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POLISH DIPLOMACY TOWARDS THE EVENTS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA IN 1989

So it could be said that history has run so fast that we have struggled to keep up with it¹.

Abstract

Political relations between Warsaw and Prague in 1989 were influenced by the disproportion between the rate of the systemic changes taking place in both countries and the critical stance of the KSC leadership towards the changes taking place in Poland. The negative assessment of the decision to convene the Round Table talks, the capitulating attitude of the PZPR, which de facto agreed to abandon the principles of socialism in the economy and accepted the strengthening of the Solidarity opposition, influenced the reduction of official political contacts, especially in the second half of 1989. This also applied to cooperation between social organisations, especially youth organisations, cultural cooperation and individual border traffic. All these issues were perceived by PLR diplomats making attempts to counteract the isolation by party activists of various levels and trying to counteract the unfavourable presentation of Poland in the Czechoslovak media and supporting their citizens subjected to persecution by Czechoslovak border guards.

Keywords: polish diplomacy, Polish foreign service, Polish-Czechoslovak relations in 1989

Introduction

In the latter half of the 1980s, the leaders of the Polish People's Republic and Czechoslovakia had differing views on the perestroika process. While both were reforming their political and economic systems, they implemented its principles to varying extents. The leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC) initially regarded perestroika as a Soviet experiment with uncertain outcomes. However, over time, they formally embraced Mikhail Gorbachev's proposal to reform real socialism. Concurrently,

¹ V. Havel, *Tylko krótko proszę. Rozmowy z Karem Hvižďalą, zapiski, dokumenty*, Kraków 2007, p. 69.



they asserted the need to tailor the perestroika principles to the unique conditions of each Eastern Bloc country. This essentially signified a willingness to make only those concessions that would not deprive the KSČ of full power. Gorbachev's visit to Prague from 9–11 April 1987 did not alter the Czechoslovak leadership's stance on the necessity for profound, even revolutionary, changes. These were anticipated by a populace that held the Soviet leader in high regard, hoping it would prompt a re-evaluation of the Prague Spring. Such hopes were misplaced, and the Soviet leader's visit became emblematic of a lost chance to align the doctrines of perestroika with the ideals of the Prague Spring and to back the reformist faction within the KSČ, represented by Lubomír Štrougal². Meanwhile, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, grappling with domestic issues, was neither ready nor willing to tackle such a challenging topic. He even acquiesced to personnel changes in the ČSSR, despite Gustáv Husák's cautions³.

The Czechoslovak interpretation of perestroika is illustrated by seemingly superficial shifts in leadership. A case in point is the appointment of Miloš Jakeš as the General Secretary of the KSČ in December 1987. Jakeš, a proponent of the intervention against the Prague Spring and the architect of the subsequent purges within the KSČ, approached perestroika with caution and detachment. He replaced Gustáv Husák, the First Secretary of the KSČ, who continued as President of the ČSSR but was at odds with Jakeš. In October 1988, after a tenure of 18 years, Lubomír Štrougal, the sole Czechoslovak leader who truly grasped the essence of perestroika and the depth of reforms required in the ČSSR, resigned as Prime Minister. His successor, Ladislav Adamec, was a Kremlin loyalist committed to upholding socialism in the ČSSR⁴. Beyond these personnel shifts, the Czechoslovak overhaul was meant to encompass the economy. Yet, the envisaged changes were limited. The policy document titled "Principles of Economic Mechanism Reform", ratified on 9 January 1987, harked back to the economic reforms of the 1960s and, politically, to the 1968 KSČ program⁵. The Czechoslovak rendition of perestroika, termed *přestavba*, even with its adoption of a Soviet-style strategy for rapid socio-economic advancement, failed to bring about significant improvements in the worsening economic climate. Consequently, it didn't elevate public morale, unaccustomed as they were to

² B. Blehova, *Michail Gorbačev und der Fall des Kommunismus in der Tschechoslowakei*, in: W. Mueller, M. Portmann, *Osteuropa vom Weltkrieg zur Wende*, 2007, pp. 353–355, https://www.academia.edu/35446367/Michail_Gorba%C4%8Dev_und_der_Fall_des_Kommunismus_in_der_Tschechoslowakei.

³ M. Pullman, *Konec experimentu. Přestavba a pád komunismu v Československu*, Praha 2011, pp. 57–203.

⁴ See, for further detail: M. Jakeš, *Dva roky generálním tajemníkem*, Praha 1996; L. Štrougal, *Paměti a úvahy*, Praha 2009, pp. 42, 281–285; F. Koudelka, *Husákov pád 1987. Dokumenty k oddělení funkcí prezidenta ČSSR a generálního tajemníka KSČ a k nástupu Miloše Jakeše do čela KSČ*, "Soubě dějiny" 2000, No. 3, pp. 471–525; According to Petr Husák's narrative, even after the fall of communism in the ČSSR, Jakeš attributed the situation to the USA and Western nations. He believed that the submissive approach adopted by M. Gorbachev's team towards these countries was to blame – P. Husák, *Česká cesta ke svobodě*, díl. 1: *Revoluce či co?*, Praha 1999, p. 49; J. Rychlík, *Československo v období socialismu 1945–1989*, Praha 2020, pp. 301–305; J. Suk, *Rozlam poměry "totalitářstvím" a "demokracií"*. *Čechoslowacki rok 1989 – možnosti*, "Paměť i Spravedlivost" 2011, No. 2, pp. 17–23; In 1988, laws on state-owned enterprises and agricultural cooperatives were adopted in the ČSSR.

⁵ For more on the implementing legislation adopted in June 1987 and the assumptions contained therein for the functioning of the economic sectors, see: J. Rychlík, *Československo v období...*, pp. 301–305.

a deficit economy⁶. The late 1970s and early 1980s marked an economic downturn across the socialist bloc. As a result, the ČSSR's standard of living in the 1980s increased at a slower pace than in the 1970s. This was mirrored in the stagnation of real wage growth, a declining birth rate, and a static quality of life index. The 1980s saw a GDP per capita growth of 1.3%, a stark contrast to the 4.3% growth rate of the 1970s⁷. Nevertheless, the ČSSR's GDP in 1989 was on par with Belgium's and surpassed the Netherlands', despite a significantly lower industrial productivity. This productivity was more resource-intensive, technologically outdated, and lagged behind Western European nations⁸. As a result, foreign trade values declined, and the industrial production growth rate in 1989 was a mere 1%, the lowest since the mid-1960s⁹.

Wojciech Jaruzelski had a far better grasp of the principles of glasnost and perestroika than the KSČ leadership. He pledged allegiance and collaboration with Gorbachev, positioning Poland, alongside the USSR, as a forerunner of reforms in the Eastern Bloc. However, when compared to Czechoslovakia, Poland's economic situation appeared far grimmer, even with the initiation of the second phase of economic reform by Zbigniew Messner's government from 1985. The decline in industrial production, market scarcities, rampant inflation, the dire state of national finances, and escalating debt stirred public unrest, necessitating drastic remedial actions. In December 1988, the Wilczek Act was enacted, permitting economic activities. By 1989, a resolution was passed to introduce market mechanisms into the food economy¹⁰. These steps signaled the onset of Poland's systemic transformation towards a free market economy. This was in contrast to the initial belief that a socialist economy would persist, and that the imposed economic reforms would placate the public, enabling the PZPR to retain its hold on power.

The widening gap between the rate of systemic reforms in the 1980s and the KSČ leadership's skepticism towards the transformations occurring in Poland adversely affected the formal political ties between Warsaw and Prague. The mutual perceptions between the two countries were significantly shaped by the events in Poland during 1980–1981. Additionally, the rising tide of social unrest in the latter half of the 1980s, marked by a surge in anti-communist opposition and the continual emergence of strike hubs, played a role. The media in Czechoslovakia, under the influence of the KSČ, meticulously utilized

⁶ P. Ukielski, *Czechosłowacja – implozja systemu*, in: A. Burakowski, A. Gubrynowicz, P. Ukielski, 1989 – *Jesień Narodów*, Warszawa 2009, pp. 195–198.

