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## The Relations between Poland and the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic in the first Years after the Collapse of the Communism System in the Context of the European Integration Process (1990-1993)<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

In the second half of 1989 new governments were established, first in Warsaw, then in Prague, in which communists no longer played the major role. It might have seemed at that time that there was an opportunity to achieve new quality in mutual relations. Instead of alleged friendship between the nations building socialism, declared by consecutive leaders of the Polish United Workers' Party (Polish abbreviation: PZPR) and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ), an opportunity emerged to build real and close cooperation, initiated by Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity, an opposition organization referring to the tradition of two meetings of activists of Charter 77 and KSS "KOR" in the Karkonosze Mountains in 1978.<sup>2</sup> In the second half of the 1980s its members tried to strengthen the relations between opposition environments in both countries and at the beginning of November 1989 – literally on the eve of the outbreak of the Velvet Revolution – they managed to organize the Festival of Independent Czechoslovak Culture in Wrocław, as well as an international seminar titled "Central Europe. Culture at the Crossroads – between Totalitarianism and Commercialism", attended by approximately a thousand of Czechoslovak citizens. Almost immediately after the collapse of the communist dictatorship by the Vltava River, on 21<sup>st</sup> December 1989 a meeting was held in Czech

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1 The article was written as part of NCN grant "Coalition governments in Poland in 1989-2001" UMO-2019/35/B/HS3/02406.

2 P. Blažek, *Setkání představitelů československé a polské opozice na státních hranicích 1978-1989*, [in:] Dalibor Hrodek (ed.) *Česká a polská historická tradice a její vztah k současnosti. Pardubická konference (18. –20. duben 2002)*, Praha 2003, pp. 177–209.

Teschen of “Solidarity” members of parliament and representatives of Civic Forum, at which prospects of close cooperation between both countries were discussed.

In spite of these actions, it remained clear that the history of mutual relations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was burdened with such dramatic events as the military conflict of 1919, the annexation of the Zaolzie region in 1938, another border dispute after the end of the Second World War, or the participation of the Polish People’s Army troops in the military intervention of the Warsaw Treaty in Czechoslovakia in 1968.<sup>3</sup> The last burden was eased by the declaration of the Contract Sejm of 17<sup>th</sup> August 1989, in which the above military operation was explicitly condemned<sup>4</sup>. Although the official reaction of the authorities in Prague, where the communists were still in power, was icy, the situation changed a few weeks later, when the Velvet Revolution opened the way to forming a new government by the Vltava River.

## 1. The First Contacts

However, the past problems were not the only elements hampering cooperation between Poland and Czechoslovakia after 1989. The new head of the Polish diplomacy, Krzysztof Skubiszewski, considered regional cooperation with Czechoslovakia and Hungary to be one of priorities of the Polish foreign policy. However, the summit meeting in Bratislava on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1990, in which Presidents, Prime Ministers and Ministers of Foreign Affairs of these three countries participated, did not end with any significant agreements, and Czechoslovak President, Václav Havel later stated that “the most significant thing about the Bratislava talks was that they took place”<sup>5</sup>. Reporting the course of the meeting at the government sitting, Minister Skubiszewski claimed, “Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs rejected our offer to prepare the Bratislava summit well (...). As a result, at some moments the talks were rather chaotic and some issues were not closed.(...) The difficulties faced by the Hungarian delegation were obvious, the election was coming, and it was clear that the government would change. The Czechs avoided topics which would specify the tri-lateral cooperation”<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, inter alia, the proposal put forward by Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki, to gradually eliminate restrictions in personal movement between Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary did not cause any reactions.

The next months brought three-sided meetings of, for example, Ministers of Finance and Defense, but they did not lead to the establishment of real political or eco-

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3 L. Kamiński, P. Błażek, G. Majewski, *Ponad granicami. Historia Solidarności Polsko-Czechosłowackiej*, Wrocław 2009; M. Przeperski, *Nieznosny ciężar braterstwa. Konflikty polsko-czeskie w XX wieku*, Kraków 2016.

4 *Stenography report from the 5<sup>th</sup> sitting of the Sejm of the Polish People’s Republic on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> August 1989*, pp. 135–136.

