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## **The Czech Republic in the European Union: A Problematic Member State?**

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### **Abstract**

A comparison between Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic concerning regional cooperation, European Enlargement and further integration and relations with Germany might lead to the conclusion that the Czech Republic, once Member State of the European Union, might be more prone to cause tensions and problems than the other two countries.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the first part, we will concentrate on the so-called Visegrad Co-operation launched in 1991 between Poland, Hungary and the Czechoslovakian Republic, or rather the Czech Republic after the split in 1992. The Visegrad forum of regional co-operation, once created on account of common aims and similar starting positions after the turning point in 1989/90, would not be too successful, to a great part resulting from the resistance of the Czech government towards regional co-operation. The conservative Prime Minister Klaus, in power till 1997, would opt for a single strategy concerning the entry in Western structures and would reject any political co-operation on the regional level being proposed by Poland and Hungary.

Furthermore, there might be figured out a certain parallelism concerning support for regional co-operation and support for Enlargement and further integration: the conservative resistance towards regional co-operation on the one hand would be accompanied by critical comments on further integration within the EU leading to Klaus' reputation of the 'Czech Thatcher' on the other hand. Neither in Poland nor in Hungary, one would discover such critical statements concerning the deepening process. Being in favor of more integration and institutionalization on the regional level, the parliament parties support the same processes within the EU by joining forces in the preparation of their country's entry.

Nevertheless, it has to be said that the Czech conservatives are not on power at the moment while the pro-European social democrat will probably enter in a coalition with other pro-European parties after having won the recent elections in June 2002. The election's result has so far to be judged in a positive way from an integrationist point of view because the social democrats support clearly Enlargement, integration and regional co-operation. But it should not be forgotten that the anti-European potential remains considerable, the conservatives stay second political force and the communists, with a 18% the third force in parliament, neither are in favor of Enlargement and integration. So as the referendum linked to the entry into the EU comes (probably) nearer, there might exist more question marks in the Czech case than in the Polish and Hungarian case. One could also conclude that the Czech Republic as a Member State of the EU might be more difficult to handle, once that the critical forces on European integration will be on power again.

In the second part, the actual state of relations between every Visegrad country and Germany as one of the most fervent supporters of Enlargement and one of the most powerful EU member will be in the center of interest. While the Hungarian case is free from historical burdens and the Polish-German reconciliation has been very successful, the Czech case remains compromising: the so-called Benes Decrees which justify the expulsion of Sudetendeutschen and Hungarians at the end of and after the Second World War are still valid and laid down in the constitution. Apart from the radical circles of the Sudetendeutschen organization and ultra-conservatives of the Bavarian CSU, the decrees' problem was neither touched by any other German political party nor by the governments, the issue depicted a taboo topic in the bilateral relations. But on account of the possible Czech entry in the EU in the near future and on account of parliament elections in both countries this year, the Sudeten case became a hot issue and led to tension between the two countries: in March 2002, the then prime minister Zeman classified the Sudetendeutschen as 'Hitler's fifth convoy' which led finally to the taboo break of the German Minister of Home Affairs during the traditional Whitsun meeting of the Sudetendeutschen in May: Minister Schily demanded the cancellation of the Benes Decrees, however not linked with the Czech entrance in the EU structures.

The actual tense relations will not become less compromising if the conservative CSU candidate Stoiber becomes chancellor in September. Furthermore, Stoiber's more comprehensive position toward the Sudetendeutschen demands might find social echo because recently there can be found some indications of a more differentiated perception of own history in Germany: the taboo of regarding German Second World War history also out of the victim corner seems to vacillate.

Anyway, the problem does not seem so much a juridical one, the issue could be handled like the Munich Agreement of 1938. It is rather a question of the prevailing distrust towards Germany which will not be extinguished from one moment to another, reconciliation is a process demanding efforts from both sides; but inevitably it must include an open debate on the Czech side, lacking till the present day.

So as long as no real reconciliation will be reached, there will rest a tension potential which might have negative impacts on co-operation and negotiations between the two countries and within the EU.

Having compared the different positions concerning the Visegrad Co-operation and the bilateral relations with Germany, one comes to the conclusion that the Czech Republic contains more potential to be a problematic Member State than Poland or Hungary.

## I. REGIONAL CO-OPERATION: THE VISEGRAD CO-OPERATION

### 1. Origin and development of the co-operation

After the end of the Cold War and the breakdown of the Eastern block, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, like the Eastern states in general, are challenged by the need of economical and political transition, including the formulation of an own foreign policy which had been defined by the Soviet superpower during the Cold War. From 1989 on, the prime strategic target of these countries is the assurance of independence which is about all meant to be reached by integration into EC and NATO. The Visegrad Co-operation, named after a declaration of co-operation of the countries on their way to the European integration, came to existence in February 1991 for several reasons: the countries' situation was marked by same problems, so the urge of as political as well as economical transition<sup>1</sup>; furthermore, sharing a security need they wanted to break out of the Soviet sphere of influence and 'return to Europe' by joining the structures of EC and NATO<sup>2</sup>. Apart from this, the European Community, above all the Commission's President Jaques Delors, promoted their voluntary co-operation as a preparation for the entry into the Community one day<sup>3</sup>.

But despite of these mutual interests, the Visegrad Co-operation would not reach institutionalization and would actually be replaced by the CEFTA<sup>4</sup>. However, the creation and co-operation of the 'Madrid trio' aspiring NATO membership and a government change from conservatives to social democrats in the Czech Republic in 1998, caused a reanimation of the Visegrad co-operation, although the countries met partly different interests (e.g. agriculture) and concepts on European integration<sup>5</sup>. The principal aim of the attempted restoration of the Visegrad co-operation was the will to promote 'pro-European aspirations in Slovakia'<sup>6</sup> and to support the country's participation in the Western organizations in order to preserve security in their neighborhood.

