nations living in that area, the Slavic, Romanian, Hungarian, Greek, Turkish, and Albanian nations, would not be able to withstand this pressure unless they joined a larger Danubian federation. Palacký was convinced that Austria, which "by nature and history is destined to be the bulwark and guardian of Europe against Asiatic elements of every kind," should continue to play this role of a protector against Russian expansionism. Here the Czech historian spoke as a liberal democrat who warned unequivocally against tsarism. He summed up all his eloquence to drive home this basic historic and geopolitical truism:

Certainly, if the Austrian state had not existed for some time, we would have to create it in the interest of Europe and humanity itself... When I look behind the Bohemian frontiers, then natural and historical reasons make me turn not to Frankfurt but to Vienna to seek there the center which is fitted and destined to ensure and defend the peace, the liberty, and the right of my nation. Your efforts, gentlemen, seem to me now to be directed...toward utterly destroying that center from whose might and strength I expect the salvation not only of the Czech land.³⁵

Finally, Palacký's third reason against Czech participation in Frankfurt was his fear that the success of German revolution must inevitably lead to the proclamation of a German republic. This form of government, Palacký was convinced, would create a multitude of "teeny" republics ("*Republikchen*," as he contemptuously referred to them), that would present a delightful target for a "universal Russian monarchy."

Palacký's decision to reject the Greater German solution also meant an unequivocal breach in the tradition of bilingual Bohemian patriotism and a departure from his own precepts of ethnically neutral "Bohemianism," which he clearly formulated in the first edition of his *Geschichte von Böhmen*. Here, Palacký described himself as a "Bohemian" who had conceived his *History of Bohemia* as a synthesis of three elements: the Slavic which had initially prevailed, the German which since the tenth century had steadily gained in importance, and the specific Bohemian element which was partly a mixture of the other

³⁵ Kohn, op. cit., pp. 75-80.

two.³⁶

In 1848, Palacký, and with him the entire Czech nationalistic intelligentsia, abandoned this position as obsolete and embraced instead the principle of ethnic exclusiveness defined by the use of language, which was formulated by the prominent Czech linguist Josef Jungmann. Thus the Czech intelligentsia moved from one extreme to another. By the end of the eighteenth century, the inevitable success of progressive Germanization of the Czech population had been taken for granted by the leading literary figures of the day, such as Josef Dobrovský and František Martin Pelzel.³⁷ But 50 years later, thanks to the spectacular revival of Czech culture, intellectuals such as Jungmann no longer despaired. Ironically, Jungmann himself was inspired largely by the inflamed German romanticism. Already in 1806, he defined nation as consisting primarily of language: "It is language which divides peoples and countries.... From the moment the Czechs arrived in Bohemia they found themselves in a continual struggle with the alien element."³⁸ This trend, based on the mythical idolization of the native language and culture as contained in the works of the German cultural philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder encouraged the introduction of dangerous stereotypes and created a rift between the two communities in Bohemia. As Milan Otáhal argued in his excellent study, the implications of Palacký's letter to Frankfurt were ominous from the perspective of future coexistence between the two communities: "Palacký's letter was the immediate cause of a thorough schism between both nations, so that in place of cooperation, a life and death struggle began, which was typical not only for the year 1848, but in fact for the whole historical period until the end of World War II, when the 'German Problem' in the Czech lands was 'solved' by their expulsion."³⁹

In large measure to preserve the newly acquired Czech national identity against an all-German unification effort, the Czech leaders along with other Slav leaders in the monarchy supported Pan-Slavism (except for the Poles who saw in the defeat of tsarist Russia the chance for of their political freedom). They entered, willy-nilly, into a political alliance with the forces determined to preserve the Habsburg monarchy, the Viennese court, and its bureaucracy, allied temporarily with the tsar to crush the Hungarian revolution.

In the eyes of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, this was both outrageous and stupid. They savagely attacked the first Pan-Slav Congress when it met in Prague in the spring of

³⁶ See Franz Palacký, Geschichte von Böhmen (Prague, 1836), vol. 1, pp. vi and ix.

³⁷ F. M. Pelzel, "Geschichte der Deutschen und ihrer Sprache in Böhmen von 1341-1789," Abhandlung der böhmischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften, vol. 4 (Vienna and Prague, 1788), pp. 344-79; Neue Abhandlung der königlichen böhmischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften, vol. 1 (Vienna and Prague, 1790), pp. 281-310.

³⁸ Josef Jungmann, Boj o obrození národa (Prague, 1948), p. 38.

³⁹ M. Otáhal, "Czech Liberals in the Year 1848," Independent Historiography of Czechoslovakia, vol. I (Berlin, 1985), p. 55. See also an earlier essay by Robert Kalivoda, "Češi a Němci v českých dějinách" (Czechs and Germans in Czech history), Plamen, no. 4 (Prague, 1967), p. 4.

1848, showing their contempt for the Slavs and went so far as to threaten genocide to all these "reactionary peoples" who must be exterminated in the future world war for the sake of progress.⁴⁰ Marx ridiculed Palacký to the extreme:

The chief champion of the Czech nationality, Professor Palacký, is himself nothing but a learned German run mad, who even now cannot speak the Czech language correctly and without foreign accent. But as it often happens, a dying Czech nationality, dying according to every fact known in history for the last four hundred years, made in 1848 a last effort to regain its former vitality—an effort whose failure, independently of all revolutionary considerations, was to prove that Bohemia could only exist, henceforth, as a portion of Germany, although part of her inhabitants might yet, for some centuries, continue to speak a non-German language.⁴¹

In the course of the 1848 revolution, the Czech political program found itself at a crossroads between remaining loyal to Austrian neo-absolutism or becoming the passive victim of Pan-Germanism. Czech leaders opted for the preservation of Austria, hoping that it would be transformed into a federation of equal and autonomous nations enjoying fundamental civil liberties. If the Czechs were criticized then and later for joining the camp of counter-revolution and helping to preserve Austria, this was a misunderstanding and was not the primary reason. Although it was true that the Czech political program of 1848 supported the preservation of the Austrian monarchy, it wanted a federation of equal nations founded on a liberal and just constitution vis-à-vis its many nationalities.

Ten years of neo-absolutism followed the defeat of the revolution in Austria. Centralism continued to be the prevailing doctrine of the Habsburg monarchy until the mid 1860s when war between Austria and Prussia for the leadership of the German Confederation and the German national movement broke out. The federalist option was abandoned for the sake of dualism, a practical political arrangement between the two leading nationalities of the empire, the Germans and the Hungarians, to the exclusion of all others. The Czechs, seeing the inevitability of the *Ausgleich* approaching, declared "passive opposition" to Vienna, a stance they would hold for sixteen years.