⁷ A. Bálek, *Československá ekonomika v osemdesátých letech 20. století*, “Acta Oeconomica Pragensia” 2007, roč. 15, č. 7, pp. 45–50, https://aop.vse.cz/artkey/aop-200707-0001_československa-ekonomika-v-osmdesatych-letech-20-stoleti.php; M. Sekanina, *NEDOKONČENÁ: Československá ekonomika v druhé polovině 80. let minulého století*, “Acta Oeconomica Pragensia” 2007, roč. 15, č. 7, pp. 331–351, https://aop.vse.cz/artkey/aop-200707-0023_nedokoncena-ceskoslovenska-ekonomika-v-druhe-polovine-80-let-minuleho-stoleti.php

⁸ A. Bálek, *Československá ekonomika v osemdesátých letech...*, p. 47.

⁹ M. Sekanina, *NEDOKONČENÁ: Československá ekonomika...*, p. 341.

¹⁰ Mieczysław Wilczek was Minister of Industry from 1988 to 1989. The law permitted to conduct economic activities, thereby ending the erstwhile state monopoly. Act of 23 December 1988 on economic activity, Journal of Laws of 1988, No. 41, item 324, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19880410324>; On the same day the Act on conducting economic activity with the participation of foreign entities was adopted, which created favourable conditions for the activity of foreign companies, Journal of Laws of 1988, No. 41, item 325, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19880410325>; J. Kaliński, *Kiedy zaczęło się odradzanie gospodarki rynkowej w Polsce?*, “Optimum”, *Studia Ekonomiczne*, 2015, No. 1, pp. 5–9, https://repozytorium.uwb.edu.pl/jspui/bitstream/11320/3055/1/01_Janusz%20Kaliniski.pdf

these developments for propaganda purposes, casting both the Solidarity movement and the Polish people in an unfavorable light¹¹. The diplomatic endeavors of the Polish People's Republic, along with attempts to alter the stance of Czechoslovak authorities and its citizenry towards the situation in Poland post the rise of the Solidarity movement in 1980, achieved limited success in the 1980s. By the decade's end, Czechoslovak media still portrayed the changes in Poland within the framework of what they termed as the anti-socialist actions of the opposition and the Polish Church¹². This portrayal made the announcement of the commencement of a round table in Poland, where the opposition, including Solidarity members, would be key negotiators, even more disconcerting for the KSČ leadership.

The stance of the Czechoslovak authorities concerning the events in Poland in 1989 has been meticulously analyzed by the Czech historian, Prof. Jan Rychlík. His research, grounded in primary sources, was published in the Czech Republic between 2006 and 2009¹³. Additionally, his findings were featured in the "Central European and Balkan Studies" journal of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences¹⁴. The official stance of governmental entities and the activities of ČSSR diplomats and consuls can be discerned through a thorough examination of archival documents housed in the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Archives of the Czech Republic. These archives contain a wealth of diplomatic and consular reports, as well as records of direct interactions, party discussions, and state-level dialogues between the Polish People's Republic and the ČSSR. Among the documents referenced by Prof. Jan Rychlík are reports by the ČSSR ambassador in Warsaw, Josef Havlín¹⁵, detailing the situation in Poland. Notably, these reports include information about the premiere of Václav Havel's one-act plays at the Teatr Powszechny in Warsaw on 25 February 1989. The presence of figures like Adam Michnik and Mieczysław Rakowski in the audience further solidified the ambassador's belief that

¹¹ Central Archives of Modern Records, Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (hereinafter AAN KC PZPR), Ref. No. LXXVII-8, Study on Polish-Czechoslovak relations in the field of information and propaganda.

¹² For more on the efforts of Polish diplomatic missions to restore relations before their crisis, see: A. Szczepańska-Dudziak, *Regaining Trust: The Work of Communist Poland's Foreign Service in Czechoslovakia in the 1980s*, "Slovanský přehled" 2020, č. 1, pp. 89–111. To hinder the reception of Polish television and consequently curb information flow about the situation in Poland, the Czechoslovak authorities intended to construct two Czech television transmitters. These were designed to disrupt the signal from Polish transmitters – AAN, KC PZPR, Ref. No. LXXVII-31, letter dated 6.01.1989 from the Office for Cooperation with Foreign Countries of the Radio and Television Committee to the Chairman of the Radiocommittee.

¹³ J. Rychlík, *Československo a změny ve východní Evropě na prahu událostí roku 1989*, "Slovanské Historické Studie" 2006, No. 31, pp. 196–210; idem, *Politické změny ve Východní Evropě před 17. Listopadem a jejich ohlas v Československu*, "Česko-slovenská historická" 2009, pp. 113–139.

¹⁴ Idem, *Diplomacia czechosłowacka wobec sytuacji w Polsce w roku 1989*, "Studia Środkowoeuropejskie i Bałkanistyczne", 2021, vol. 30, pp. 259–267.

¹⁵ Josef Havlín was born in 1924 in Holšice, near Kutná Hora. Trained as a mechanical engineer, he joined the Central Committee of the KSČ in 1964. He served in the Ministry of Education and Culture and, following the quelling of the Prague Spring, he became known as one of the "hardliners". He subsequently took on a role in the leadership of the Press and Information Office, acting as a censor. In October 1975, he was appointed Minister for Education. Due to internal personnel shifts within the KSČ, he was designated as the Ambassador to the ČSSR in Warsaw in the autumn of 1988. However, post the Velvet Revolution, Havlín not only lost his ambassadorial position but was also expelled from the KSČ – J. Dejmeck, *Diplomacie Československa*, díl. 2: *Biografický slovník československých diplomatů (1918–1992)*, Praha 2013, p. 350.

the play was a direct affront to Czechoslovakia. He viewed it as evidence of an anti-Czechoslovak campaign and perceived disloyalty from the Polish authorities, especially the Ministry of Culture and the Arts, which had sanctioned the performance. Adding to the awkwardness of the situation was the fact that Václav Havel, the Czechoslovak playwright and dissident, was incarcerated at the time. He had been detained following protests marking the 20th anniversary of Jan Palach's tragic self-immolation¹⁶. Ambassador Havlín also expressed disapproval of the Polish parliament's resolution that condemned the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia¹⁷.

As Jan Rychlík has pointed out, Czechoslovak leaders viewed Poland as a nation grappling with economic and social crises, considering it the most vulnerable within the socialist states' alliance. This vulnerability was further intensified by opposition activities and the influential role of the Church¹⁸.

Drawing from archival sources and Prof. Jan Rychlík's publications, we can piece together the stance of the KSČ leadership regarding the events in Poland in 1989. To gain a comprehensive understanding of Polish-Czechoslovak relations towards the late 1980s, it is insightful to consider the situation in the ČSSR from the vantage point of Polish party decision-makers, as well as the perceptions of diplomats and consuls from the Polish People's Republic stationed in that country. This article aims to outline Poland's official stance on the situation in Czechoslovakia in 1989, highlighting the contrasting pace and nature of transformations in both nations. Inevitably, our analysis will touch upon challenges in Polish-Czechoslovak bilateral relations, a list that is notably extensive for two Eastern Bloc nations that were, on paper, bound by a fraternal friendship. This piece does not delve into informal interactions between Polish and Czechoslovak dissenters, a topic deserving its own dedicated research and it has been much more often the interest of researchers.

