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BOOK REVIEW: HISTORY OF CZECH FOREIGN POLICY

Tomáš Swiatlowski*

VESELÝ, Z.: *Dějiny české zahraniční politiky. (History of Czech Foreign Policy)*. Praha: Vysoká škola ekonomická v Praze, Nakladatelství Oeconomica, 2013. 536 p. ISBN 978-80-245-1945-6.

The reviewed publication represents the first comprehensive synthesis of the history of Czech foreign policy, thus filling a certain gap in the current Czech and Slovak book market. The issue of historical development of the international position of the Czech state and the history of its foreign policy was indeed elaborated in a number of works dedicated to Czech history in general, or the Czech political and legal history specifically, but such a comprehensive treatise was so far missing. The referred work provides a detailed mapping of historical development of the foreign policy in the Czech territory on more than 500 pages, starting from the times of Celts to the current direction of the Czech Republic's foreign policy, including the latest events and issues of contemporary international relations. From the nature of the publication is clear that the target readers are mainly students of International Relations and other related fields, but because of its clarity and acceptable style of interpretation it is befitting all who are interested in the subject. Through this work students will obtain a comprehensive chronological overview of Czech foreign policy, allowing them to navigate in the context of the historical development of the Czech state and its international position. The work is functional and useful not only for students, but also to teachers within the pedagogical process. Due to numerous passages from historical documents the publication is also useful when working on seminars or exercises, where students can better understand the historical context while creating a space for professional discussion. The connection between the interpretation and real teaching at the university is also

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emphasized by the fact that the author drew, among others, from his own teaching experience and also from learning material prepared specifically for students.

The publication *Dějiny české zahraniční politiky [History of Czech Foreign Policy]* is the result of author's previous treatises on this issue, including e.g. *Dějiny českého státu v dokumentech [History of Czech State in Documents]* (third ed. Prague: Professional Publishing, 2012), *Nástin dějin české zahraniční politiky [Outline of the History of Czech Foreign Policy]* (Prague: Oeconomica, 2004, 2005, 2006 a 2009), *Dějiny české zahraniční politiky v datech [History of Czech Foreign Policy in the Dates]* (Prague: Oeconomica, 2006), *Dějiny české politiky v dokumentech [History of Czech Policy in Documents]* (Prague: Professional Publishing, 2005) a *Prameny a literatura k dějinám české zahraniční politiky. Sešity ke studiu české zahraniční politiky [Sources and Literature on the History of Czech Foreign Policy: Workbooks for the Study of Czech Foreign Policy]* (Prague: Oeconomica, 2004). The above clearly shows that the author, prof. PhDr. **Zdeněk Veselý**, CSc., deals with this subject over a long period, with many publication outputs, and the currently reviewed work represents the comprehensive synthesis and clear summary of previous work on this subject, being an imaginary apex of many years of effort and is a clear evidence of the author's maturity.

The work's structure corresponds to chronological interpretation of the foreign policy issue since the early formation of Czech state to the present, while the matter is overall divided into nine chapters. The interpretation itself has a structure similar to the so called reversed pyramid, which means that the closer to the present we get, the interpretation is more comprehensive. At first glance the reader can be startled that only a third of the book is dedicated to the period of time preceding the 20th Century, and the remaining two thirds of the content deal with the period after the year 1914. Of course, this fact can be justified by several arguments. To begin with, the sheer volume of foreign policy activities in international relations in the 20th Century expanded rapidly due to technological and civilisational progress, emergence of new players, challenges and advancing globalisation. Moreover, at this time the Czech statehood and international legal subjectivity were definitely anchored, first in the form of Czechoslovakia and later in the form of independent Czech Republic. The metamorphosis of international status of the Czech state and its foreign policy activities in periods when it was independent subject in the international arena, as well as in times when its statehood and the associated exercise of foreign

policy were restricted or completely prohibited, represents the backbone of research of the reviewed publication.