In anticipation of this development, Palacký published his most succinct political pamphlet in 1865, entitled The Idea of the Austrian State, in which he brilliantly sketched out the transformation of Austria into a federation of equal nations, a unique "Austrian Commonwealth of Nations."⁴² Palacký argued that the original *raison d'être* for the creation of a multi-national Habsburg state in east and south-central Europe was the

⁴⁰ Kohn, op. cit., p. 100.

⁴¹ Karl Marx, Revolution and Counter-revolution (London, 1952), pp. 62-63.

⁴² Characterized by Willy Lorenz, Monolog über Böhmen (Vienna: Herold, 1964), p. 57.

defense of European Christianity against the assault of the Ottoman Turks. The Habsburgs, however, soon added another reason which the Protestant historian Palacký regarded as reactionary: the preservation of Catholicism against the forces of the Reformation. Could Austria find a new idea to justify its continued existence? Palacký thought that it could by recognizing the principle of ethnic equality and democratic rights for all Austrian subjects regardless of nationality. In this instance, Palacký de-emphasized the traditional argument favoring the historic rights of the Bohemian Kingdom. Regarding the future, however, Palacký was no longer as optimistic as he had been in 1848. Over the logic of his argument lurked the specter of dualism, which he feared would mean the subjugation of Slavs. But, as Palacký exclaimed prophetically on behalf of the Czech nation: "We were here before Austria existed, we shall be here still, after she has gone."⁴³

Meanwhile Czech society had begun a rapid transformation. The 1867 Constitution not only introduced Austro-Hungarian dualism, but ended centralism and neo-absolutism. Most important, it was during the succeeding years that the modern Czech nation emerged with the necessary institutions of politics, economics, social life, self-governing communes and districts, and, above all, with a wide spread network of educational institutions at all levels. "What a remarkable transformation our nation underwent between 1848 and 1916!" commented the Czech historian Josef Pekař with obvious admiration during his funeral oration for the deceased Emperor Francis Joseph.⁴⁴ Less than two years later this legacy would be shattered by the breakup of the Habsburg monarchy and the victory of Pekař's political and intellectual opponent, Thomas Garrigue Masaryk (1850-1937), the first and life-long president of the new state, Czechoslovakia.

The negative implications of this remarkable Czech revival professing linguistic nationalism must not be overlooked. It meant further democratization between the Czech and German communities in Bohemia. All common institutions were divided into Czech and German counterparts. When even the social democratic trade unions split in half, there seemed no hope of reconciling the two linguistic groups.

Chronic, ethnic confrontation between the Bohemian Germans and Czechs seemed unresolvable. A young bilingual Czech journalist, Hugo Gordon Schauer, tried to challenge this deadly trend in a bold article, "Our Two Questions," in December 1886. Playing the devil's advocate, Schauer asked the existentialist question of whether a small nation like the Czechs should devote all their energy to the preservation of their language, instead of merging with the more advanced and stronger German culture. Was the cultural

⁴³ František Palacký's Idea státu rakouského consisted first of a series of eight articles published in the daily Národ during April and May 1865. A German translation appeared the following year as Oesterreichs Staatsidee. See also the excellent analysis by Jan Křen in Vilem Prečan, ed., "Palackýs Mitteleuropavorstellungen, 1848-1849" (Palackýs Ideas about Central Europe, 1848-49), Acta Creationis: Independent Historiography in Czechoslovakia, 1969-1980, (Hannover, 1980), pp. 119-146.

⁴⁴ According to Lorenz, op. cit., pp. 63-70.

contribution of the Czech nation to world civilization so important? His answer was that only if the Czech nation moved in harmony with the "ideal world order," was it worth the effort.⁴⁵ The response from the main camp of the Czech nationalists was, as one could anticipate, furious. The co-editor of the journal that published "Our Two Questions" was one T.G. Masaryk, then professor of philosophy at the Czech University in Prague, who had a German background but became a Czech patriot during his university studies in Vienna. He was about to come forward with some alternative interpretations of the Czech question. While it is true that Palacký's 1848 letter to Frankfurt and The Idea of the Austrian State (1865) remained key documents for Czech politicians until World War I, it is equally true that Czech politics remained paralyzed on the national issue, even after 1879, when the Czech deputies decided to return to the Viennese Parliament after sixteen years of passive opposition.

Meanwhile the Bohemian Germans were losing their faith in the future of their separate identity as Austrian Germans and began to drift toward the Pan-German solution, which seemed to them to be the quickest way of bringing the Czechs back under German control. Professor Masaryk, who entered Czech politics in the 1880s, had not yet developed a comprehensive concept to redefine the Czech-German relationship. Philosopher-moralist Masaryk defined the Czech question primarily on moral grounds as a religious question, as a matter of ethics rather than ethnicity.⁴⁶ "Czechness" for Masaryk was a constant challenge calling for self-improvement. It was a basic challenge to ethnic universality and cosmic humanity against which all the territorial and language disputes between Czechs and Germans seemed irrelevant and trivial. He passionately believed that the Czech national genius was determined by the Hussite Reformation when it struck Bohemia in the fifteenth century.⁴⁷ Palacký's interpretation of the Czech question as a continuous struggle against Germandom was refuted by Masaryk,⁴⁸ who emphasized, instead, the humanitarian contents behind the national idea. "The nation is not detached from humanity, it is part of

⁴⁵ H.G. Schauer, "Naše dvě otázky", Čas, 20 December 1886; see also Jaroslav Opat, Filozof a politik T.G. Masaryk, 1882-1893 (Prague: Melantrich, 1990), pp. 162-72. One hundred years later, Václav Havel commented on Schauer's dilemma: "Personally, I don't bother myself with such questions. To me, my Czechness is a given fact.... If I lived during the national revival in the nineteenth century, my Czechness might still have been a matter of personal choice, and I might have tormented myself with the question of whether it was worth the effort. The problem whether we should develop the nation or simply give up on it is not something that I have to solve. These matters have already been decided by others." See V. Havel, Disturbing the Peace: A Conversation with Karel Hvězda (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1990), pp. 178-79.

⁴⁶ T.G. Masaryk, Česká otázka (Prague, 1895); see also T.G. Masaryk, Palackého idea národa českého (Prague: Čin, 1926).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*; see also Otto Urban, "Masarykovo pojetí české otázky," Československý časopis historický, vol. 4 (1969), pp. 527-52.