It is significant to trace the progression of these bilateral relations, starting with Wojciech Jaruzelski's trip to Prague in February 1989. This journey spans Mieczysław Rakowski's efforts to solidify prior party relations during his September discussions with communist leaders in Prague, leading up to the Polish parliament's denouncement of the Warsaw Pact troops' intervention in 1968. The timeline concludes with the dialogues in December 1989 between non-communist foreign ministers, Krzysztof Skubiszewski and

¹⁶ J. Rychlík, *Politické změny ve Východní Evropě před 17. Listopadem a jejich ohlas v Československu, "Česko-slovenská historická"* 2009, pp. 140–142, Information from the ČSSR embassy in Warsaw on the premiere of Vaclav Havel at the Teatr Powszechny in Warsaw, 27.02.1989; Ambassador Havlín's report is in the unreleased team of the AMZV – Archiv Ministerstva zahraničních věcí (hereinafter: AMZV), Teritoriální Odbory – Obyčejne, Polsko 1980–1989. The new premiere of the one-act plays by Vaclav Havel took place at the Teatr Powszechny in Warsaw on 27.02.1989. V. Svatek discusses the premiere of the one-act play by Vaclav Havel and the official protest note from the ČSSR authorities in his memoirs, *Od Husáka k Havlovi...*, p. 120. The Czechoslovak diplomat incorrectly reported that the premiere with Mieczyslaw Rakowski took place at the Ateneum Theatre.

¹⁷ J. Rychlík, *Politické změny ve Východní Evropě...*, pp. 142–145, Information from the ČSSR embassy to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the conversation between J. Havlín and the Deputy Foreign Minister of the Polish People's Republic, B. Kulski, Warsaw 21.08.1989.

¹⁸ The situation in Poland is described in their reports by the ČSSR consuls in Poland, AMZV, Teritoriální Odbory – Obyčejne, Polsko 1980–1989, box 7, Information of the KG in Szczecin on the political and economic situation, 25 August 1989 and seen through the eyes of the KSČ; Národní Archiv, KSČ Ústřední výbor 1945–1989(hereafter: NA ČR, ÚV KSČ), Praha – předsednictvo 1986–1989, sv. 106/89, k. inf. 4, Intra-political situation in the Polish People's Republic prior to the start of the round table and the opening speech introducing the participants to the first meeting.

Jiří Dienstbier. The focus of the mutual discussions in 1989 shifted from initial suggestions for party collaboration to challenging negotiations concerning the reinstatement of border traffic, environmental conservation in the border regions, and even deliberations on German reunification.

The article's foundation lies in documents housed in the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, specifically: First Department, Consular Department, Department of Press, Cultural and Scientific Co-operation, and Prague Dispatches, found within the Central Archives of Modern Records, Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party – 1948–1990 collection. Useful materials from the Departmental Archives of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, particularly those in the Foreign Cooperation Office concerning Czechoslovakia's information, propaganda strategies, and mutual cultural exchanges, have been referenced. The article also references numerous source documents from the National Archives and the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, primarily to provide a more comprehensive account of discussions between the two countries' representatives. These archival sources are supplemented by published materials, including the "Collection of Documents" from the Polish Institute of International Affairs, press sources like "Rude právo", "Tribuna", and "Gazeta Wyborcza", and relevant literature¹⁹. At the outset, it is worth emphasizing that the existing source material does not allow for a complete reconstruction of the Polish People's Republic's diplomatic response to the course of the Velvet Revolution. To a limited degree, the extraordinary and intense occurrences of November and December 1989 in the ČSSR are captured in the annual reports of diplomats and consuls housed in the First Department team of the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, the communications from the communist embassy in Prague, presented as Dispatches, provide a more detailed account.

Balance of Neighborly Relations

In January 1989, the First Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw prepared informational material on the prevailing situation in the ČSSR²⁰. This assessment of the actions undertaken during the Czechoslovak *přestavba* revealed a perception of the reconstruction processes that differed from that in Poland. The KSČ leadership was perceived to have lost public trust and seemed incapable of addressing the escalating economic challenges. The briefing material strongly highlighted the necessity for profound changes within the KSČ and a comprehensive democratization of the party's internal affairs. According to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, alterations in the realm of cultural and information-propaganda policy, which were under stringent party control, were more gradual and circumspect than those in Poland. The centrally-regulated cultural policy in the ČSSR remained a significant means of propagandist influence on the public. However,

¹⁹ *Zmierzch dyktatury. Polska lat 1986–1989 w świetle dokumentów*, vol. 2 (czerwiec–grudzień 1989), selection, foreword and compilation by A. Dudek, Warsaw 2013.

²⁰ Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereafter: AMSZ), First Department, 37/93, vol. 2, Information material on the current socio-political situation of the ČSSR and on Polish-Czechoslovak bilateral relations, Warsaw 24.01.1989.

there was a noticeable shift in artistic expression methods²¹. Furthermore, there were novel elements in the information policy, with television broadcasts showcasing images and footage of street protests against the authorities and a more lenient stance towards historical figures like Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and Edvard Beneš. In contrast, the official stance on the events of the Prague Spring and its forceful quelling remained consistent at the highest echelons of the state. The apprehension of the KSČ leadership about a recurrence of these events was the rationale Polish diplomats believed underpinned the party apparatus's reluctance towards the reconstruction endeavors. The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not concur with the ČSSR government's opinion that the opposition in the nation was of negligible significance. On the contrary, there was an observed surge in dissident activities referencing the Prague Spring programmer and the human rights charter, as demonstrated by the protest in Prague commemorating the anniversary of Jan Palach's tragic demise. As evaluated in the material from the First Department, the magnitude of these protests suggested a rising public endorsement for the opposition. The harsh police response to the protesters further amplified anti-government feelings²². Polish People's Republic diplomats also allocated significant attention to examining the economic climate in the ČSSR²³. They noted the decelerated economic growth, market deficiencies, the populace's rush to purchase durable goods, the failure to meet housing construction targets, diminished product innovation and competitiveness, which resulted in decreased exports and subsequently, an adverse trade balance with the West for the ČSSR. The outcome of the přestavby was an elevation in the earnings of specific worker groups without a corresponding boost in market production. This led to a scenario where money was abundant, but apart from food, there was a dearth of goods to purchase, leading to a rise in black

²¹ Departmental Archives of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (hereafter: AZMKiDN), Foreign Cooperation Office, Ref. No. 1418/18, Report on bilateral cultural and scientific cooperation for 1988 between the Polish People's Republic and the ČSSR, Prague 23.01.1989. The report drew attention to the slow departure in ČSSR cultural policy from rigid ideological and artistic canons, despite the political authorities retaining control in this area. The fact that artistic circles strongly supported the reformist currents was not insignificant. Art exhibitions that deviated from the socialist mainstream, as well as the forthcoming publication of Bohumil Hrabal's works, were highlighted as examples. However, despite these observations, the evolution of cultural ties between the Polish People's Republic and the ČSSR was viewed as the most gradual within the Eastern Bloc, second only to Bulgaria. For more on Poland's cultural cooperation with socialist countries, see *ibidem*, Information on cultural cooperation with European socialist countries under conditions of renewal and reconstruction, Warsaw, April 1989. In this situation, the Polish side hoped to improve the atmosphere for the promotion of Polish culture, which had been absent from the ČSSR for a long time, and to be able to shape a proper image of Poland among Czechoslovak society – *ibidem*, Framework programme of activities of the Polish Information and Culture Centre (OIKP) in Prague in 1989; *ibidem*, Report on the activities of the OIKP in Prague for 1988; *ibidem*, Plan of information, propaganda and cultural events for the fourth quarter of 1989. In April, the heads of the ministries of education and youth met in Zakopane to sign a protocol to the agreement on cultural and scientific cooperation, and in May a protocol was signed on the cooperation of the Polish Writers' Union and the Czechoslovak Writers' Union – *Informator o stosunkach polsko-czechosłowackich 1944–1989, compiled by M. Wilk, Z. Kacpura, Warsaw 1991, p. 107.*

²² The shifting stance of Polish diplomats in Prague regarding the opposition in the ČSSR is illustrated by a meeting with independent academics, including historian Prof. Jaroslav Valenta, held in late January 1989. The central topic of discussion was the sluggish progress of the democratic transition in the ČSSR, with the prevailing government team held accountable for this inertia, AMSZ, Incoming Dispatch – Prague 1989, 24/91, vol. 19, vol. 1, Ciphertext No. 1560, 31.01.1989. Prof. J. Valenta was deprived of the opportunity to work at universities and to publish his scientific work between 1970 and 1979.

