

CZECHOSLOVAKIA 88

An international symposium on the subject:
Czechoslovakia in the European context 1918 - 1988

The Steering Committee invites political scientists, historians and cultural figures, at home and abroad, whose work is related to Czechoslovak problems in the broadest sense, or who have a serious interest in our country, to attend the above symposium to be held in Prague on 11th, 12th and 13th November 1988.

It is not our intention to impose any rigidly defined subject-matter or hold panels requiring lengthy introductions and highly specialised papers. Instead what we have in mind is a free and open debate providing an interesting opportunity for participants from inside and outside Czechoslovakia to compare their attitudes and viewpoints.

It would be helpful if those wishing to attend were to let us know their intentions shortly, and send us their contributions (maximum 20 mins. delivery) in written form by 12th September, if possible. The working languages will be Czech, Slovak and English. Those who are unable to attend are welcome to send us a discussion paper which would be made available to the participants and included in the published record of the proceedings.

Unhappily, we are unable to defray your travel and accommodation costs. However, should you fail to obtain hotel accommodation we will be pleased to offer you the hospitality of our homes.

We must be prepared for the eventuality that some of the foreign participants will not be granted entry visas for the days in question. Should this happen, we are hoping to reach an agreement with friends in the Czechoslovak exile community whereby a substitute or parallel symposium on the same theme would be held in Vienna on the same, or subsequent days. We would give you due and detailed notice of any such eventual changes.

The Symposium is being organised by Charter 77 and other independent civic groupings.

Please direct applications and any other correspondence to the following members of the Steering Committee:

Ladislav Lis, Šišková 1228, 182 00 Prague 8, Czechoslovakia
Libuše Šilhánová, Jeseniova 105, 130 00 Prague 3, Czechoslovakia
Jan Urban, Thunovská 19, 118 00 Prague 1, Czechoslovakia.

We look forward to meeting you personally.

On behalf of the Symposium Steering Committee:

Václav Havel
Miloš Hájek
Radim Palouš
Emanuel Mandler
Rudolf Battěk
Ladislav Lis
Libuše Šilhanová

NB: The correspondence from outside Czechoslovakia should be sent to:

Gerald Nagler
International Helsinki Federation
Rummelhardtgasse 2/18
A-1090 WIEN
Austria

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Dear Sir/Madam,

By a strange coincidence, a number of fateful events in the recent history of the Czechs and Slovaks occurred in years ending in an eight. Consequently, this year we shall be commemorating several key anniversaries at the same time. And because of our country's specific geo-political circumstances - amongst other reasons - the events in question had repercussions well beyond the national borders and indeed had a major impact on the history of the entire European continent. On each occasion, the course of European history was fundamentally changed, for better or worse. They were events that usually gave rise to a historical dilemma, and generally left some permanent mark on the continent's history. On more than one occasion, an event that seemed to be of purely Czechoslovak importance either presaged various wider European developments or threw light on certain European aspirations or disasters.

The creation of an independent Czechoslovak state in 1918 and the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy totally transformed the European political map and were the key to subsequent developments in Europe and a prelude to the coming dangers. The Munich diktat of 1938 and the policy of appeasement of violence that it came to symbolise were the main factors that encouraged and paved the way for Hitler's expansion and World War II. The coup d'Etat of February 1948 was conceivably the final and crucial step towards the lasting division of Europe and the continued escalation of the Cold War. The Prague Spring of 1968 was the culmination of a period, dating back to the late fifties, during which attempts were made in various countries of the bloc to reform the Soviet-style system. The Soviet intervention brought that era to a tragic end. At the same time it was a test of how far the Brezhnev regime could go in consolidating Soviet superpower hegemony. And now, in 1988, there is a sense in which Czechoslovakia is once again a historical testing ground. The contrast between political inertia and the need for change, highlighted by the current

developments in the USSR, is most obvious here in Czechoslovakia. It could well be that it will fall to our country to test the seriousness, depth and credibility of the new policies being pursued by the Soviet bloc.

We have come to realise that our country's internal situation, in terms of human dignity, democracy, social harmony and tolerance, is intimately bound up with the overall European context and has always been in some way indicative of the prospects of peace on the continent. There were some Czechoslovak politicians in the past who showed an awareness of these linkages and of their own special responsibility. Hence a number of major initiatives motivated by the ideal of a friendly and peaceful European community of sovereign democratic states originated in our country. And it is still a valid ideal in the eyes of Charter 77 and other independently-minded groups and individuals in Czechoslovakia. There are many of us who believe that it is actually more topical now than ever before and we are doing what we can to promote it, though our scope for action is limited. Incidentally, this helps explain Charter 77's constant insistence that human rights, a democratic order and mutual tolerance are the only rational basis for genuine and lasting peace.

Clearly these are wide-ranging and complex issues, with many intellectual, spiritual and cultural ramifications, which demand analysis and conceptual debate. In view of of this, we have decided to mark this year's anniversaries with an informal, independent symposium on the topic: Czechoslovakia in the European context 1918-1988.

On behalf of the Symposium Steering Committee

Václav Havel

Miloš Hájek

Radim Palouš

Emanuel Mandler

Rudolf Battěk

Ladislav Lis

Libuše Šilhánová

NB: The original announcement was dated Prague, 25 May 1988