In the first chapter, the author covers the period since the inception of first state bodies in the territory of Czech countries to the end of the Thirty Years' War and the subsequent adoption of the Peace of Westphalia. Interpretation begins with the inhabitation of the Czech territory by Celtic tribe of Boii. It is important to note that right from the beginning, in addition to the actual description of historical facts and constitutional historical aspects, the emphasis is put on international position of the first state bodies and their relationships with surroundings. From the perspective of the Slovak reader it would perhaps be possible to argue with some of the statements (e.g. regarding the localisation of Wogastisburg, or the royal title of **Svätopluk**), but given the persisting unexplained facts of these times, the discussion is still open in this respect. After a relatively brief insight into the history of the Great Moravian Empire, the author details the international status and foreign policy of the Czech state during the reign of Přemyslid dynasty, which is understandable because in this period *"the crystallisation process of a new state began; a state which after its emancipation in the form of Czech principality and then the Kingdom became a significant power factor of international relations in Central Europe until the end of the Middle Ages."* (p. 15). The author continues with the reign of the House of Luxembourg, with the emphasis on the policy of **Charles IV.** and position of Czech state within the Holy Roman Empire. The passage on diplomatic activities of the Hussite movement is also interesting, especially the comprehensive interpretation of perhaps the greatest contribution to international relations in these times – the plan of peace union of Christian monarchs, initiated by **George of Poděbrady**. The advantage is that the original text of this project, along with other important documents, is included as an annex at the end of this chapter. Subsequently, after a short part about the Jagiellonian reign, the author gets to the onset of the Habsburgs to the Czech throne, who consolidated their power after Thirty Years' War when *"the Czech state became for several centuries a permanent part of the Habsburg monarchy, in which it lost its autonomy and thus the status of independent subject with its own foreign policy in international relations."* (p. 75).

The second chapter continues with the interpretation of the Habsburg domination period, with emphasis on the status of the Czech lands and foreign policy of the Habsburg Monarchy. The results of the Thirty Years' War had serious consequences for the Czech state, because due to centralistic and

absolutistic tendencies of the Habsburg rulers it had lost the ability to implement its own foreign policy while being increasingly drawn into the problems of great power politics in Europe. Nevertheless, we cannot speak of the absence of Czech foreign policy activities in this period, though their implementation was mainly in the hands of a few individuals among the nobility operating at the Vienna's imperial court, whose diplomatic activities are discussed in this section. Subsequently, in chronological order, the author presents the reader with the onset of the Czech national policy and its foreign policy activities in the second half of the 19th Century, in relation to the emancipation movement of nations within the Habsburg Monarchy. Particular attention should be given to the interpretation of international relations of non-state nature between the representatives of the Czech national movement and other states, especially France. The author characterises these kinds of activities as a sort of paradiplomacy *"allowing the creation of cadre potential for foreign service of subsequently formed Czechoslovakia."* (p. 139).

The issue of birth of the Czechoslovak foreign policy and formation of Czechoslovakia is the content of third chapter. For obvious reasons, the emphasis in this part is primarily on diplomatic activities of Czechoslovak foreign resistance during World War I. Benefit over other publications devoted to our national history and formation of Czechoslovakia is the elaboration of the issue of the status of the Czechoslovak National Council within the international fora and its diplomatic recognition by the major powers as representative of Czechs and Slovaks and as a basis for future Czechoslovak government. On the other hand, Slovak reader may be surprised by relatively small space dedicated to the position of Slovak policy and its representatives towards the nascent new state forming on the ruins of Habsburg Monarchy. In this context, perhaps a more extensive interpretation should be given to other constitutional ideas about future arrangements in the Central Europe, coming from other important political leaders of the time, which were often different from the ideas of **T.G. Masaryk**, to whom the most space is dedicated. Of course, given his importance in Czech history this fact is justifiable. Despite the above-mentioned shortcomings, Slovak reader will certainly be pleased by inclusion of the text of Martin Declaration in the annexes to this part.

The fourth chapter discusses primarily the foreign policy and its instruments, mainly in the form of diplomacy and diplomatic service, under the new circumstances unseen for centuries – the independent state of Czechs and Slovaks, a fully-fledged entity in the international arena, and equal partner to the

other players in world politics. In addition to the interpretation on the shaping of state bodies, the author addresses the process of establishing diplomatic relations with other states, thanks to which *“the new state entered as an independent and sovereign entity on the scene of international relations.”* (p. 208). On the other hand, Czechoslovakia had to face the territorial and border problems in relations with its neighbours. The Czechoslovak diplomacy had a prominent place at the Paris Peace Conference and in all peace treaties with the defeated countries *“Czechoslovakia received, with the other successor states, international legal recognition.”* (p. 211). The author also mentions the Czechoslovakia’s commitments to its allies, membership in the United Nations and participation of our diplomacy on the projects of European integration. By evaluating the policy of appeasement, the author gets to the Munich Agreement, which meant a hard blow for the young republic. The chapter concludes by a passage about short, so-called post-Munich period and liquidation of Czechoslovakia, while the author also very briefly attends to the events in Slovakia. A great benefit is the selection of attached documents, among which the reader will find a number of international agreements between Czechoslovakia and other countries, including substantial parts of peace treaties with the defeated states, Pact of the Organisation of the Little Entente, texts of the Munich Agreement or the Vienna Award.