²³ AZMKiDN, Foreign Cooperation Office, Ref. No. 1418/18, Report, *op. cit.*

market activities. The authorities in Prague were keen to identify those responsible for this predicament and persuaded the public that the culprits were the Poles, who were labelled as traders and held accountable for the goods scarcity in stores. This further tarnished the reputation of Poles in Czechoslovak society and influenced the perception of Poland's economic state. Consequently, the opposition, with its numerous strikes, was blamed for the country's instability. The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs discerned a lack of comprehension in Prague regarding Polish national characteristics, the actions of the opposition, and frequently expressed historically rooted stereotypes.

As 1989 dawned, the Polish People's Republic and the ČSSR had an extensive list of unresolved neighborly issues, consistently discussed in meetings between both countries' delegations. A prominent issue was the movement of individuals between the Polish People's Republic and the ČSSR. This was impeded by Prague's decision, sustained since 1981, to suspend the 1959 Convention on Local Border Traffic and the 1977 Agreement on the Facilitation of the Movement of Persons. This decision stemmed from Prague's apprehensions about the spread of the Polish Solidarity movement into the ČSSR. As a result, family interactions, access to borderland, and cooperation between towns and provinces, which Poland favored, were restricted²⁴. During the 1980s, as environmental awareness grew and environmental organizations became more active in the Eastern Bloc, the topic of compensation for pollution became prominent. This was particularly due to the concentration of industry in border areas, such as the ČSSR's contamination of the Oder River waters with petroleum products. Regrettably, since 1986, diplomatic efforts from the Polish side regarding issues such as the construction of a landfill site for post-production waste near Kudowa Zdrój, or the building of a coking plant in Stonava²⁵, have been unsuccessful. These projects posed threats to the Beskid ecological system and the spa in Ustroń Śląski. The territorial compensation through land exchange, agreed upon in the 1958 agreement concerning the final demarcation of the state border, also remains unresolved. Moreover, the issue of water management in the border waters has yet to be settled.

The evaluations of the situation in the ČSSR and the overview of unresolved issues in bilateral relations served as the foundation for discussions during the regular meetings between the first secretaries of the communist parties of the Polish People's Republic and the ČSSR. These talks were scheduled to take place in Prague at the start of the year. As was the norm before such meetings, the First Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs prepared talking points for the discussions with Poland's second most significant economic partner after the USSR, a neighbor keen on maintaining its post-war borders. The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs acknowledged that the reforms in Poland and the *prestavba* in the ČSSR had led to some misunderstandings due to their differing rates of implementation. However, they advised addressing these misunderstandings by rejuvenating govern-

²⁴ For more on the issues related to the restriction of movement of persons and local border traffic on the Polish-Czechoslovak border, see J. Rychlík, *Cestovní styk mezi Československem a Polskem v letech 1948–1989*, in: *Česká v polská historická tradice a její vztahy k současnosti*, ed. D. Hrodek, Praha 2003, pp. 127–140; idem, *Cestování do ciziny v habsburské monarchii a v Československu. Pasová, vízová a vstěhovatelská politika 1848–1989*, Praha 2007.

²⁵ "Gazeta Wyborcza", 16.08.1989, *Zagrozenie ekologiczne i kontrrewolucyjne*. Charter 77 sent an open letter to the Czechoslovak authorities and the public on 8 August 1989, supporting the environmentalists' demands for the construction of a coking plant.

ment contacts, fostering connections at lower party levels, and adopting an objective information policy²⁶. The document highlighted numerous challenges to address, including accelerating economic integration through means such as establishing joint ventures, regulating exchange rates, enhancing environmental protection, and restarting passenger traffic. It was noted that the public perception of reducing this traffic was negative and counterproductive to the professed friendship between the two nations. The Polish representatives underscored the importance of enhancing youth exchange programmes and finalizing an agreement on personal and scholarship exchanges, as well as bolstering cultural cooperation. Interestingly, the ongoing delay in publishing the Polish-Czech and Czech-Polish dictionary was a point of concern and criticism within the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The challenges in Polish-Czechoslovak cooperation were set to become focal points for the Polish embassy in Prague in 1989²⁷. Given the negative portrayal of Poland and its citizens in the media influenced by the KSC, especially reminiscent of the strained relations during 1980–1981, Polish diplomats were charged with countering this propaganda. Their strategy included engaging with influential figures in the ČSSR and members of the diplomatic corps in Prague, aiming to present an accurate representation of Poland and the ongoing transformations within the nation.

A platform to address these contentious issues within the KSC leadership was provided during Wojciech Jaruzelski's discussions with Miloš Jakeš and Gustáv Husák in Prague on 1 February 1989, during a one-day working visit. The Polish delegation included Józef Czyrek, a member of the Politburo and Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party; Bogusław Kołodziejczak, a member of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party; and Deputy Prime Minister Janusz Patorski²⁸. A primary objective of the Prague visit was to allay the concerns of the Czechoslovak comrades regarding the announcement of round-table discussions and the inclusion of the opposition. The aim was to assure them that socialism in Poland remained intact. Furthermore, to strengthen ties between the two Communist parties, a proposal was made to the KSC to sign a cooperation agreement at a higher level. Jaruzelski emphasized the significant membership and societal influence of the Polish United Workers' Party. He articulated the necessity for a round table and deliberations on political and trade union pluralism in Poland, describing it as a vital compromise and a response to the deteriorating economic situation and rising inflation. While it is challenging to determine

²⁶ AMSZ, First Department 37/93, vol. 2, Theses for talks between the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, Chairman of the Council of State of the Polish People's Republic Wojciech Jaruzelski and General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Miloš Jakeš, First Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Warsaw 26.01.1989.

²⁷ AMSZ, First Department 37/92, vol. 2, Plan of work of the Embassy of the Polish People's Republic in Prague for 1989.

²⁸ AMSZ, First Department 37/93, vol. 2, Information on the visit of the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party Wojciech Jaruzelski to Prague on 1 February 1989 sent by the head of the Foreign Department of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party Ernest Kucz to the Director of the First Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Władysław Napieraj; Communication on the visit of the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, Chairman of the State Council of the Polish People's Republic Wojciech Jaruzelski to Czechoslovakia Prague 1.02.1989, "Collection of Documents" PISM, No. 1, 1990, pp. 96–99; "Rude právo" 2.02.1989.

if the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party managed to mitigate the ČSSR's reservations towards Solidarity and the Polish Catholic Church, Jaruzelski certainly tried. He sought to convince his counterparts that Solidarity had evolved and, once legalized, would neither be anti-Soviet nor garner the same widespread support as in 1981. Jaruzelski indicated that the Church's stance towards the USSR had shifted due to the Vatican's eastern policy, and the ecclesiastical hierarchy, keen on maintaining peace in Poland, was moderating its opposition. Jaruzelski praised the state of Polish-Czechoslovak economic ties but identified currency and pricing issues as barriers to deeper integration. He also highlighted the importance of pivoting industrial production towards civilian needs instead of armaments²⁹.

A closer examination of the briefing note from the Jaruzelski-Jakeš meeting offers a glimpse into the genuine sentiments of the KSC leadership. They were acutely aware of the impact that the situation in Poland had on the ČSSR and acknowledged the errors made in handling the opposition, particularly the use of force during anniversary demonstrations in Czechoslovakia in 1988 and early 1989. On two significant matters for Poland, the Czechoslovak counterpart displayed less sympathy. Jakeš claimed that Czech television aired Polish films and unbiased content about Poland, a perspective that clearly differed from the Polish viewpoint. Regarding the border opening, there was no evident advancement. Jakeš deemed it appropriate to subject Polish tourists to customs checks, attributing market shortages to them. The briefing note's concluding remarks on the ČSSR's situation highlighted that the transition in Czechoslovakia was gradual and primarily focused on economic reform. The note also proposed a step-by-step approach to alter the ČSSR's stance on passenger movement across the Polish-Czechoslovak border³⁰.