5 G. Lipiec, *Grupa Wyszehradzka: powstanie – rozwój – rozkład*, „Ad Meritum” 1995 No. 1, p. 72.

6 Archive of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers’ Office [AKPRM], *Transcript of the course of the sitting of the Council of Ministers on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1990*, pp. 5–7.

conomic cooperation until the end of 1990. It turned out that although Havel and the new head of the Czechoslovak diplomacy, Jiří Dienstbier participated in the activities of the Polish–Czechoslovak Solidarity in the 1980s, including also the secretive meetings of oppositionists from both countries in the Karkonosze Mountains, once they gained power after the Velvet Revolution, they were not inclined to implement the policy of rapprochement with the government in Warsaw. This was despite the fact that as early as in January 1990 Minister J. Dienstbier and then, several days later, V. Havel visited Warsaw. Havel was awarded with the possibility to address the joint sitting of both chambers of the Polish Parliament. “We should not compete to see who overtakes whom and who wins the place in one or another European organ” – Havel appealed in the speech which earned him a burst of tumultuous applause. He argued, “If each of us tries to return to Europe individually, this will probably last considerably longer (...) than when we do it in mutual agreement”<sup>7</sup>. The new President of Czechoslovakia aptly diagnosed then one of the main threats, since it was the rivalry between the countries to be the closest to the European Communities that hindered the development of regional cooperation.

In January 1990 Prime Minister T. Mazowiecki also visited Prague. The surprisingly frequent first contacts did not, however, yield any concrete results. It seems that apart from the already mentioned burden of difficult history, this situation could be caused also by Prague fears of Polish domination, which was probably strengthened by the idea of the Polish–Czechoslovak confederation suggested by Zbigniew Brzeziński. It was heavily criticized by both Havel and Dienstbier<sup>8</sup>. Although nobody in Poland considered it seriously, and even though during his January visit Mazowiecki clearly declared that his government had no such plans, his subsequent idea of establishing a free trade zone by three countries was initially resisted by the influential then Minister of Finance, Václav Klaus. “I remember when we were visited by Václav Klaus, (...) who was at that time afraid of opening the borders, as he believed that in the blink of an eye Poles would clear their market of all goods” – reported Jerzy Osiatyński, who was head of Central Planning Office in Mazowiecki’s government<sup>9</sup>.

Paweł Ukielski aptly observed that at that time both Prague and Budapest “paid more attention to cooperation within the *Quadrangonale* (and after Czechoslovakia accession in May 1990 – *Pentagonale*), an organization in which neither Hungarians nor Czechs or Slovaks saw a place for Poland”<sup>10</sup>. President Havel justified that at the already mentioned summit in Bratislava in 1990 in the following way, referring to distant history: “Since the zone of the Danube and the Adriatic cooperation was

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7 Stenography report from the 19<sup>th</sup> sitting of the Sejm on 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> January 1990, p. 85.

8 L. Lukášek, *Visegrádská skupina a její vývoj v letech 1991–2004*, Praha 2010, pp. 16–17.

9 A. Hall, J. Onyszkiewicz, J. Osiatyński, *Rząd Mazowieckiego widziany od środka*, „Więź” 2009 No. 8–9, p. 130.

10 P. Ukielski, *Europa Środkowa w polskiej myśli politycznej po 1989 roku*, [in:] P. Waingertner (ed.) *Polska wobec południowych sąsiadów w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej w XX wieku*, t. II, Łódź 2020, p. 121.

established. Poles know that they do not belong to this historic space”<sup>11</sup>. He suggested that Poland should concentrate on building a separate alliance of the Baltic Sea states. Such suggestions did not earn much sympathy or understanding among Poles, but there were far more differences.

The new ambassador, professor Jacek Baluch (specialist in Czech studies from Jagiellonian University, who replaced the former member of the Politburo of the Polish United Workers’ Party, Włodzimierz Mokrzyński), sent to Prague in April 1990, recalled that the beginning of his assignment was marked with a serious problem of “terrible image of Poland and Poles, imposed by the Czech and Slovakian communist propaganda on the society. (...) The condition of our border passes and our communication was terrible after years of mutual isolation. Our neighbors believed that Poles were buying out attractive goods in Czechoslovakia; the Polish side accused its neighbors of polluting the Oder River and causing the ecological catastrophe in the Poland–Czechoslovakia–East Germany triangle. Also the national minority issues called for regulation”<sup>12</sup>. The new ambassador of Czechoslovakia in Poland, a signatory of Charter 77 and an activist of Polish–Czechoslovak Solidarity, Markéta Fialková–Němcová, who arrived in Warsaw roughly at the same time as Baluch, did not have an easy task, either. She had to take part in a complicated game played by the governments in Warsaw, Prague and Budapest with the Kremlin, which, while agreeing to dismantle the communist regimes in Central Europe, assumed that it did not have to lead to the automatic liquidation of the Warsaw Treaty and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon).