⁴⁸ Masaryk, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

humanity to which we all belong," Masaryk wrote.⁴⁹ Political independence should not be the ultimate aim, but merely the means to achieve higher ambitions in the sphere of moral improvement. He argued that the Czech political program must be founded on a strong cultural component which would bring the Czech nation, despite its small size, into the modern world's technical, scientific, and intellectual mainstream.

It was only after he went into exile in late 1914 to work against Habsburg Austria for the independence of Bohemia that Masaryk was forced by circumstances to modify his broad humanitarian interpretation of the Czech question and return to the notion of a narrow Czech-German rivalry revolving around territorial nationalism in which, ironically for someone who was himself of German background, the language difference was the major feature. That he would adopt the prevailing ethnic stereotypes, classifying the Bohemian Germans as guilty of Pan-Germanism, was only a question of time. It was during World War I that the original dilemma of the Czech question resurfaced. The Bohemian Germans, because they happened to belong to the wrong ethnic group, were forbidden by the victorious Allies to apply the right for self-determination when the war was over. When they nonetheless tried to proclaim separate states and, like the Austrian Germans, be annexed by Germany, Czech troops were sent in.

Caught up by the Bolshevik coup and the ensuing civil war in Russia, Masaryk was too busy to extract the Czech Legion from the battlefield, which therefore had fought alongside the Russian army against Germany and Austria-Hungary. While organizing the eastward trek across Siberia to Vladivostok he wrote down his thoughts in a propaganda pamphlet called *New Europe*.⁵⁰ He envisaged a new kind of *Zwischeneuropa* (as different from Friedrich Naumann's *Mitteleuropa*), with small nations serving as a buffer zone between the former German and Russian empires (later known, under French auspices, as the *cordon sanitaire*).⁵¹

It was the small and particular that won the war against the expansionist and universal (i. e., Pan-Germanism); it was the principle of democracy that defeated the "theocracy" embodied in the German, Austro-Hungarian, and Turkish empires, Masaryk maintained. The Czech leader proposed the very reorganization of east-central Europe that Palacký contemptuously referred to as "dwarf republics" (*Republikchen*). Masaryk's apotheosis for the nation-state was, of course, meant for the fortunate ones that happened to win the war—not the defeated ones such as Germany, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey.

⁴⁹ T.G. Masaryk, "Humanita a národnost" (Humanity and nationality), *Naše doba*, no. 3 (1897).

⁵⁰ T.G. Masaryk, *Nová Evropa: Stanovisko slovanské* (The New Europe: The Slavic Position) (Prague: G. Dubský, 1920). See also George J. Kovtun, "Masaryk's *New Europe*: the History and the Purpose of the Book," *Czechoslovak and Central European Journal*, vol. 8 (Summer/Winter 1989), nos. 1 and 2, pp. 81-89.

⁵¹ The great British geographer Sir Halford Mackinder, in order to improve stability of East Europe, also proposed the creation of a "tier of independent States between Germany and Russia." See Mackinder's, *Democratic Ideals and Reality* (London: Constable, 1919), p. 205.

The Germans especially were to be treated according to "*Vae Victis!*" and forced to accept the new Carthaginian peace conditions. Because it was the dreaded *Drang nach Osten*, inspired by Pan-Germanism, which was the incarnation of all evils, there was no way the Germans could be readmitted to the world community, without heavy penalty, for at least a generation to come. This Manichean world appeared to be controlled by the Entente powers and their allies, who according to Keynes acted like "angels of light" against the vanquished who were treated as "children of the devil."⁵²

Was national independence for the small nations in central Europe, on the ruins of Pan-German supremacy, the ultimate goal of Masaryk's thinking? In *The New Europe*, Masaryk wishfully suggested the creation of a genuine federation of "free and liberated nations [who] will organize themselves, as they find necessary, into greater units, and thus the whole continent will be organized."⁵³ But how feasible was an east-central European confederation without Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, and so on?

Consider now the precarious position of the Germans living in the new Republic of Czechoslovakia. As former Austrian subjects, they shared the humiliation of the Versailles and St. Germain peace treaties with their fellow Germans across the border. Czechoslovakia granted them equal rights as citizens and drafted them into the military to shed blood for a country which many of them regarded as artificial. Moreover, Masaryk, as the founding father of the Czechoslovak Republic, regarded the Habsburgs and Pan-Germanism as the greatest enemies of the new state. "Czechoslovak" was declared the state language. Although the 3 million Germans were the second largest ethnic group in the country (22.5 percent overall and in Bohemia and Moravia their combined share was 30 percent), they had to relinquish their rights of secundogeniture to the Slovaks. The Jewish minority in Czechoslovakia was numerically weak and spread across several social and ethnic groups, with the German-speaking segment culturally most prominent. Czechoslovakia's Hungarian minorities could not identify with the new state and strove, like the Slovaks, for greater autonomy or followed, like the Germans, the clarion call of irredentism from across the border.

The Czechs now replaced the Germans as the ruling nation. The Czechs numbered just over 6.5 million, just about 50 percent of the entire population, and the Slovaks (15.6 percent), who had never belonged to the Bohemian state, joined the critical Czech majority as Czechoslovaks. Most of the Slovaks, however, despite a thousand years of common existence with the Hungarian state, wanted to revive their national identity, but the larger Czech numbers expected them to merge overnight into this new "Czechoslovak" nation-state.

⁵² This description is according to John Maynard Keynes, who resigned his position as economic advisor to the British government and left the Paris Peace Conference in disgust in June 1919. See his *Economic Consequences of the Peace* [1919], Reprint (New York: Penguin, 1988), p. 267.

⁵³ T.G. Masaryk, *The New Europe: the Slav Standpoint* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1972), p. 77.

Solving the German problem should have been the new republic's first priority. In his first public address after his return from exile, on 21 December 1918, Masaryk the President-Liberator, described the Bohemian Germans as second-rate citizens, who originally came to the country as "immigrants and colonists," and were now expected to accept the rule of the Czechs.⁵⁴ This harsh treatment sounded astonishing from someone who was partly of German origin himself.⁵⁵ Although Masaryk tried to make up for the negative impact of his comments by delivering a speech in German the following day at the premiere of Beethoven's "Fidelio" in Prague's German Theater, reassuring his German fellow citizens that they would enjoy equal rights to the Czechs', the damage had already been done.⁵⁶ In his 1920 New Year's address, Masaryk called Czech-German relations the single most important issue for Czechoslovakia.⁵⁷ He tried hard to convince leading Germans to enter the government, but did not succeed until 1926.⁵⁸ After the German Christian and Agrarian Parties joined the Prague government, the German Social Democrats entered the coalition in 1929. Thus, shortly before the world depression hit central Europe and propelled Hitler's party to the fore, most of the Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia abandoned their earlier hostile attitude toward the new state; only about one-quarter of the German voters continued to support the German National Party (DNP) and the German National Socialist Workers' Party (DNSAP).⁵⁹ When the sister Nazi party under Hitler (NSDAP) came to power in Germany in 1933, the Prague government decided to ban the two extremist German parties. This did not prevent Konrad Henlein from forming a new

⁵⁴ Josef Dubský, "Masaryk a Němci," in T.G. Masaryk a naše současnost, vol. 2 (Prague: samizdat, 1980), pp. 217-18.