Insightful remarks about Jaruzelski's visit were relayed by Polish diplomats in a dispatch sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, based on feedback from Western diplomats stationed in Prague³¹. The visit garnered significant attention, particularly from Western diplomats. They noted not just the understated protocol and its working nature, but also its timing – shortly after the anniversary demonstrations marking the tragic death of Jan Palach and amidst heightened tensions between the Communist authorities and Primate František Tomášek. These diplomats speculated that this visit, along with the anticipated arrival of Wiktor Grosz, aimed to nudge the ČSSR leadership towards a more adaptable approach in foreign policy. However, this interpretation seemed misaligned with the objectives of the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party.

In February 1989, the tone of the head of Polish diplomacy, Tadeusz Olechowski, shifted. In his parliamentary address, he viewed perestroika as a revolutionary overhaul set to enhance and stabilize the international climate. Concurrently, he announced the adapta-

²⁹ Data for 1988 show that exports from the Polish People's Republic in the ČSSR amounted to 359,139 million roubles while imports were at 335,978 million roubles, "Statistical Yearbook" 1989, pp. 370–371. Despite these indicators, the Polish embassy's evaluation of the trade conditions was negative. This was due to the worsening market situation in the ČSSR, the Czechoslovak government's investment cutbacks, and the frequent fluctuations in the zloty-koruna-rouble exchange rate, which disadvantaged the Polish side, AAN, KC PZPR, Ref. No. LXXVII-8, Minutes 3/89 of the meeting of the Executive Board of the Polish United Workers' Party Committee in Prague, 21.02.1989

³⁰ AMSZ, First Department 37/93, vol. 2, Information on the visit of the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, Wojciech Jaruzelski to Prague, op. cit.

³¹ AMSZ, Incoming Dispatch – Prague 24/91, vol. 19, vol. 1, Ciphertext 1793, 3.02.1989.

tion of collaboration methods with socialist states in response to Eastern Bloc changes. He emphasized the unique position of the GDR and ČSSR in Polish foreign policy, describing them as close neighbors and allies with whom relations and cooperation should rapidly take on a new quality³².

In reality, the proclaimed neighborly cooperation was increasingly under strain. One challenge was the complex negotiations regarding environmental protection, which was deteriorating due to the economic policies pursued in the ČSSR. On 28 February 1989, prompted by the Czechoslovak side, a working meeting took place in Ostrava between the Polish deputy minister for the environment and natural resources and his Czechoslovak counterpart³³. The discussions centered on organizing an international conference involving the Prime Ministers of the bordering states with the ČSSR. This was to discuss the foundations of a tripartite agreement between the Polish People's Republic, the ČSSR, and the GDR on environmental protection and contentious issues. The Polish side had made similar proposals. Even before the June parliamentary elections, on 17 May 1989, the then Prime Minister of the Polish People's Republic, Mieczysław F. Rakowski, extended an invitation to the ČSSR Prime Minister Adamec, asking him to visit Poland immediately after the elections and the formation of the Polish government³⁴. In his letter, Rakowski emphasised that environmental issues greatly concerned the Polish public and adversely affected the longstanding friendship between the two countries. It was suggested to the Prague government that a trilateral agreement between the PRL-ČSSR-GDR on environmental cooperation be signed in Jelenia Góra. This would pledge to rectify ecological damage in line with international law principles³⁵. No progress in the implementation of the Polish environmental demands almost resulted in the failure of the Prague meeting to which L. Adamec had invited leaders from seven countries. Following discussions between Adamec and the Polish Deputy Minister for the Environment and Natural Resources, Józef Koziół, the meeting eventually occurred in Prague from 28–30 May 1989. This provided an opportunity for independent environmental groups to stage a demonstration by mothers (Pražské matky) who, pushing prams, highlighted the effects of environmental pollution on the health of their children and future generations. An upsurge of environmental protests also swept the country in November 1989. As Milan Otáhal notes, the environmental move-

³² Speech in the Sejm by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Tadeusz Olechowski on the sentences and directions of Polish foreign policy, Warsaw 24.02.1989, "Collection of Documents" PISM, No. 1, 1990, pp. 31–49; for more on the reorientation of Polish foreign policy, its de-ideologisation, sovereignty, see K. Skubiszewski, *Polityka zagraniczna i odzyskanie niepodległości. Przemówienia, oświadczenia, wywiady 1989–1993*, Warsaw 1997, pp. 11–28.

³³ AAN, KC PZPR, Ref. No. LXXVII-31, Study of the Polish People's Republic embassy in Prague on Polish-Czechoslovak relations in the first half of 1989; A. Szczepańska, *Oficjalne relacje polsko-czechosłowackie w latach 1980–1989 w świetle raportów ambasady PRL w Pradze*, "Przegląd Zachodniopomorski" 2010, vol. 4, pp. 77–79.

³⁴ AMSZ, First Department 37/93, vol. 2, Letter of Prime Minister of the Polish People's Republic, M.F. Rakowski to Prime Minister of the ČSSR, L. Adamec, Warsaw 17.05.1989. The Polish Prime Minister sought prompt clarification on the issues in bilateral relations. To expedite the meeting, he authorised a letter and delegated the negotiation task to his personal representative, the Minister for the Environment and Natural Resources, Józef Koziół.

³⁵ The definitive agreement on environmental cooperation was signed in Wrocław on 1 July 1989 by representatives from the ČSSR government, L. Adamec, the Polish People's Republic government, M.F. Rakowski, and the GDR government, Willy Stoph.

ments in the ČSSR marked the earliest instances of public activism post-1968 and signaled the commencement of civil society's construction³⁶.

The deteriorating state of the environment, coupled with growing public awareness, meant that many independent groups formed in the ČSSR included ecological concerns in their programs³⁷. In 1981, Charter 77 activists compiled a report on the environmental situation, which was published in Letters on 11 November. By 1987, young opposition members had established the Environmental Forum under Charter 77. Hard-line KSC activists, particularly those around Bil'ak, viewed environmentalists as adversaries of socialism. This stance became challenging to uphold after a confidential report on the environmental situation was released in 1983 in the periodical "Informace pro Chartě". This report, prepared by the Ecology Section of the Biological Society of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences at the government's request, was later published in 1984 in "Le Monde". Perestroika, the suppression of the truth regarding the Chernobyl disaster, and the rising influence of the Green Party in the West all contributed to a surge in the activities of environmental groups during the latter half of the 1980s. This upswing included joint initiatives to protect the climate, spearheaded by the Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity in the borderlands.

Warsaw-Prague after the June 1989 Elections

The situation in Czechoslovakia during the period under discussion was aptly described in the memoirs of Vacláv Svatek, a Czechoslovak diplomat in the Polish People's Republic. He served as the cultural counsellor at the embassy in Prague and later became the director of the Centre for Culture and Information (KIS). He referred to his country as a "lonely fortress of real socialism". His critical remarks pertained to the situation in the ČSSR following the June 1989 elections in Poland. According to Svatek, the authorities in Prague failed to draw any lessons from these events and did not engage in dialogue with the opposition³⁸.

Given the traditional representational and informational roles of diplomats, the ambassador of the Polish People's Republic in Prague, Włodzimierz Mokrzyśczak, was duty-bound to liaise with representatives of the Czechoslovak government and the KSC leadership to communicate the stance of the Polish People's Republic authorities. Conversely, the ambassador was a crucial informant on the views held by the Czechoslovak authorities regarding the transformations occurring in Poland³⁹. It is enlightening to examine the in-

³⁶ M. Otahal, *Opoziční proudy v české společnosti*, Praha 2011, pp. 549–555.

³⁷ M. Vaněk M., *Nedalo se tady dýchat. Ekologie v českých zemích v letech 1968 až 1989*, Praha 2022, pp. 115–234. The first environmental organisations, both official and state-licensed, were established in the ČSSR as early as the 1970s.