## 2. The Dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty

On 7<sup>th</sup> June 1990 the Advisory Political Committee of the Warsaw Treaty met in Moscow. At the meeting, the Hungarian Prime Minister, József Antall stated that “the Warsaw Treaty should join the European system, whereas the military organization of the Warsaw Treaty is not needed and should be dissolved by the end of 1991”<sup>13</sup> Antall first presented this view on 22<sup>nd</sup> May in the Hungarian parliament. An opposite opinion was expressed by President Wojciech Jaruzelski, who headed the Polish delegation. He, like Gorbachev, believed that until the Europe-wide security system is established. “the existence of the Warsaw Treaty, treated as an agreement on collective self-defense, which covers both the military and political spheres, is justified”. President of Czechoslovakia, Václav Havel, presented a compromise, emphasizing that the

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11 Quoted after: M. Szczepaniak (ed.), *Państwa wszechradzkie. Systemy polityczne, gospodarka, współpraca*, Poznań 1996, p. 88.

12 J. Baluch, *Praga do więzienia!*, [in:] M. Maruszkin, K. Szaladziński (ed.), *Krzysztof Skubiszewski i dyplomacja czasów przelomu*, Poznań 2016, pp. 92–93.

13 Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs [AMSZ], case number 11/95, line 1, Information note on a meeting of the Advisory Political Committee of the Warsaw Treaty states in Moscow on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1990, p. 2.

Warsaw Treaty is “of temporary nature” and may still exist “as long as it is changed in a way that respects sovereignty of the parties and ceases to be a form of subordinating national armies”<sup>14</sup>. The most important agreement of the Moscow meeting was the appointment of a special commission which was to prepare the assumptions for reforming the Warsaw Treaty. The commission met three times (in Prague, Sofia and Warsaw), but the meetings revealed fundamental differences which made it impossible to develop a coherent project.

Commenting on the course of the summit, Minister Skubiszewski wrote in a confidential note: “Czechoslovakia and Hungary aim at quick dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty as an alliance and military structure. (...) Both countries seem to be ready to unilaterally move out of the Warsaw Treaty if the changes do not satisfy them”. In this context he believed that “the Polish government should not engage in the reconstruction of the disappearing alliance or support any proposals of structural changes voiced by the Polish People’s Republic in the past”<sup>15</sup>. Although Skubiszewski did not declare clear support for Budapest or Prague, the overtone of his arguments was unambiguous: Poland did not intend to defend “the disappearing alliance”. Skubiszewski expressed a similar opinion on this subject in mid-June at the sitting of the government, stating: “The Warsaw Treaty at this stage remains. But not for ever (...) In my opinion, Poland cannot perceive the role of the Warsaw Treaty differently. The Treaty may play some role in the reunification of Germany. As long as it exists, certain structural and doctrinal changes are needed (...) Therefore, Poland is sometimes presented on the international stage as a supporter of the further existence of the Treaty. Such an opinion cannot be expressed in one sentence. The picture which I have presented here is much more complex”<sup>16</sup>.

At the end of June 1990, in a conversation with the Czechoslovak Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Luboš Dobrovský, Minister Skubiszewski stated that “Poland will not prolong the existence of the Warsaw Treaty and does not consider it to be the base for future cooperation. Instead, we see bilateral cooperation with particular states, cooperation in the Poland-Czechoslovakia-Germany triangle, the Baltic cooperation and the European cooperation, especially leading us towards the European Communities”<sup>17</sup>. The evolution of the Polish position, significantly determined by fears related to the process of Germany reunification<sup>18</sup>, was a slow process, in line with the principle expressed by Minister Skubiszewski in a cryptogram sent at that time to ambassador Baluch: “I am against all contests in politics and diplomacy: who will be the first to join an organization or similar ones. I am for very concrete and close

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14 *Ibidem*, pp. 5–7.

15 *Ibidem*, pp. 12–13.

16 AKPRM, *Transcript of the course of the sitting of the Council of Ministers on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1990*, p. 8.

17 AMSZ, reference number 44/92, line 15, *S. Przygodzki’s cryptogram to J. Baluch*, No. 4247 from 29<sup>th</sup> June 1990, p. 98.