The reader learns about the repeated loss of statehood and hence the loss of ways to promote the own foreign policy in the fifth chapter, dedicated to the period of occupation and World War II. In the introduction, the author very concisely describes the international legal status of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. He compares it with other examples from the past, stating that *“the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia had, in the contrary with the international practice hitherto, no international subjectivity and even its own internal affairs were not in its full competence. Relationship of Protectorate to Germany had forced constitutional nature and not an international legal one.”* (p. 260). The author also provides very interesting information in the section about the international response to the occupation and its diplomatic consequences. The interpretation of the actual impacts of *“the end of Czechoslovakia’s international legal subjectivity and hence its own foreign policy”* (p. 265) on diplomatic practice, and the fate of the Czechoslovak embassies abroad is a very engaging reading that is absent in other publications devoted to this period. From the perspective of the Slovak reader there is a need to positively evaluate the section on international position of

Slovakia. Subsequently, the author fluently passes to the description of activities of the Czechoslovak resistance, both domestic and foreign, while at the end, in the context of its climax and liberation of the territory, there is given a wider interpretation about the Košice Government Programme, which section on foreign policy is part of the documents included in the annex.

Chapter six covers only a short period since the end of World War II to the events of February 1948, which sealed the future foreign policy orientation of the renewed Czechoslovakia. In this part of the publication, the author skilfully combines the interpretation of the internal political situation in the post-war republic and the gradual transition to so-called people's democracy regime with foreign policy orientation and international position of the renewed state. He addresses issues such as the fate of German and Hungarian minorities and so-called Beneš Decrees, cession of Carpathian Ruthenia to the Soviet Union, participation, or rather lack of thereof, of Czechoslovakia on Marshall Plan, or its position in the newly formed United Nations. Emphasis is also placed on the development of Czechoslovak-Soviet relations as well as relations with neighbouring countries and with the West. At the end of the chapter, the author provides the analysis of events of February 1948 and addresses the international response to them, while mentioning the efforts of prominent Czechoslovak diplomat, **Ján Papánek**, who wanted the whole matter solved at the UN Security Council.

The seventh chapter continues with extensive interpretation of international status and foreign policy activities of Czechoslovakia during the Cold War, while the author quite comprehensively addresses the internal political situation with the emphasis on the nature and development of the regime. For the analysis of Czechoslovak foreign policy in this period, the author chose to divide it clearly into three areas, namely: relations of Czechoslovakia within the Soviet bloc and with other communist states; relations with Western countries; and relations with the so-called Third World countries, while each of these areas is given wide attention. In the first part, the author describes the gradual strengthening of ties with communist countries, not only in Europe, but also in the world at both bilateral and multilateral level. He notes that *"the forefront was held by Soviet Union, in relation to which the post-February Czechoslovakia transformed from ally to Soviet satellite."* (p. 349). In addition to relations with Soviet Union and other European communist states, the author also points to the activities of Czechoslovak diplomacy in relations with countries like North Korea, China, Mongolia and Cuba, which were anchored in the form of friendship and

cooperation treaties. He also covers the issue of reaction of the communist states to the events of the Prague Spring in 1968. In the second sphere, alongside a detailed description of relations with the German Federal Republic, the attention should also be paid to often neglected issue of Czechoslovak monetary gold. In the third areas, that is in relations with other states of so-called Third World, the author discusses, among others, the Czechoslovak Near East policy, which was strongly influenced by the politics of Soviet Union, and the dramatic turnaround in foreign policy orientation towards Israel. The issue of Czechoslovak activities at international fora, especially in the UN, is also thoroughly elaborated, because *“alongside the bilateral dimension within the limitations given by belonging to the Soviet Union, the Czechoslovak foreign policy also sought the multilateral dimension of foreign policy and activity at the international fora, whether in international organisations or at major international negotiations.”* (p. 374). Many important foreign policy documents from this period are attached to this chapter, among which we can mention the Warsaw Pact, the Moscow Protocol, the Treaty of Presence of Soviet Occupation Forces in Czechoslovakia and many others.