³⁸ V. Svatek, *Od Husáka k Havlovi aneb Čech ve Varšavi: vzpomínkový diplomata z let 1980–1992*, Praha 2009, pp. 124–147; Viliam Horňák coined the term "two blocs in one camp" to describe the unique alliance of countries, namely the ČSSR, GDR, and Romania, which were sceptical of perestroika., idem, *Československo mezi přestavbou a revolucí. Politický deník 1987–1991*, díl. I, *Přestavba*, Praha 1991, pp. 26–27.

³⁹ NA ČR, ÚV KSC, 02/1, P 127/89/2, PUV 25. 8. 1989, Information on a conversation between the Polish People's Republic ambassador in Prague, S. W. Mokrzyśczak with J. Lenart, Secretary of the Central Committee of the KSC, Prague 23.08.1989. The conversation focused on the position of both countries on the Romanian

formation and insights relayed from Prague to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw to grasp just how conservative the ČSSR leadership's stance was. According to the Polish ambassador, the KSČ leadership acknowledged the situation post the June elections and the subsequent appointment of Tadeusz Mazowiecki as Prime Minister, but only as fait accompli. This stance was further evidenced by the Prague authorities' hesitancy to inform Polish diplomats about Polish citizens detained during the demonstrations on 21 August 1989. This date marked the anniversary of the Warsaw Pact troops' entry into Czechoslovakia. Diplomats learned of the detention of their compatriots through unofficial means, complicating efforts to offer consular assistance to those detained⁴⁰.

Developments in Poland consistently raised concerns within the KSČ leadership, particularly given the increasing ease with which opposition activists in Poland, now parliamentarians, could liaise with Czechoslovak oppositionists and bolster their efforts towards democratization and pluralism in the ČSSR. Unofficial information received by Polish diplomats in Prague suggested that Miloš Jakeš enquired of Mikhail Gorbachev about the stance other Eastern Bloc nations should adopt concerning the changes occurring in Poland and Hungary. It seemed as though only a summit of the Warsaw Pact leaders might salvage socialism in the ČSSR⁴¹. As Mokrzyśczak noted, the mindset and propaganda direction of the KSČ leadership was most evident in the articles published in issue 36 of "Tribuna". This publication represented the voice of the KSČ's radical wing, which emerged post the Prague Spring suppression. It was staunchly anti-reformist, dogmatically upheld the party's stringent stance, and was headed by the former chief of the "Rudé právo" editorial board. On 6 September, the newspaper's front page showcased an article by Robert Dengler titled "Plurokomunismus"⁴². The author perceived the situation in Poland as unparalleled and inappropriate for adoption in other Eastern Bloc nations. Furthermore, he advocated for mobilizing the working populace to defend and advance socialism. Given the ongoing shifts in an unstable Polish People's Republic, such a stance seems somewhat detached from reality.

initiative to provide aid to Poland in order to defend socialism; the Ambassador also asked about the fate of Poles arrested during demonstrations held in the ČSSR on the anniversary of the Warsaw Pact troops' intervention in Czechoslovakia.

⁴⁰ AMSZ, Incoming Dispatch – Prague 24/91, vol. 19, vol. 2, Ciphertext 2369, 22.08.1989; The arrested Poles were released after the intervention of Polish diplomats with the Prosecutor General of the ČSSR, *ibidem*, Ciphertext 2483/III, 24.08.1989.

⁴¹ AMSZ, Incoming Dispatch – Prague 24/91, vol. 19, vol. 2, Ciphertext 3517/III, 14.09.1989; *Zmierzch dyktatury...*, p. 252, document No. 140, 14 September 1989, Prague – Ciphertext of the Polish People's Republic Ambassador in Prague, Włodzimierz Mokrzyśczak, concerning the reaction in the ČSSR to events in Poland. Conversely, during discussions with Prime Minister Ladislav Adamec, it was evident that the Czechoslovak authorities were not prepared to compromise on the Stonava matter or the reparations for the pollution of the Oder River – *ibidem*, p. 267, document No. 143; 27 September 1989, Prague – Ciphertext of the Polish People's Republic Ambassador in Prague, Włodzimierz Mokrzyśczak, concerning the conversation with ČSSR Prime Minister Ladislav Adamec; V. Svatek, *Od Husaka k Havlovi...*, p. 124; *Informator o stosunkach polsko-czechosłowackich...*, pp. 107–108.

⁴² "Tribuna" 6.09.1989. The content of the articles in issue 36 of "Tribuna" and their anti-Polish message was the subject of a press note from the Polish People's Republic Embassy in Prague of 14.09.1989 to the Director of the Press and Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding media reports in the ČSSR about Poland – AAN, KC PZPR, Ref. No. LXXVII-728; J. Železný, *Vznik týdeníku Tribuna jako první legální tiskové platformy antireformních sil v roce 1969*, "Sborník Národního Muzea v Praze", řada C. Literární historie 2012, sv. 57, č. 4, pp. 53–57.

Mieczysław Rakowski shared a similar perspective on the “Tribuna” publication⁴³. The First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party visited Prague on 25 September 1989, following an invitation from the Czechoslovak authorities. During his brief yet intensive working visit, he engaged in discussions with his counterpart, the First Secretary of the KSČ, Miloš Jakeš, as well as with President Gustáv Husák and Prime Minister Ladislav Adamec. Rakowski’s memoirs offer scant details about this visit, which is unexpected given his lengthy private conversation with Jakeš, spanning three and a half hours⁴⁴. Their discussions encompassed the economic landscape of Czechoslovakia, the ongoing reformative actions, and the anticipated outcomes, which Rakowski’s interlocutors believed would be prosperous shops ensuring societal harmony. However, according to Rakowski, the Czechoslovak comrades only displayed genuine concern when discussing the intellectual opposition and the potential shift in the Kremlin’s stance on the Prague Spring, as well as a re-evaluation of the legitimacy of the Warsaw Pact troops’ intervention in Czechoslovakia.

Rakowski’s discussions in Prague are elaborated upon more comprehensively and in greater detail in a report on his visit, housed in the collection of the National Archives of the Czech Republic in Prague. This report has been referenced by Prof. Jan Rychlík in his publications⁴⁵. The diminishing influence of the Polish United Workers’ Party, not just domestically but also within the socialist bloc, coupled with the mistrust shown by the communist leadership – exemplified by the Romanian authorities’⁴⁶ stance against the formation of Tadeusz Mazowiecki’s coalition government – compelled the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers’ Party to not only seek support from Prague’s conservative party and state leadership but also to make candid remarks, some of which were not particularly complimentary towards his own nation. Of the myriad topics broached during the meeting, Poland’s stance on the tragic events of 1968 emerged as significant, especially in light of the Polish parliament’s resolution condemning the harsh intervention in Czechoslovakia – a resolution Rakowski had

⁴³ In his memoirs, Rakowski cites an article by Vladimir Petlak, published in the same issue of “Tribuna”, in which the author does not believe in the renewal or reconstruction of socialism in Poland – M.F. Rakowski, *Dzienniki polityczne 1987–1990*, Warsaw 2005, pp. 528–529.

⁴⁴ M.F. Rakowski, *Dzienniki polityczne 1987–1990...*, pp. 528–530; “Rude právo” 26.09.1989, an article discussing Rakowski’s visit and the press conference was entitled “The Initiating Role of the KSČ and the Polish United Workers’ Party in Czechoslovak-Polish Relations”.

⁴⁵ NA ČR, ÚV KSČ, 02/1, P 132/89/2, PÚV 29.09.1989, bod. 8, č. 8686, Report on the course of the friendly working visit of the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party, M. Rakowski, to the KSČ, appended to the Report of M. Jakeš to the Presidium of the Central Committee of the KSČ on the discussion with the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers’ Party, M. Rakowski, during his visit to Prague, during which he informed about the political situation in Poland; cf. also J. Rychlík, *Československo a změny ve východní Evropě...*, document No. 8, pp. 200–209.