18 See A. Dudek, *Problem zachodniej granicy Polski oraz zjednoczenia Niemiec w polityce zagranicznej rządu Tadeusza Mazowieckiego (1989–1990)*, „Prace Historyczne. Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego” 2018 No. 145 (1).

cooperation with the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic, as well as with Hungary”<sup>19</sup>. This was visible, inter alia, in the position adopted by the Polish delegation in mid-July 1990 at the sitting of the Commission for changes to the Warsaw Treaty. It still tried to find the middle ground between the position of Hungary, which wanted to dissolve the Treaty completely before the end of 1991, and the USSR, which upheld the postulate of preserving it as a military alliance at least till the end of 1991, and further on as a political alliance. “The passivity of Hungary and the opportunism of Czechoslovakia hinder our negotiation activities, as they do not contribute to weakening the conservative approach of the USSR at this stage” – complained Jerzy M. Nowak, head of the Polish delegation, in a note summarizing the talks in Prague. However, in the light of the events that took place a few weeks later, it was him who adopted an opportunistic position towards the weakening Kremlin<sup>20</sup>.

The progressing internal crisis in the USSR, the signing of the Polish-German border treaty in November 1990, followed by the change of the government in Poland, which was the consequence of T. Mazowiecki’s loss in the presidential election, accelerated the evolution of the Polish position concerning the ultimate dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty. In reaction to the events in Lithuania, where in January 1991 Gorbachev decided to use force to stop independence aspirations, the authorities in Prague proposed to Hungary and Poland a joint withdrawal from the Warsaw Treaty. Although Poland objected to connecting what happened in Vilnius with the dissolution of the alliance, finally – at the meeting in Budapest on 21<sup>st</sup> January – Ministers of the above three countries supported the dissolution of the Treaty before the end of 1991, with a possibility of delaying this decision until March 1992. Simultaneously, in order to exert pressure on Moscow, it was decided that the three countries would withdraw from the Warsaw Treaty if the sitting of the Advisory Political Committee is not convened before the end of February 1991.

### 3. The Birth of the Visegrád Triangle

The rapprochement of Warsaw, Prague and Budapest was facilitated by the crisis of Pentagone, caused by the outbreak of the conflict in Yugoslavia. Therefore the governments in Budapest and, most of all, in Prague, once again looked more favorably to the proposals of formalizing three-sided cooperation put forward by the Polish authorities. Therefore, at the summit of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in Paris, in November 1990, Mazowiecki managed to convince both Havel and Antall to start negotiations on the declaration of regional cooperation<sup>21</sup>. Its content

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19 AMSZ, reference number 44/92, line 15, *The manuscript of K. Skubiszewski’s cryptogram to J. Baluch from 10<sup>th</sup> June 1990*, p. 78.

20 *The note from the sitting of the Commission for changes to the Warsaw Treaty, Prague 15<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> July 1990*, p. 5. I would like to thank professor S. Cenckiewicz for the access to this document from the Central Military Archive.

21 L. Lukášek, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

was the subject of the talks between heads of diplomacy of the three countries held at the end of January and the beginning of February 1991, with their final on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1991 in Visegrád near Budapest, where Wałęsa, Havel and Antall signed a declaration on “aspiration for European integration”. It announced that the agreeing countries would aim at eliminating the remains of the totalitarian system, building parliamentary democracy and free market economy and joining the European political and economic system”<sup>22</sup>. “Not resigning from our main goal, namely the full integration with Western Europe, through >small< integration we are offered an opportunity to prove our maturity and prepare for the meeting” – Jan Krzysztof Bielecki evaluated the summit<sup>23</sup>. In the light of this statement of the new Polish Prime Minister, we are forced to agree with Paweł Ukielski, who claims that in the Visegrád declaration “the field of cooperation was narrowed down to aspiration for the European integration. Obviously, this limitation cannot be analyzed separately from the geopolitical situation at that time – the signatories of the Declaration were afraid of the concept of establishing a separate integrating organization in Central Europe, whose existence could rule out the possibility of participating in Western integration processes. However, regardless of justifiable reasons for self-limitation of cooperation fields, one cannot fail to notice that it was not a community of identities but a community of goals”<sup>24</sup>. Another goal shared by Prague and Warsaw was the willingness to finally break formal ties with the USSR, which plunged into the aggravating internal crisis.