⁵⁵ See Lorenz, op. cit., pp. 112-20. After presenting the scrupulously verified evidence of T.G. Masaryk's German origins, Willy Lorenz argues convincingly: "Even if Thomas Garrigue Masaryk had been of one hundred percent German origin, he had the right to declare himself as Czech.... The fact, however, that Masaryk chose to conceal his origins in order to be seriously accepted by his people, unravels not merely his own personal tragedy, but throws light on the great tragedy of Bohemia in the 19th and 20th centuries.... In spite of his personal courage, which Masaryk frequently proved, he did not dare declare: 'Yes, I am Czech, but I have a German mother, and I concede that I belong to both nations of our country...and I consider my dual nationality as a personal gift, as well as a fortune for the country inhabited by two nations.'" (Ibid., pp. 118-19).

⁵⁶ Dubský, op. cit. In his World Revolution, Masaryk tried to mitigate his "colonist" speech, by explaining that he did not mean to imply that the Germans were second-rate citizens in the new state. But they must be first "de-Austriacized," he lectured his readers. Masaryk seemed to have confined the equal rights for minorities to matters of schooling. See Světová revoluce (World revolution) (Prague: Orbis, 1925), p. 527.

⁵⁷ Dubsky, "Masaryk a Němci," p. 220.

⁵⁸ J.W. Brügel, Tschechen und Deutsche: 1918-1938, vol. 1 (Munich: Nymphenburger Verlag, 1967), pp. 160-61.

⁵⁹ The DNSAP traced its origins to the German Workers' Party founded in 1904 in Trautenau, in northern Bohemia, and must be thus regarded as the oldest "Nazi" party. See Brügel, Tschechen und Deutsche: 1918-1938, pp. 64-65; Ronald M. Smelser, The Sudeten Problem 1933-1938 (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1975).

party, the *Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront*, which in 1935 changed its name to *Sudetendeutsche Partei*, and became the main vehicle for German irredentism in Czechoslovakia with the full moral and financial support of Nazi Germany. Consequently, attitudes on both sides of the German-Czech political schism hardened, resulting in a cultural "apartheid." Johann W. Brügel's verdict that during the twenty years of its existence the new state could hardly have created peaceful conditions between the two rival nationalities in such a charged atmosphere still retains its validity.⁶⁰

If the prominent ideologues of Czech nationalism interpreted the Czech-German relationship as a permanent struggle (Palacký and, since World War I, Masaryk also), was there no voice of reason which could divert the two nationalist ideologies from the inevitable collision? Such a man did appear. He was Emanuel Rádl (1873-1942), a philosopher-moralist like Masaryk, who wished to substitute the exclusive doctrines of linguistic and cultural nationalism for a contractual relationship based on liberal principles of mutual respect and equality. In 1928 Rádl published *The Struggle between Czechs and Germans*, in which he severely criticized his Czech countrymen for their intolerance that could provoke the quick disintegration of the new state.⁶¹ Rádl noted that the President-Liberator had refused in his *New Europe and World Revolution*, to grant the Germans self-determination and national autonomy at the same time that he wanted them to cooperate with the new state. For Masaryk the Germans would always be a minority, objects rather than subjects, in a state run by Czechs and Slovaks.⁶² Rádl singled out contemporary Czech nationalistic writer Josef Holeček, who epitomized for him the perpetuation of the most primitive stereotypes about the alleged German-Czech antagonism in which the Germans embodied absolute evil and the Czechs absolute good. "Is there no other way in this country," he asked in exasperation, "than the eradication of one people by another?"⁶³ Rádl singlehandedly defended his fellow German-speaking citizens of Czechoslovakia against injustice and discrimination. He believed that the new state should be founded on a contract between all citizens, not just the ones lucky enough to belong to one particular language culture.⁶⁴

Rádl's main target was the German "organic" theory of nationalism which held that modern German and Czech nationalism came from the same German ideological father, i. e., that the concepts of "Czechoslovak people" and "*das Deutsche Volk*" are ideological

⁶⁰ Brügel, *Tschechen und Deutsche: 1918-1938*, p. 546.

⁶¹ E. Rádl, *Válka Čechů s Němci (The Struggle Between Czechs and Germans)* (Prague: Čin, 1928), p. 13. For the German edition, see *Der Kampf zwischen den Tschechen und Deutschen* (Reichenberg, 1928).

⁶² Rádl, *Válka Čechů s Němci*, pp. 201-11.

⁶³ Rádl, *Válka Čechů*, pp. 13, 89.

⁶⁴ J.L. Hromádka, *Don Quijote české filosofie: Emanuel Rádl (The Don Quixote of Czech philosophy, Emanuel Rádl)* (New York, 1943), p. 88.

brothers who had the same German midwives, namely the promoters of German romantic mysticism, Herder (Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit), Fichte (Reden an die deutsche Nation), and Schlegel, who declared that language was the main criterion determining a nation's identity. Rádl further criticized the whole concept of "Czechoslovakism," which he called one of tribal and racial exclusiveness. Rádl urged that the romantic concept of linguistic nationalism be abolished and replaced by a "political nation" to include all citizens of Czechoslovakia regardless of their ethnic origins. Why, he asked, should there be only one state language, namely Czechoslovak, which was a linguistic nonsense? Why could there not be a Czechoslovak nation with three state languages, following the Swiss model? Rádl declared at the beginning of The Struggle between Czechs and Germans that he wrote this book to substitute the warlike philosophy of national struggle with a philosophy of peace between "those two old neighbors and frequent friends," and he warned in his conclusion that the solution of the German-Czech question would decide the future of not only the Czechoslovak Republic, but of all central and eastern Europe.⁶⁵