⁴⁶ On 19 August 1989, Ambassador Woźniak of the Polish People’s Republic in Bucharest was summoned to the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where the Soviet ambassador was already present, and was handed the contents of an appeal addressed by the Romanian government to the Polish authorities and to the leaders of other socialist countries, calling for the defence of socialism in Poland and not allowing the formation of the Mazowiecki government – K. Nowak, *Dyplomacja Nicolae Ceaușescu wobec przemian politycznych w Polsce w roku 1989 r.*, “Studia Środkowoeuropejskie i Bałkanistyczne” 2021, vol. 19, pp. 245–253; *Zmierzch dyktatury...*, p. 252, document No. 140, 14 September 1989, Prague – Ciphertex of the Polish People’s Republic Ambassador in Prague, Włodzimierz Mokrzyśszczak, concerning the reaction in the ČSSR to events in Poland.

opposed⁴⁷. He viewed this as potentially igniting a Polish-Czechoslovak conflict rooted in historical differences. Seemingly affirming his concerns, he criticized the Mazowiecki government for not just its amateurish approach but also its inclination to revert to the Beck foreign policy, which could understandably be perceived in Prague in the most negative light. However, as we recognize today, Rakowski's apprehensions did not materialize, and historical disagreements remained dormant.

In the autumn of 1989, as the situation within the ČSSR and its international ties evolved, Polish diplomats in Czechoslovakia observed that alongside the previously prevalent critical opinions regarding the inclusion of the opposition in Polish governance – which served as cautionary tales against swift and radical reforms in the ČSSR – there emerged more independent and objective assessments of the state of affairs in the Polish People's Republic, particularly among younger journalists. Beyond the grim portrayals of the Polish economy, the daily press largely presented unembellished facts without commentary or judgement. Moreover, in the latter half of 1989, there was a noticeable uptick in media narratives painting Polish tourists as traders and opportunists⁴⁸. The embassy of the Polish People's Republic identified potential avenues to diversify the sources of information about Poland. They endeavored to supply more current informational materials and facilitated study trips for Czechoslovak journalists to Poland. Additionally, the Propaganda Team at the Polish People's Republic Embassy in Prague was revitalized, and a strategy for propaganda and informational initiatives was formulated. It is challenging to determine the precise influence of the embassy's actions on the media's portrayal of Poland. However, it is undeniable that following the establishment of Tadeusz Mazowiecki's government, the frequency of articles in "Rudé právo" about Poland diminished considerably. Over time, the focus shifted to the escalating tensions within Czechoslovakia itself. Only after 17 November 1989 did Polish diplomats and consuls discern a significant thaw in official Polish-Czechoslovak relations. Consular representatives in both Prague and Slovakia experienced a more receptive and open attitude towards direct engagements from the new party leadership⁴⁹.

⁴⁷ Statement of the Sejm of the People's Republic of Poland in connection with the 21st anniversary of the intervention of the Warsaw Pact troops in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, Warsaw 17.08.1989, "Collection of Documents" PISM, No. 3, 1990, p. 11; AMSZ, Fist Department 37/93, vol. 2, Information from the Marshal of the Senate to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Krzysztof Skubiszewski, on the meeting with the Ambassador of the ČSSR, Warsaw, 12.02.1989. On 11 September 1989, Marshal of the Senate Prof. Andrzej Stelmachowski met with Ambassador J. Havlin. The visit was a courtesy visit, but the issue of a resolution of the Polish Parliament condemning the intervention of Warsaw Pact troops in 1968 as a violation of the inalienable rights of peoples to self-determination was raised; "Rude právo" on 19.08.1989 published a statement by both chambers of the ČSSR Parliament on the resolution of the Sejm and Senate of the Polish People's Republic denying the right to assess Czechoslovak history. Adam Michnik, in his article *Zamiast z czolgami idziemy z kwiatami* ("Gazeta Wyborcza", 25.08.1989), wrote about the ČSSR authorities regarding the Polish parliament's resolution as interference in Czechoslovakia's internal affairs, while the appointment of T. Mazowiecki's government as a slow dismantling of socialism. According to the editor, change in Poland and other countries was inevitable and involved finding ways to move to a system of parliamentary democracy.

⁴⁸ AAN, KC PZPR, Ref. No. LXXVI-728, Note from the Embassy in Prague to the Director of the Press and Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding media reports on Poland, 14.09.1989; AMSZ, Consular Department 29/97, vol. 18, Consular Report of the Consular Section of the Polish Embassy in Prague for 1989, Prague 18.01.1990; *ibidem*, Consular Report of the KG RP in Ostrava for 1989, Ostrava 24.01.1990.

⁴⁹ AMSZ, Consular Department 29/97, vol. 18, Report of the KG in Bratislava for 1989.

The Velvet Revolution through the Eyes of Polish People's Republic Diplomats

The swift political transformation in Czechoslovakia after 17 November 1989, instigated by societal demonstrations against the outcomes of the so-called reconstruction, led to the downfall of the communist power monopoly. This initiated the transition to parliamentary democracy in a non-confrontational manner. The Civic Forum in the Czech Republic and the Public Against Violence in Slovakia assumed power through a gentle revolution, known as the Velvet Revolution. This revolution instigated significant institutional and personnel shifts at the top tiers of the federal government, as well as within the Czech Republic and Slovakia. It is crucial to highlight Moscow's non-response to these events and the Soviet leadership's commitment to the principle of non-interference in the domestic matters of the USSR's satellite states. They hoped the KSC leadership would recognize the urgency for profound reforms⁵⁰. The geopolitical shifts concerning Czechoslovakia, coupled with the hastening democratization in Poland and Hungary, left no doubt that a peaceful revolution was imperative in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

A poignant yet hopeful message for tangible change in Czechoslovakia is captured in "Gazeta Wyborcza". It depicts the swift alterations occurring in government and the burgeoning activism of the Czech and Slovak people⁵¹.

Such detailed coverage is hard to find in the reports about the ČSSR situation sent from the Polish embassy to Warsaw in November 1989. However, even then, Polish diplomats leaned in favor of the protesting opposition, criticizing the Czechoslovak leaders for their sluggish pace of reforms and their underestimation of the opposition's significance. The initial ciphertex dispatched from the Polish People's Republic embassy in Prague to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is dated 22 November. It pertains to a statement made at the embassy by 61 Polish students in the ČSSR, expressing solidarity with their peers who demonstrated in Prague on 17 November⁵². Later dispatches to Warsaw were predominantly informational, focusing primarily on the shifts in state and KSC leadership. They also touched upon the socio-political climate, highlighting the role of creative, artistic, and academic communities in the systemic transition and the rise of political parties with non-Marxist leanings⁵³. Special attention was given to the events of 27 November in Prague, marked by a general strike and a gathering graced by Vaclav Havel, who received applause at the National Theatre⁵⁴. A defining feature of the events, as observed by Polish diplomats, was their serene nature. Subsequent achievements of the Civic Forum, such as the presidential role transition, the dissolution of the people's militia, democratization, and shifts in the state's official stance on the Prague Spring, did not, in the view of Polish diplomats, lead to a heightened atmosphere of retaliation against the KSC leadership⁵⁵.

⁵⁰ B. Blehova, *Michail Gorbačëv...*, pp. 364–367.

⁵¹ "Gazeta Wyborcza", 20.11.1989, No. 138, *W Pradze wrze*; "Gazeta Wyborcza", 30.11.1989, No. 146, *Sprintem od komunizmu, Polska 10 lat, Węgry 10 miesięcy, NRD 10 tygodni CSRS 10 dni*; "Gazeta Wyborcza", 12.12.198, No. 155, *Havel na Hrad*.

⁵² AMSZ, Incoming Dispatch – Prague 24/91, vol. 19, vol. 2, Ciphertext 2412/IV, 22.11.1989.

⁵³ Ibidem, Ciphertext 2484, 23.11.1989; ibidem, Ciphertext 2537/IV, 24.11.198.

⁵⁴ Ibidem, Ciphertext 2656/IV dated 27.11.1989; ibidem, Ciphertext 2670/IV, 27.11.1989; ibidem, Ciphertext 2727/IV, 27.11.1989.