The February declaration gave rise to the Visegrád Triangle and then the Visegrád Group, which constituted another signal to the Kremlin that the alternative to the dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty, compromising to the USSR prestige, would be the withdrawal of consecutive countries from this alliance, especially as at the beginning of February Bulgaria signaled such an option. Therefore, Mikhail Gorbachev issued a letter to heads of member states in which he proposed quick liquidation of all military structures of the alliance and agreed to hold the meeting of the Advisory Political Committee. The Committee met in Budapest on 25<sup>th</sup> February and ended with the signing of the “protocol of repealing military agreements concluded within the Warsaw Treaty and the dissolution of its bodies and military structures”, which became effective on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1991. The USSR did not manage to preserve the Treaty as an alliance of purely political nature and on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1991 the protocol on its final dissolution was signed in Prague. On that day all Visegrád Group countries took a major step towards Western political and defense structures, but while the dissolution of the Treaty was preceded by the withdrawal of the soviet troops from the territories of Czechoslovakia and Hungary, in Poland this process was only beginning.

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22 P. Deszczyński, M. Szczepaniak, *Grupa Wyszehradzka. Współpraca polityczna i gospodarcza*, Toruń 1995, pp. 12–13.

23 *Interview with Prime Minister J. K. Bielecki*, „Biuletyn Informacyjny Kongresu Liberalno-Demokratycznego” 1991 No. 2, p. 4.

24 P. Ukielski, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

The Polish diplomacy reached a major success when it convinced the Czech and Slovak and Hungarian governments to refrain from giving their consent for the transit of the soviet troops from Germany through their territory until an agreement in this matter was reached with Poland. In the case of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic the success was due to unofficial contacts established by Mirosław Jasiński, chargé d'affaires in the Polish embassy in Prague with the Czechoslovak Minister of Internal Affairs, Ján Langoš, whom he had known from the activities in Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity. He easily convinced Langoš that Prague consent for letting the soviet military transports from Germany through its territory would bring negative consequences for Poland. The matter was difficult because Germany – rightly fearing the collapse of Gorbachev and insisting on getting rid of the Russians from their territory as quickly as possible – had already promised the Czech and Slovak authorities significant amounts of money for the consent for the transit. However, Langoš managed to bring the matter at the meeting of the Czechoslovak National Security Council chaired by President Václav Havel at the beginning of February 1991. “As a result, the Czechoslovak side did not accept the German proposal – observes Andrzej Grajewski – what is more, it closed the border with Germany to all soviet military vehicles”<sup>25</sup>. This was probably the most significant action taken by Prague in solidarity with Warsaw in the whole decade of the 1990s and we should remember it in Poland.

#### 4. The Problem of neo-COMECON

The future of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) was in the background of the issue of the withdrawal of the soviet troops and the dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty. Soon after his appointment, Prime Minister Bielecki learnt that following the decision of Mazowiecki's government, work was being conducted on establishing the Organization for International Economic Cooperation, which was to include Comecon member-states. The new Polish Prime Minister opposed that, therefore he obliged the Minister for Economic Cooperation with Foreign Countries, Dariusz Ledworowski, “to conduct consultations in the discussed matter with relevant authorities of Hungary and the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic”<sup>26</sup>. Ledworowski recalls that “Czechoslovakia and Hungary agreed to withdraw their support for the new organization, some sort of Comecon-bis, on condition that Poland would initiate such a step and would assume the responsibility for it in its relations with Russia. And that is what happened”<sup>27</sup>. However, the above-mentioned summit in Visegrád on 15<sup>th</sup> February, where the preliminary decision to dissolve the Comecon was taken, did not determine the issue of establishing an organization that would replace it.

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25 A. Grajewski, *Solidarny w wielu wymiarach. Jan Langoš (1946-2006)*, „Biuletyn IPN” 2017 No. 12, pp. 149-150.

26 AKPRM, *Protocol of agreements No. 9/91 from the meeting of the Council of Ministers on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1991*, p. 2.

27 D. Ledworowski, [in:] S. Gomułka (ed.), *Transformacja polska. Dokumenty i analizy 1991-1993*, Warszawa 2013, p. 31.

The Polish government returned to the Comecon-bis issue on 26<sup>th</sup> February, when Minister Ledworowski informed the government about the hesitant positions of Prague and Budapest (in fact, this was true only for the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic), and presented three options available after dissolving the Comecon. The first one, radical in his opinion, assumed resignation from establishing any multilateral forms of economic cooperation between former Comecon member-states. The second one, favored by him, assumed establishing an organization of “consultation-information” nature, which, apart from the former Comecon countries, would associate other countries of Central Europe (Austria, Finland, Yugoslavia). The last option stipulated that the place of an organization would be taken over by “a system of mutual consultations, without institutionalizing this cooperation through any types of organizations”. In the discussion that followed Minister Skubiszewski favored the first option, while Deputy Prime Minister Balcerowicz pointed out that its adoption would negatively affect economic relations with the USSR and suggested waiting to see how the situation developed. He was supported by Eysymontt, who explicitly mentioned Poland’s dependence on supplies of oil and especially gas from the USSR. Bielecki diplomatically did not openly support the first variant and asked the head of the Polish diplomacy to develop a concept of “some consultation and information forum”, but this was supposed to be just an elegant form of burying the idea of the Comecon-bis<sup>28</sup>.