New geopolitical situation after the collapse of bipolarity along with the internal political transition to democratic establishment resulted in the emergence of *“new”* foreign policy of Czechoslovakia, whose basic starting points and implementation instruments are the subject of the eight chapter. The structure of interpretation is similar as in previous section, i.e. it is divided into relations with Soviet Union and former states of Soviet bloc and the relations with Western countries. In contrast to the previous section, this chapter lacks a specific section dedicated to relations with other states, respectively with countries of so-called Third World, but this issue is largely covered by interpretation of renewed and newly established diplomatic relations. In the multilateral dimension of foreign policy, the author addresses the Czechoslovakia's involvement in the international arena, expressed also by promoting the new ideas about security architecture of Europe, particularly in the form of a proposal for setting up a European Security Commission and subsequently of the Organisation of European states with the ultimate goal to achieve the European Confederation, while this proposal, *“although not implemented, still represents one of the boldest projects of Czechoslovak diplomacy. With historical detachment we can compare it without exaggeration to pan-European activities of **George of Poděbrady** or **Edvard Beneš.**”* (p. 425). In addition to the unrealised activities, the author further describes the

process of gradual rapprochement with NATO and the EU, as well as the fate of the Comecon and the Warsaw Pact. There is also a space dedicated to the activities of the national republics of Czechoslovakia in the international arena, because *“the more evident impossibility of maintaining a common Czechoslovak state in the second half of 1992 has found its reflection in many agreements and treaties, which transformed the hitherto domestic dimension of Czechoslovak relations into a Czech-Slovak interstate relations.”* (p. 428). Among the many attached documents, the especially noteworthy are e.g. the speech by President **V. Havel** in the U.S. Congress, the Visegrad Declaration and the Protocol on the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact.

The final chapter discusses the recent period of Czech history, i.e. the Czech Republic's foreign policy since 1993. At this point it is necessary to highlight the fact that the author continues to analyse the issue until now, while the interpretation maintains the detail and complexity of the previous parts of the publication. The thorough treatise of the current foreign policy orientation of the Czech Republic and its diplomatic activities at bilateral and multilateral level is a contribution in comparison with other works dealing with history, where the recent history and present are largely ignored or at the very least only briefly described. In this part, the author chose a very clear interpretation structure divided into bilateral and regional dimension of Czech foreign policy, with special emphasis on relations with Slovakia, Germany, Russia and the United States, and multilateral dimension with a more detailed breakdown of the security, integration, economy, human rights, development, humanitarian, and military dimension of the Czech foreign policy. The analysis also focuses on the activities of Czech diplomacy in the context of important universal international organisations, especially the UN, but largest part is dedicated to integration dimension with the emphasis on the process of accession to the European Union. The successful completion of this process is represented by the Treaty of Accession signed in Athens, text of which is included in the attached documents.

Alongside the body text it is important to highlight the rich accompanying material in the form of attached documents, chronological overview, the list and brief biographies of Czechoslovak and Czech Foreign Ministers, a table summarising the establishment of diplomatic relations between Czechoslovakia, respectively Czech Republic, and other world countries, the list of permanent missions and delegations of the Czech Republic to international organisations and international organisations represented in Czech Republic, as well as

image attachments, which appropriately complement and illustrate the interpretation to the reader.

Finally, it should be noted that the reviewed work *Dějiny české zahraniční politiky* [*History of Czech Foreign Policy*] is a part of works of prof. PhDr. **Zdeněk Veselý**, CSc., leading Czech historian, and along with the publications *Dějiny mezinárodních vztahů* [*History of International Relations*] (second ed. Plzeň: Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleš Čeněk, 2010) a *Diplomacie (Teorie – Praxe – Dějiny)* [*Diplomacy (Theory – Practice – History)*] (Plzeň: Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleš Čeněk, 2011) it creates a compact triad. Although it is primarily a college textbook, this work deserves a place in the library of every person who wants to expand their knowledge and gain an insight into the history of Czech foreign policy.