Alas, Rádl's premonitions proved right. Five years after the publication of his book, an Austrian political adventurer named Adolf Hitler assumed power in Germany. Within a few years, the Nazi movement irresistibly attracted the Germans outside the Reich, especially those in Austria and Czechoslovakia. If the Czechs wanted to keep the Germans inside their new state against their will, they would have to fight a war which Hitler keenly wanted, but the other world powers did not. The Munich *Diktat* of September 1938 was the first catastrophe. The Czechs were compelled to surrender the Sudeten German areas along the century-old historic border to Nazi Germany. Yet, almost half-a-million Germans continued to live in the rump of Czechoslovakia. Six months later Czechoslovakia was invaded by Hitler and became the "Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia," with limited autonomous rights as part of Hitler's Greater German Empire, which was to last a thousand years. The phantom of the *Reichsidee* in its worst metamorphosis became a reality. It was only a question of time before the Nazis would begin the deportation of the Czech population to Siberia. The wartime atmosphere exacerbated the antagonism between the Czechs and Germans to the point of pathological hatred, especially after the Nazis, in June 1942, destroyed the Czech village, Lidice, and executed all its male inhabitants. Although conditions in the Protectorate were as brutal as in occupied Poland, the Nazis carried out the physical elimination of the Czech intelligentsia while bribing the working class needed for the war effort. Had Hitler won the war, plans existed to deport half of the Czech population eastward to Siberia and to Germanize the rest.⁶⁶

In 1945 the Czechs retaliated with the expulsion of the entire German population from Czechoslovakia. This was urged by the Czech resistance and by the government-in-exile of President Beneš, with the support of all surviving political parties including the

⁶⁵ Rádl, Válka Čechů, pp. 13 and 213.

⁶⁶ See Helmut Heiber, "Der Generalplan Ost," Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte, vol. 6 (1958), p. 318.

Communists. Only the doomed German Social Democrats objected. With the approval of the Allied Powers, these plans were put into effect when the war ended. The consequences of the state doctrine based on linguistic nationalism were most terrible. The two protagonists, the Germans and the Czechs, concluded respectively that they must get rid of each other, shredding the fine texture of at least seven centuries of historical continuity in Bohemia. Almost three million Sudeten Germans were expelled in harsh conditions, and only about 200,000 were allowed to stay behind, mostly miners and experts needed to keep the economy going. Sudeten German statistical sources even make the controversial claim that about 225,000 Germans died during the forced transfer; approximately the same number of Czech victims (including Jews) also died during the entire Nazi occupation.⁶⁷ Recalling Palacký's dictum of Czech history as a continual struggle, this was its final act and consummation. What new meaning could Czech history have after this tragedy, if the main antagonist of the Czech nation ceased to exist. Although Masaryk was adored during his lifetime as the founder of the Czechoslovak Republic, its President-Liberator, and a true philosopher-king, today his model nation-state is regarded as a failure.⁶⁸

DISSIDENT THOUGHT ON THE GERMAN QUESTION SINCE 1968

It is only after this quick survey of the thousand-year-old Czech-German relationship that one may appreciate the radicalism of President Havel's two statements on the German question. Directed, perhaps unintentionally, against the entire paralyzing legacy of traditional Czech nationalism, they demolish many of the conventional ethnic and geopolitical stereotypes which have been entrenched in the Czech political tradition since its entrance into modern politics in 1848, the few exceptions--H.G. Schauer, the pre-1914 Masaryk, and Emanuel Rádl--notwithstanding.

It must, however, be borne in mind, that Havel's two theses on the German question were not the result of divine inspiration visited upon him as he assumed the Czechoslovak presidency. They were the result of twenty or more years of intensive discussions on a number of issues considered taboo. These passionate debates were conducted first in official journals and, when these were prohibited, debate continued in the samizdat press and the periodicals of the Czech exiles.

The major taboo subject, the brutal story of the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans, was debated in public for the first time during the Prague Spring of 1968 by three authors,

⁶⁷ See Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus der Tschechoslowakei (The expulsion of the German population from Czechoslovakia) (Bonn, 1957); J.W. Brügel, Tschechen und Deutsche, 1939-1946 (Czechs and Germans, 1939-46) (Munich, 1974).

⁶⁸ See F. Gregory Campbell, "Empty Pedestals?" Slavic Review, vol. 44, no. 1 (Spring 1985), and the rejoinders by Gale Stokes and Roman Szporluk, pp. 1-29. For the contemporary Czech criticism emphasizing Masaryk's failure to contribute to the solution of the German Question, see Rudolf Kučera, Kapitoly z dějin střední Evropy (Chapters from the history of Central Europe) (Munich: Tschechischer Nationalausschuss in Deutschland, 1989), p. 123.

historian Milan Hübl, writer Jan Procházka, and journalist Vladimír Blažek, in several issues of the literary periodical, Host do domu.⁶⁹ A West German historian, Gottfried Schramm, was invited to publish his thought-provoking article, "Czechs and Germans during the First Republic," for the much-read monthly review, Dějiny a Současnost.⁷⁰ This same review published several other disturbing articles on another forbidden subject, the Czech collaboration with the Nazis during World War II.⁷¹ Also for the first time, non-violent civil resistance was openly discussed, linking the exploits of wartime resistance against Nazi occupation with the cruel reality of the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.⁷² The quintessential essay, The Question of Guilt by the German philosopher Karl Jaspers finally published in Czech in 1969, was widely analyzed, especially its treatment of the collective guilt.⁷³ Václav Havel was very much part of these polemics and threw himself into debates with Milan Kundera, with whom he intensely disagreed on the subject of "Czech destiny".⁷⁴ Toward the end of 1969, with censorship reintroduced almost everywhere, the Communist Party started to purge Czechoslovakia's intellectual elite. Almost 150 historians were dismissed and at least three imprisoned, partly for their courage in breaking open taboo subjects.

The Czechoslovak human rights movement, Charter 77, and especially the moral and ethical reputation of its principal founder, Professor Jan Patočka (1907-77), brought the German question back into the public arena, but as a dispute peculiar to the Czechs, not yet including the Germans as co-debaters. First, a Czech writer, using the pseudonym Jan Přibram (Petr Práhoda) published "A Story with Not so Good an Ending,"⁷⁵ in the émigré quarterly Svědectví (Testimony), which was soon followed by the even more explosive "Theses on the Re-Settlement of the Czechoslovak Germans," signed with another pseudonym, Danubius, later revealed to be the Slovak historian Ján Mlynárik, an original

⁶⁹ Host do domu, no. 5 (Brno, 1968).

⁷⁰ Dějiny a současnost, o. 8 (Prague, 1968), pp. 4-17.