The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs developed a project of establishing the Advisory Economic Committee, which was discussed at the sitting of the government on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1991. This organ would not have any material or legal ties with the dissolved Comecon and the authors proposed to invite other countries of broadly understood Central Europe, not belonging to the disintegrating soviet bloc to work on it. The forms and aims of the Committee activities were presented in a rather general way, which was connected with the tactic the Polish side wanted to adopt during the meeting of the regular representatives of the Comecon member-states in Moscow planned for 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> March. When formulating it, Leszek Balcerowicz emphasized that the Polish delegation could not be alone in its position and should aim at developing a formula shared at least by the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic and Hungary. Moreover, “it should not be in sharp conflict with the Soviet Union”<sup>29</sup>.

The Russians, however, as Vitaly Churkin, spokesman for the Russian Foreign Ministry, declared on the eve of the Moscow meeting, did not see “any real reasons for resigning from establishing an open, politics and ideology-free organization”<sup>30</sup>. They believed that it was sufficient to remove non-European countries, such as

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28 AKPRM, *Transcript of the course of the sitting of the Council of Ministers on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1991*, pp. 11-12, 14-23.

29 *Ibidem*, p. 102.

30 „Rzeczpospolita” from 15<sup>th</sup> March 1991.

Cuba, Mongolia and Vietnam from the organization. A few days earlier, the soviet Deputy Prime Minister Stiepan Sitaryan was arguing in a conversation with the Polish ambassador in Moscow, Stanisław Ciosek, that “a new organization is needed as a framework structure which will be filled with bilateral agreements. The joint element would be the analysis of economic processes and inspiring economic ventures. It is extremely difficult to recreate an organization that once has been demolished”<sup>31</sup>. However, the meeting in Moscow ended with a very general decision that it was necessary to continue preparatory works by experts, who did not manage to reach any agreement. The situation was not changed by the next meeting of regular representatives of the Comecon member-states in mid-May in Moscow, and on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1991 in Budapest, Ministers of Trade of member states finally signed “Protocol on the dissolution of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance”.

## 5. The Treaty of 6<sup>th</sup> October 1991

Parallel to these negotiations, Warsaw and Prague conducted talks on signing a bilateral agreement regulating relations between both countries. This was the result of the initiative of the Polish diplomacy head, Krzysztof Skubiszewski, who aimed at signing agreements with all neighbors of Poland. In June 1991 such an agreement was signed with Germany, and on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1991 in Kraków, President Wałęsa and President Havel signed a treaty on good neighborhood, solidarity and friendly cooperation between the Republic of Poland and the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic. It replaced the treaty between the Polish People’s Republic and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic from 1<sup>st</sup> March 1967. It confirmed the inviolability of the border between the countries and renounced any territorial claims (Article 2). It also declared the willingness to conduct joint consultations on the level of Prime Ministers and Ministers of Foreign Affairs “at least once a year” (Article 3). Such consultations were particularly to be conducted in the event of threats to sovereignty or territorial integrity of one of its signatories. The treaty did not assume any military alliance, only “cooperation in military areas” and the possibility of providing the attacked side with “support in line with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter” (Article 5). It stipulated cooperation on the regional level, respect for the rights of national minorities (Article 8) and development of trade between the countries, which was aided by increasing the number of border passes and streamlining communication (Article 11). The treaty also contained declarations of willingness to cooperate in culture, science, education as well as in sport and tourism. It included a reference to the Treaty of Munich from 1938, stating that it was “invalid from the very beginning, with all consequences of such invalidity” (Article 2 section

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31 AMSZ, reference number 45/93, line 11, chart 134, S. Ciosek’s *cryptogram from Moscow from 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1991*.

3)32. It is worth observing that the treaty signed in Kraków, concluded for the period of 15 years, with the option of prolonging it for further 5-year periods, is still the foundations of the relations between Poland and the Czech Republic as well as between Poland and Slovakia33.