⁵⁵ Ibidem, Ciphertext 2771/IV, 29.11.1989

More analytical content can be found in the reports and diplomatic notes sent from the Polish missions in the ČSSR in December 1989. The portrayal of the socio-political landscape in the ČSSR, as depicted by Polish diplomats and consuls, largely aligned with the descriptions in the dispatches. However, they characterised the pace of change post-17 November as swift, catching the KSČ leadership off guard. This rapid change led to their international isolation and compounded the pressure from widespread protests⁵⁶. Reports from the Polish diplomatic and consular missions in the ČSSR criticised the KSČ's slow pace in implementing reforms and the tightly controlled democratisation processes, particularly in the cultural sector. This was swiftly capitalised on by the opposition, who demanded authentic reforms akin to those already seen in Poland and Hungary. Amidst the evolving scenario in the ČSSR, Polish diplomats identified both positive and negative elements that could influence bilateral relations and Polish interests. The parallel trajectories of political and social change were seen with optimism. They also recognised the potential for Polish firms to economically benefit from the reduced imports of goods to the ČSSR from the USSR, noting the complementary nature of both economies. Nevertheless, mutual biases and stereotypes persisted. These were exacerbated by the propagandistic portrayal of inflation and market shortages in Poland as arguments against swift economic transformation. Formally and legally, the ČSSR was behind Poland in this regard, continuing to restrict the autonomy of Czechoslovak businesses. As anticipated by the First Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish People's Republic, the ČSSR was on the brink of amending its constitution. This would involve renouncing the provisions about the KSČ's leadership role and initiating the withdrawal of Soviet troops. The perceived delays in the ČSSR's foreign policy changes were closely monitored. The Czechoslovak leadership was chided for not supporting the transformations occurring in the USSR, Poland, and Hungary. Hence, the Polish People's Republic embassy's 1989 report highlighted the positive shifts in Czechoslovak foreign policy towards the end of that year. This included a westward orientation, prioritising the recognition of post-war territorial boundaries, and the new administration's commitment to acknowledging the border along the Oder and Lusatian Neisse.

The swift and profound transformations during the Velvet Revolution in the ČSSR, coupled with many journalists siding with the opposition, hastened personnel changes in the leadership of Czechoslovak media. This included the press (with the exception of "Rudé právo" and some local newspapers), radio, and television. From December 1989, publications in "Lidové noviny" and "Veřejnosti" became possible. Despite the hopes Polish diplomats in the ČSSR had pinned on these staffing shifts, the narrative regarding the situation in Poland altered minimally. For one, the Czechoslovak media, engrossed with do-

⁵⁶ AMSZ, First Department, 38/93, vol. 1, Political Report of the Embassy of the Polish People's Republic in Prague for 1989; *ibidem*, Information Note concerning the current socio-political situation in Czechoslovakia and Polish-Czechoslovak bilateral relations, First Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Warsaw 6.12.1989. The note pointed to the rapid and turbulent nature of the internal changes in the ČSSR – *It can be considered that the rapid process of regime change in the ČSSR is moving from the streets and squares to the socio-political instances and organisations*. In turn, according to the consul general of the Polish People's Republic in Bratislava, Antoni Górny, Slovak party activists were surprised by the rapid changes in their country, which the consul explained by their conservatism and sluggishness in carrying out reforms as well as their bad knowledge of the situation in neighbouring countries, cf. AMSZ, Consular Department 29/97, vol. 18, Note by Consul Antoni Górny and conclusions on changes in the socio-political situation in Slovakia, Bratislava 30.11.1989.

mestic events, showed diminished interest in international affairs. When they did cover foreign events, the focus was predominantly on the GDR and Romania⁵⁷. Furthermore, many reports from Poland, which painted a bleak picture of the market situation, were penned by previous correspondents like J. Lipavsky. He described the Civic Forum's economic programme as "experiments on living standards and a major operation risking inflation and unemployment", drawing parallels with the economic plight of Poland. It appears, however, that Polish diplomats formed their views based on media outlets antagonistic to the opposition. Consequently, the information relayed to the Press and Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw did not portray Poland and its citizens in a favourable light. The Czechoslovak media scarcely covered the support and empathy Poles felt for the Velvet Revolution. Instead, they highlighted stories of Poles escaping to the GDR, while downplaying the genuine issue of GDR citizens emigrating. Lastly, Polish diplomats found the Civic Forum's position disappointing. In an effort to allay its society's concerns, the Civic Forum refrained from referencing foreign (specifically Polish) influences on the reforms they were implementing. This was likely to avoid drawing comparisons with the economic outcomes of reforms in Poland.

Meanwhile, the informational notes drafted by the Polish Information and Culture Centre in Prague, regarding the cultural environment in the ČSSR, highlighted not just the direct involvement of cultural figures in opposition activities, but also the extensive support from the cultural community for student strikes⁵⁸. Theatres, galleries, and art institutions transformed into hubs for the Civic Forum and meeting points for people, bolstering the stature of the cultural community in the public's eyes. The staff at the Polish Information and Culture Centre were optimistic about the potential de-ideologisation of cultural policies, the termination of censorship, and a broader embrace of Western culture. Given this context, they suggested modifications to the Polish cultural offerings for the Czechoslovak market. This revised offering was to feature avant-garde pieces, contemporary artists, and even those from the emigrant community. The Polish Information and Culture Centre had plans to showcase the works of Stanisław Mrożek, as well as films by Krzysztof Kieślowski.

The close of 1989 offered high hopes for ushering in a new era in neighbourly relations, aiming to achieve full sovereignty, which, as we recognise today, still required time. However, there remained a significant backlog of unresolved issues and emerging challenges in mutual cooperation, such as the matter of German unity, regional collaboration, and finally the change of mutual stereotypes. In December 1989, consultative discussions were held between representatives of the Polish and Czechoslovak foreign ministries. These were in preparation for a visit to Warsaw, scheduled for January 1990, by the head of ČSSR diplomacy, Jiří Dienstbier⁵⁹. This meeting, held in Prague, had an extensive agenda. Topics

⁵⁷ AMSZ, Department of Press Cultural and Scientific Cooperation (hereafter: DPWkiN) 117/13, vol. 43, Note of the Embassy of the Polish People's Republic in Prague on the presence of Polish issues in the Czechoslovak mass media in the fourth quarter of 1989, Prague, 21.12.1989.

⁵⁸ AMSZ, DPWkiN 117/13, vol. 43, Information note of the OIKP in Prague on the situation in the ČSSR cultural environment, Prague, 6.12.1989.

⁵⁹ AMSZ, First Department 37/93, vol. 2, Consultations of Foreign Ministry State Secretary B. Kulski with the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the ČSSR, Pavel Sadvský, 11–13.12.1989 in Prague; AMZV, Dokumentace Teritoriálních Odborů 1945–1989, box 67, Consultations of the MFA of Poland and Czechoslovakia, Deputy Minister of the FMZV Pavel Sadvsky and Secretary General of the MFA B. Kulského, Prague 11–13 December 1989; AMSZ, First Department 37/93, vol. 2, Information note of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

ranged from the ČSSR's material responsibility for pollution damage and the resumption of passenger traffic on the Polish-Czechoslovak border, to acknowledging German reunification as a natural facet of European integration, all the while affirming the sanctity of the post-war borders. Polish diplomats believed that addressing such challenging subjects showcased the goodwill of the newly formed government of national accord in Prague towards resolving outstanding issues in their bilateral relations. Conversely, it was noted that both the Civic Forum and the KSČ distanced themselves from Poland's approach to systemic transformation, given its significant economic and social implications. This somewhat sceptical view of the initial phase of Poland's transformation might have either facilitated or impeded the growing closeness between Warsaw and Prague. The alternative for Prague was strengthening ties with Austria, Federal Republic of Germany, and Hungary. Deputy Foreign Minister Bolesław Kułski, however, remained uncertain about the permanence of the changes occurring in the ČSSR, even with the recent establishment of Marián Čalfa's government of national accord.

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