⁷¹ See, for example, in Dějiny a současnost (Prague): Jan Tesař, "Záchrana národa a kolaborace," no. 5 (Prague, 1968); "Emanuel Moravec aneb logika realismu," no. 1 (Prague, 1969); Tomáš Pasák, "Generál Eliáš a problémy kolaborace," no. 6 (Prague, 1968); Bohumil Černý, "Eduard Beneš a odsun Němců z ČSR," no. 3 (Prague, 1969); Jaroslav Hrbek, "Emanuel Moravec," no. 5 (Prague, 1969).

⁷² See, for instance, Milan Hauner, "Občanská rezistence" (Civic resistance), Dějiny a současnost, no. 5 (Prague, 1969); Magne Skodvin, "Norská rezistence v době okupace" (Norwegian resistance during the occupation), no. 8 (Prague, 1969).

⁷³ See, for example, Emanuel Mandler's review article on Jaspers in the literary review Tvář, no. 5 (1969), pp. 9-14.

⁷⁴ Václav Havel, "Český úděl," Dějiny a současnost, no. 2 (Prague, 1969), pp. 30-33. See also Václav Havel, Disturbing the Peace (1990), pp. 171-79.

⁷⁵ "Příběh s nedobrym koncem," Svědectví, no. 55 (Paris, 1978), pp. 371-76.

signatory of Charter 77. He charged his fellow Czechs with the accountability for this mass crime unworthy of the nation of Jan Hus and T.G. Masaryk, and condemned the application of collective guilt to all Sudeten Germans. He selected the late President Edvard Beneš, faithful disciple and successor of Masaryk, as the chief culprit who should bear the responsibility for the idea and execution of the forced transfer.⁷⁶

The "Theses" touched off a storm of bitter controversy among Czechs and Slovaks both at home and in exile, which went on for a number of years. The most balanced reply, "A Word on the Transfer," published in early 1981 in the exile journal of the Social Democrats, came from a group of Czechoslovak historians writing collectively under the name of "Bohemus."⁷⁷ This was the beginning of the Czech version of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (confronting the past), whose many stages had already swept through the intellectual life of West Germany. It is inconceivable that Václav Havel would have stayed out of the discussion, his years of imprisonment notwithstanding. He took an active part in the next phase of the German question with its pervasive *Mitteleuropa* discussion, without ever reaching a consensus on how this mythical homeland of true central Europeans should be defined, where it should be located, and which nations should live in it.⁷⁸

The third stage in discussing the German question came from the east-west dialogue within the European peace movement of the mid-1980s. As part of this dialogue, Havel completed The Anatomy of a Reticence in April 1985, in which he recognized and sanctioned German reunification and requested the withdrawal of foreign troops from Europe.⁷⁹ The dissident movement in Czechoslovakia, which had been fully absorbed along with fellow dissidents in Eastern Europe and West European pacifists in discussions of the moral correlation of peace and freedom, confronted the German question in its major publication, The Prague Appeal, in March 1985.⁸⁰ This document summed up the many arguments which went back and forth between the Czechoslovak dissidents and their

⁷⁶ Danubius, "Tézy o vysídlení československých Němců" (Theses about the expulsion of the Czech Germans), Svědectví, no. 57 (Paris, 1979), pp. 105-22.

⁷⁷ Bohemus, "Slovo k odsunu," Právo Lidu, nos. 1 and 3 (1980). See also Ernst Nittner, "Die Ausweisung der Sudetendeutschen vor vierzig Jahren als tschechisches Problem," Bohemia, no. 26 (Munich, 1985), pp. 9-21. Most of these texts, as well as correspondence, are now available in a separate volume, Češi-Němci-odsum, B. Černý, et al. (Prague: Academia, 1990).

⁷⁸ Jan Křen and Václav Kural, Konfliktní společenství—Češi a Němci 1780-1945, (Prague samizdat, 1986); Milan Kundera, "The Tragedy of Central Europe," New York Review of Books, 26 April 1984; Martin Schulze Wessel, "Die Mitte liegt Westwärts," Bohemia, vol. 29 (1988), pp. 325-44.

⁷⁹ Svědectví, no. 75 (Paris, 1985), pp. 569-91. See also The New York Review of Books, 21 November 1985. A full English translation appeared in Cross Currents, vol. 5 (Ann Arbor, 1986).

⁸⁰ See Listy, vol. XV, no. 2 (April 1985), pp. 3-4.

colleagues in both Eastern and Western Europe.⁸¹ It was in this work that the Czech and Slovak dissidents unambiguously declared support for a united Germany (a position regarded by many pragmatic Western politicians at that time as incredibly naive) as a *sine qua non* without which a united Europe could never materialize.

It was indeed the unification of Europe which the authors of the Prague Appeal hailed as their noblest ambition. But how could Europe be unified, questioned the Charter 77 authors, if the "state of non-war" had existed in Europe for the last 40 years as the direct result of "the situation created when the spheres of military operations, agreed upon at Yalta, degenerated into military blocs?" Thus, along with its proposals for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Europe, the dissolution of NATO and the Warsaw Pact as military organizations, the removal of all nuclear weapons "either sited or aimed at Europe," and the radical scaling down of armed forces in all European countries to a "level eliminating the risk of aggression from any quarter," the Prague Appeal also added the reunification of Germany. This was seen as the most daring demand, an idea which all these years had been treated as taboo inside Czechoslovakia:

If our aim is European unification, and no one should be denied the right to self-determination, then this applies equally to the Germans. Let us acknowledge openly the right of the Germans freely to decide on if or how they wish to unite their two states within their present frontiers.

This is actually what happened four years later in the summer of 1989, when thousands of East German tourists decided to walk across various border points into West Germany, and what culminated in the breach of the Berlin Wall on November 9 of the same year. The Prague Appeal did not yet contain an explicit apology for the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans from Czechoslovakia after 1945, but it prompted by a fateful reaction from all corners of the world. East and West German pacifist groups joined in. In one letter, an East German peace group addressed the German question discussed in The Prague Appeal, but avoided the term reunification. The German question could only be solved, they argued cautiously, through a peace treaty negotiated with both German states.⁸²

Jiří Dienstbier's 1984 essay, Pax Europeana, was another key document leading to The Prague Appeal. Like Havel, the present Czechoslovak Foreign Minister also believed that it was the pursuit of democracy that mattered rather than the size of the future united Germany. Dienstbier summed up his views of the future on Europe in five points relevant to understanding the present Czechoslovak foreign policy and the reshaping of the Czech-

⁸¹ Listy, pp. 3-4. For an interpretative survey, see Milan Hauner, "Anti-militarism and the Independent Peace Movement in Czechoslovakia," In Search of Civil Society: Independent Peace Movements in the Soviet Bloc, Vladimir Tismaneanu, ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 88-117.