## 6. The Preliminary Efforts made to join the NATO and the EU

Once the Warsaw Treaty and the Comecon were dissolved, the most significant issue in the relations between the two countries was the development of regional cooperation in the context of the countries' efforts to join the European Union and the NATO. The process of pro-Western orientation of both Prague and Warsaw was accelerated by the deepening internal crisis in the USSR, symbolized by the coup in Moscow in August 1991. Although the attempted coup, led by the USSR Vice-President, Gennady Yanayev, failed after three days, Mikhail Gorbachev never regained full control of the state. Boris Yeltsin, President of Russia, rapidly became the most significant politician. Independence aspirations intensified in many republics, especially in the Baltic states and in Ukraine. Poland and Czechoslovakia rightly feared that the whole post-soviet region would quickly become an area of deep destabilization which would threaten Central Europe.

After the failure of the Moscow coup, Prime Minister Jan Krzysztof Bielecki was the first person to declare Poland's desire to join the NATO. This happened during his September visit to the USA. In his address to the Council on Foreign Relations in New York on 10<sup>th</sup> September 1991 Bielecki stated, "It is time the NATO spread its protective umbrella over Central and Eastern Europe". He also stated that "it was obviously a mistake of the first Solidarity government to delay pressure on the date of the withdrawal of soviet troops from Poland". However, the reaction of the White House was very reserved. Although Bielecki was met by George Bush, the announcement made by the American side was limited to the claim that "Western support for transformations and reforms in Poland and in other new democracies will remain unchanged"34.

Bielecki's speech revealed that skeptical views concerning our attempts at joining the NATO were in minority and contributed to the next joint step of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, taken at the above-mentioned summit in October in Kraków. It was then that apart from signing the Poland-Czechoslovakia treaty and the Poland-Hungary treaty, Presidents Havel and Wałęsa and Prime Minister Antall signed a declaration stipulating the initiation of institutional cooperation with the NATO. This was a reaction to an American initiative, as a result of which in December 1991

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32 "Journal of Laws" 1992 No. 59, item 296.

33 W. S. Staszewski, *Polityka traktatowa Polski w zakresie umów o przyjaźni i współpracy po „jesieni ludów” 1989 r.*, „Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej” 2019 Volume 1, p. 286.

34 *Bielecki w USA*, „Gazeta Wyborcza” from 12<sup>th</sup> September 1991.

all three countries joined the newly-formed North-Atlantic Cooperation Council<sup>35</sup>. However, the road to the NATO was just beginning and the military cooperation between Warsaw and Prague – even though it was stipulated in the treaty from October 1991 – did not go beyond purely symbolic ventures.

1991 was also a year filled with negotiations between the countries of the Visegrád Triangle concerning the association with the European Economic Community. During these talks Brussels skillfully used the rivalry between Warsaw, Prague and Budapest over which country would obtain the most favorable terms. Anna Fornalczyk, head of the Anti-Monopoly Office, at the meeting of the government referred to her contacts with the Czech and Hungarian counterparts, stating: “The EEC says that we as Poland have already agreed. they say it to the Czechs and they say that the Hungarians have also agreed. while in fact this is not true, they just play us, saying that other sides have agreed to something”<sup>36</sup>. Formally, the countries of the Visegrád Group were to cooperate with each other in ways of negotiating with the EEC and to agree their positions earlier, but in practice it was not feasible. This situation was taken advantage of especially by France, which tried to save its agriculture from the effects of the imports of cheap food from Central Europe.

Nevertheless, in spite of difficulties in coordinating positions, finally in December 1991 all three countries signed an agreement on their association with the European Communities. This was considered to be an incentive to further coordinate activities in this field and therefore on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1992 another Visegrád Triangle summit was held in Prague. Its participants decided to start trans-border cooperation and adopted joint appeals to the G-7 countries and to the European Union. This constituted an introduction to the next joint move, made on 11<sup>th</sup> September 1992, when Poland, the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic and Hungary appealed to the European Union to provide them with terms and schedule of talks concerning full membership. It was postulated that in 1996, following the EU assessment of the European system, formal negotiations in this matter could start. However, at the meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrád Group with heads of diplomacy of the EU countries in Luxemburg on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1992 it turned out that the Twelve (the number of the EU countries at that time) was not willing to determine any time schedule. Instead, the EU promised further trade facilitations and quicker ratification of the association agreements concluded in 1991, which stretched out until 1994. This position – in spite of another joint memorandum of Warsaw, Prague and Budapest from 11<sup>th</sup> November – was upheld at the December summit of the EU in Edinburg<sup>37</sup>.