⁸² East European Reporter, vol. 1, no. 3 (1985), pp. 36-38.

German relationship:

- 1) the inviolability of present borders; categorical rejection of revisionism; respect for minorities' rights;
- 2) a ban on armaments;
- 3) withdrawal of foreign troops from foreign territories; dissolution of NATO and Warsaw Pact as military alliances;
- 4) recognition of the right of the Germans to unite within the existing borders; and
- 5) adherence to the principle of non-interference.⁸³

WHAT THE AVERAGE CZECH THINKS OF GERMANS

A clandestine inquiry conducted by human rights activists in Czechoslovakia in 1985 included a section on the German question. About 70 percent of the respondents refused to acknowledge the official propaganda's stereotypes that classified the inhabitants of the Federal Republic of Germany as "bad Germans" and those of the German Democratic Republic as "good Germans"; 66 percent rejected the official communist view that the Federal Republic was an aggressive power prepared to attack Czechoslovakia; only a mere two to five percent supported the official Communist Party line on the German question. On the sensitive issue of the postwar expulsion of the Sudeten Germans, some 42 percent disagreed with the brutal methods used. The generation gap on this highly emotional issue, however, remained conspicuous: 21.7 percent of the older generation still approved of the expulsion, whereas only 13.6 percent of the middle and 12 percent of the younger generations agreed. Given the unusually high proportion of university graduates and city dwellers in this clandestine sample, one must assume that many respondents were familiar, via samizdat and foreign broadcasts, with the unofficial debates on the taboos of Czechoslovakia's history.⁸⁴

More recently, in the spring of 1990, after the Velvet Revolution brought Havel to power, a nation-wide poll of 1,000 was conducted. It provided a more representative sample of Czechoslovak public opinion: 65 percent of the Czechs and Slovaks were in favor of German unification; only 15 percent perceived unified Germany as a threat. As to the disquieting question of national guilt for the brutalities committed by the Czechs during the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans, a public opinion poll is not available. In an earlier poll

⁸³ Jiří Dienstbier, "Pax Europeana", *Listy*, vol. XIV, no. 6 (December 1984), pp. 15-20. Expanded into *Snění o Evropě* (Dreaming about Europe) (Prague: samizdat typescript, 1986).

⁸⁴ See *Svědectví*, no. 78 (Paris: Témoignage, 1986), pp. 258-334; here pp. 300-303. It took almost a full year to carry out this highly unusual independent public opinion survey consisting of 85 questions among 342 Czechoslovak citizens, selected mostly from among the most urbanized and best educated individuals. Forty-three percent had a university education whereas the national average is 6 percent. The questionnaires were sent in difficult circumstances to France where they were evaluated with the aid of computers by CRIT (Centre de Recherches Interdisciplinaires des Transformations Sociales), under Dr. Zdeněk Strmiska, who until the Soviet invasion of 1968 had been the director of the Institute of Sociology in Prague.

in 1990, however, some 2000 fairly representative citizens were asked what they considered to be the most unpopular decisions made by President Havel. The results showed a majority agreeing on two presumably unpopular decisions: Havel's amnesty for criminals and his public apology for the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans.⁸⁵ Thus, according to available data gathered in April 1990 and slightly adjusted to consider the approaching elections, it is fair to estimate that more than half of the Czechoslovak population welcomed German reunification. Reservations were recorded among the generation over 57 (32 percent against), as compared with the youngest group (26 percent against). University graduates on the whole supported reunification (60 percent). There is a significant difference between the Czech and Slovak polls. In the Slovak Republic, reunification is less popular. Women in general showed more reservations (47 percent) than men (57 percent). To the question "Who are our best friends?" 39 percent named Austria, followed by 25 percent for the United States; Germany ranked third with 5.2 percent.⁸⁶

The question of returning property to Sudeten Germans became a hot issue during the autumn and winter of 1990 in connection with the debate on legislation regarding property restitution in the National Assembly. The Czech public was deeply divided on this issue; a pronounced majority of Czech citizens in the middle and older age brackets were resolutely against restitution. When a Czech reporter randomly asked a few Czechs and Germans in Karlovy Vary (Karlsbad) what they thought about returning property to Sudeten Germans, only a few teenagers gave positive replies. Those who remembered Munich 1938 were already over 60 years of age and supplied rather violent and uncompromising answers.⁸⁷ In a poll conducted at the beginning of December 1990 by the Public Opinion Research Institute, 70 percent of the respondents declared themselves against the return of the former Sudeten German property either in the form of restitution or compensation. Only 4 percent of the 743 respondents over the age of 15 favored return of the property, 11 percent supported financial compensation, while 15 percent were confused. Those living in the former Sudeten German districts were almost without exception against returning property.⁸⁸

THE FUTURE OF THE CZECH-GERMAN RELATIONSHIP

One of the possible ways to rebuild the Czech-German relationship and give Havel's message of reconciliation a chance is to try to disconnect the notion of the German state as a great power from that of the German nation as an ethnic and cultural entity. Whether

⁸⁵ Personal communication to author via telephone by Dr. Illner, Institute of Sociology in Prague, 5 November 1990.

⁸⁶ Dr. Jan Hartl. Letter to author, 12 November 1990; data samples from the Institute of Sociology in Prague.

⁸⁷ *Mladý svět*, 26 November 1990, p. 3.

⁸⁸ *FBIS: Eastern Europe*, 8 January 1991, p. 18.

this is more than a mere intellectual exercise remains to be seen, but it should be attempted as Lev Kopelev does so eloquently in the case of German-Russian relations.⁸⁹

The ominous merger between *Kulturnation* and *Staatsnation* produced a rather volatile combination in the course of German unification under Bismarck, when the doctrine of Pan-Germanism usurped most of the alternative streams of German political culture. Given the size of Imperial Germany after the unification of 1871 (about twice the population of the average European great power) the rapid pace of its industrial and commercial expansion and, most important, its central location in the heart of Europe,⁹⁰ it would have required superhuman efforts to prevent this explosive mixture from detonating. But that was nearly a century ago. When President von Weizsäcker spoke on 15 March 1990 in Prague, he reiterated that West Germany had no territorial claims against any of its neighbors,⁹¹ and then made a remarkable comment:

Our history has never belonged to us alone. Why? Because of our specific European responsibility which reflects our precarious geographic location in the heart of the continent. We Germans have more neighbors than any other country. Our position in the center seriously affected historical events elsewhere.

When President Havel sent his good wishes to a united democratic Germany in early October 1990, the cordial atmosphere was marred by the intervention of the Sudeten German Association (*Landsmannschaft*) which, led by its spokesman Franz Neubauer, requested direct involvement in bilateral discussions between the German and Czechoslovak governments on the issue of restitution of pre-1945 Sudeten German property.⁹² Obviously, the apology repeatedly offered by Havel was not satisfactory, and the new Czechoslovak legislation concerning re-privatization and restitution of private property as far as back as 1948 must have encouraged the Sudeten German organizations to press forward their claims. The traditional position of the Prague government on the Munich Agreement did not help very much to clarify the issue. Since 1945 the Czechs had found

⁸⁹ Lew Kopelev, "Fremdenbilder in Geschichte und Gegenwart," in Mechthild Keller, ed., *Russen und Russland aus deutscher Sicht. 9.-17. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1985), pp. 11-34, p. 24; Lew Kopelev, *Worte werden Brücken* (Munich, 1989), pp. 118-19. See also Peter M. Pflüger, ed., *Freund- und Feindbilder: Begegnung mit dem Osten* (Olten/Freiburg, 1986), pp. 45-69; Stefan Plaggenborg, "Russen und Deutsche--Bemerkungen zu einem alten neuen Thema," *Osteuropa*, no. 10 (1990), pp. 975-90.

⁹⁰ David Calleo rightly examines Germany's "fatal geographic handicap" in his thought-provoking book *The German Problem Reconsidered: Germany and the World Order, 1870 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 6; see also Werner Weidenfeld, *Die Identität der Deutschen* (Munich: Carl Hauser Verlag, 1983), p. 24.

⁹¹ See *Svobodné Slovo*, 16 March 1990.

⁹² *Hospodarske noviny*, 11 September 1990 and 16 September 1990.

themselves caught between wishful thinking and reality because they wanted the best of both worlds. In order to punish the Sudeten Germans for Munich with exemplary severity by confiscating their property and expelling them from the country, Prague needed to treat them as ex-Czechoslovak citizens for reasons of legal convenience. At the same time, however, whenever the question of restitution of former property to ex-Czechoslovak citizens of German nationality was raised, the Prague authorities reacted with indignation, applying the principle of collective guilt that traitors cannot enjoy the rights of Czechoslovak citizens. Ironically, the regrettable Munich Agreement of 1938, that Prague always insisted should be null and void, also treats the Sudeten Germans as citizens of the Reich. Although successive German governments repudiated the Munich Agreement in 1964, 1968, and again in the last of the "Eastern Treaties," (which the Chancellor Willy Brandt government signed with its eastern neighbors in December 1973 as part of his *Ostpolitik*), and although the other three participants of the Munich Pact repudiated their signatures as well, this matter of citizenship was left over until a final peace treaty with Germany could be formally concluded.⁹³ Such a peace treaty, however, will probably never be signed.

The Czechoslovak federal government has so far refused any Sudeten German claims for restitution of specific property, saying that the four Allied Powers settled the question at the Potsdam and Paris Peace Conferences in 1945; they have also refused to negotiate about compensation directly with any of the Sudeten German associations, considering them private organizations. Taken at face value, the Czech and Sudeten German claims regarding damages by forced deportation and war destruction do probably amount to roughly similar, astronomical figures (360 billion versus 300 prewar Czechoslovak crowns), which, for all intents and purposes, cancel each other out.⁹⁴ It is obvious that this sensitive matter is far from being resolved, but it need not become a major bone of contention in Czechoslovakia's future relations with united Germany. During his visit to Prague in November 1990, German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher expressed the hope that the future bilateral treaty between the two countries, which is to update the Normalization Treaty of 1973, would take into account the radically changed political situation and settle most of the outstanding issues, including the property claims of the Sudeten Germans.⁹⁵ In April 1991, however, during his follow-up visit to Prague, Genscher deliberately omitted the alleged claims of the Sudeten German *Landsmannschaft* from his statement. That the final text of the new bilateral Czechoslovak-German treaty, which will not touch the question of property predating February 1948, must be left to government experts was stressed by both foreign

⁹³ On the legal aspects of the Munich Agreement of 1938, see Sir John Wheeler-Bennett and Anthony Nicholls, The Semblance of Peace: The Political Settlement After the Second World War (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972), pp. 611-13.

⁹⁴ See the statement of Dr. Richard Král, the legal expert of the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry, in Práce, 30 November 1990, and Lidové Noviny, 11 December 1990.

⁹⁵ Deutsche Presse Agentur (DPA), communiqué of 2 November 1990.

ministers, Genscher and Dienstbier.⁹⁶ Predictably, the reaction of the Sudeten Germans was very angry; their spokesmen do not wish to be excluded from the negotiations.⁹⁷

Prague is actually much more concerned about the loss of 1.8 billion DM in broken trade contracts with the former German Democratic Republic. The joint communiqué stressed the necessity of building stable institutions of a future united Europe, which should also include the Soviet Union. Since 21 February 1991, when Czechoslovakia joined Council of Europe as its twenty-fifth member, the emphasis on joining the "chosen twelve" of the European Economic Community has become even more pronounced in the present Czechoslovak foreign policy. Within this strategy Germany's sponsorship is the most important asset from Prague's point of view. Recently German private investors cemented this sponsorship with the largest single deal so far in Eastern Europe: at the beginning of 1991, the biggest German car manufacturer, Volkswagen, announced that it would invest 6.45 billion crowns in, the Škoda plant. Slovak separatists, however, could still sabotage this ambitious European strategy before the new Czechoslovak-German treaty comes into existence.

With an eye set not only on the threat of internal disruptions coming from the disintegrating Soviet empire, but also in anticipation of the growing danger of ethnic conflicts within eastern Europe itself, Genscher and Dienstbier agreed on the so-called "Ten Prague Theses" during their April 1991 meeting. The theses stressed their dedication to European integration, including the transatlantic dimension and some kind of vague Soviet involvement, all over again. There was no mention of the questions of Sudeten German property. Asked by journalists about the absence of this issue, Genscher replied that the German government wanted to cut through the vicious circle of old grievances once and for all.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Lidová demokracie, 12 April 1991.

⁹⁷ Sudetendeutsche Zeitung, 1 March 1991. It would not be surprising if the German government followed in this situation the recent precedent set by the country's highest court, which ruled on 23 April 1991 that former legal owners of agricultural and industrial properties confiscated by Soviet authorities during 1945-49 in the former GDR territory are entitled to compensation, but not to the return of the property. See Ferdinand Protzman in The New York Times, 21 April 1991.

⁹⁸ Svobodné Slovo, 12 April 1991.