On 21<sup>st</sup> December 1992 in Kraków, the Visegrád Group countries signed the Central

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35 Z. Veselý, *Zahraníční politika polistopadového Československa jako součást vyrovnání se s minulostí*, „Studia Politica Slovaca” 2018 No. 2, p. 90.

36 AKPRM, *Transcript of the course of the sitting of the Council of Ministers on 12<sup>th</sup> November 1991*, p. 74.

37 See also: A. Grajewski, *Grupa Wyszehradzka – narodziny i zmierzch*, „Przegląd Polityczny” 1996 No. 32.

European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA). Further negotiations between the agreement signatories resulted in signing the declaration on the principles of establishing free trade zones in Prague on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1994. On its basis, over 60% of Polish industrial exports gained duty-free access to the Czech, Slovakian and Hungarian markets. The gradual liberalization of custom duties did not include agriculture products and the so-called exceptional items, whose list was different for each country. However, the remaining custom duties on industrial goods were to be abolished by the end of 2000.<sup>38</sup>

The Prague summit in May 1992 and the establishment of the CEFTA were the last significant successes of the Visegrád Group. At the beginning of 1993 the regional political cooperation was weakened, which was caused by a few factors. Firstly, on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1993 two independent states: the Czech Republic and Slovakia were established. Their interests differed in many issues, including the direction of the Central European policy. The Czech Republic, governed by Prime Minister V. Klaus, lost interest in the development of the Visegrád Group. Jozef Zieleniec, Minister of Foreign Affairs in his government stated explicitly: "The conviction that before we join Europe we have to integrate with Poland and Hungary is fundamentally wrong. This idea was not the best one, as it delayed the accession of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic to the Western world"<sup>39</sup>. The position adopted by Prague was strengthened after the European Union announced that it would consider individually the countries aspiring for full membership. Therefore the *aide-mémoire* of the governments of the Visegrád Group from June 1993, issued in connection with the EU summit of 21<sup>st</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1993 in Copenhagen, turned out to be the last significant joint venture related to efforts to join the EU. Formal applications in this matter were submitted by each country of the Group separately.

At the Copenhagen summit the European Council formulated five conditions to be met by the countries of Central Europe in order to be admitted to the community. The so-called Copenhagen criteria concerned: 1) a functioning market economy; 2) the capacity to cope with competition and market forces in the EU; 3) the ability to take on and implement effectively the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union; 4) stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law. Poland and the Czech Republic were then relatively close to meeting all these criteria, therefore, as observed by Roman Kuźniar: "the fifth criterion was of more discretionary nature, the enlargement of the EU could take place as long as it did not bring any threats to the EU coherence (the achieved level of integration)"<sup>40</sup>. In practice this meant that twelve Member States retained the right to ar-

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38 A. Wach, *Żnaczenie oraz rola Grupy Wyszehradzkiej w latach 1991-2007*, „Ślupskie Studia Historyczne” 2010 No. 16, pp. 219-220.

39 Quoted after: G. Lipiec, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

40 R. Kuźniar, *Polityka zagraniczna III Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 2012, p. 69.

bitrarily block membership aspirations, which was painfully experienced by Turkey, whose first efforts to associate with the EEC date back to the 1960s and whose official application for the membership was submitted in 1987, the time when Poland and Czechoslovakia were deeply rooted in the Comecon structures.

The fact that the joint action for the membership in the EU broke down, the skeptical comments made by Prime Minister Klaus on regional cooperation and, later on, the policy of Slovakian Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, who was reluctant to establish closer ties with the West, did not result in the deterioration of Poland's relations with its southern neighbors which would resemble the return to the aversion from the period between the wars. The weakening political cooperation in the second half of the 1990s was accompanied by regular development of trade, facilitated by the CEFTA. The later cooperation between Warsaw, Prague and Budapest within the NATO and especially within the European Union – where the Visegrád group still plays a significant role as a regional alliance – has proved that the foundation of mutual relations built in 1990-1992 is solid.

## **Conclusions**

The capital built by the cooperation of Czech and Polish oppositionists in the 1980s was insufficient to establish a permanent alliance between Warsaw and Prague after the collapse of the communist regimes. The burden of difficult past and the gravity of stereotypes were strengthened by two factors. The first one was the conviction of the Polish side that it is a natural leader of Central Europe, which aroused some fears in our southern neighbor that it would be dominated. The second one was related to the belief commonly held by the Czechs that their country – due to its higher level of economic development and more favorable geopolitical location – had better chances to integrate quickly with the Western military and political structures.