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<sup>1</sup> See De Weydenthal, Jan, The Visegrad Summit, in: Report on Eastern Europe, Munich, vol. 2, no. 8, March 1, 1991, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> See Pehe, Jiri, The choice between Europe and provincialism, in: Transition, Warsaw, 14 July 1995, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> See in this respect Royen, Christoph, Polen, Slowakei, Tschechien, Ungarn, in: Weidenfeld, Werner/ Wessels, Wolfgang (eds.), Jahrbuch der Europäischen Integration 1993/4, Gütersloh 1994, p. 403 and Lippert, Barbara, Mittel- und osteuropäische Staaten, in: Weidenfeld, Werner/ Wessels, Wolfgang, Jahrbuch der Europäischen Integration 1990/1, Gütersloh, 1991, p. 384.

<sup>4</sup> Póti, Lázlo, Readaptación y reorientación. La política exterior húngara en el periodo 1990-1994, in: Cuadernos del Este. Europa: de la Guerra a la paz fría, Madrid, no. 15, 1995, p. 56. The in 1992 created Central European Free Trade Agreement will be more successful by attracting the adhesion applies from Slovenia, Rumania, Bulgaria, the Ukraine and the Baltic states.

<sup>5</sup> See Brusis, Martin, Polen, Sowakei, Slowenien, Tschechien, Ungarn, in: Weidenfeld, Werner/ Wessels, Wolfgang (eds.), Jahrbuch der Europäischen Integration 1998/9, Gütersloh, 1999, p. 444.

<sup>6</sup> See Krzywicki, Wojciech, Relations with the Czech Republic, in: Wizimirska, Barbara (ed.), Yearbook of Polish Foreign Policy, Warszawa, 1999, p. 193.

## 2. Why no political co-operation and institutionalization within the Visegrad group?

### *External circumstances*

First of all, we can perceive insufficient external support by EC and NATO. Although verbally promoting the Visegrad co-operation, the EC did not stimulate it: during the IGC in Copenhagen in 1993, Rumania and Bulgaria, having also concluded an European Agreement with the EC, were put on equal footing with the Visegrad group. This way, neither reward nor incentive for a continuation was given by the EC and also the Northern Enlargement contributed to deception and to an emphasis of economic co-operation<sup>7</sup> within the group.

Furthermore, NATO's strategy 'Partnership for Peace' focused obviously on bilateral relations promoting like this rather competition than co-operation between the countries<sup>8</sup>. Only with the decision of the NATO summit in Madrid, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic were treated as a group striving for admission.

### *Internal circumstances*

After a first period of illusionist euphoria mirrored by the slogan 'rejoining Europe', the countries would be 'confronted not just with the realities of EC association, ..., but also, ..., with the consequences of trade liberalization, the mass influx of western media, tourism<sup>9</sup> (...)'. Entrance into the European structures was neither imminent nor that certain and severe economic problems in the candidate countries caused that the popular support for the European idea suffered quite a lot, disillusion and deception became widespread<sup>10</sup>. And with the loss of European euphoria, the interest in the Visegrad Co-operation as an instrument of preparing the EU entry diminished.

### *Different concepts on regional co-operation*

However, a main reason might be seen in the different attitudes towards regional co-operation and institutionalization between the partners on which we will focus now.

#### The Czech case:

Initially, the Visegrad co-operation was fervently supported by the Czechoslovakian president Havel, but with the conservative ODC coming to power in 1993, Havel lost quite a lot influence<sup>11</sup>. Foreign policy of the Czech Republic would mainly, although not free from contradictory statements between Klaus and Havel and within the government itself<sup>12</sup>, be determined by the conservative prime minister Klaus, in office till end of 1997.

Klaus 'que se voit volontiers comme une sorte de Margaret Thatcher tchèque'<sup>13</sup> has never left doubt that he was exclusively interested in the economic co-operation, the CEFTA, and that he considered political co-operation as an obstacle to the wished membership in the European Communities. His government preferred a bilateral, solo strategy concerning the entrance into the European-Atlantic structures, opposing in general any regional institutionalization: 'The Czechs have proved to be less enthusiastic about efforts by Poland, Hungary and Slovakia to establish closer regional co-operation and policy coordination, ... (but want) to be treated individually by NATO and the EU'<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> See note (3), Royen, Christoph, p. 403.

<sup>8</sup> See in this respect note (3), Royen, Christoph, p. 404.

<sup>9</sup> Kolankiewicz, George, Consensus and competition in the eastern enlargement of the European Union, in: International Affairs: The European Union setting an agenda, Cambridge, no. 3, vol. 76, July 1994, p. 479.

<sup>10</sup> It was only from 1995 on, in the Polish case, and in the Hungarian and Czech case from 1997 on, that the attitude towards European integration developed in favor of integration.

<sup>11</sup> See note (5), Brusis, Martin, p. 402 and see note (2), Pehe, Jiri, p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> Concerning the war in Bosnia, Havel supported publicly the NATO's ultimatum and a potential military action while Klaus adopts a more reticent, critical attitude.

<sup>13</sup> Le Monde, 19 April 2002, Surenchère nationaliste dans la campagne électorale tchèque.

<sup>14</sup> See note (2), Pehe, Jiri, p. 14. See also in this respect note (3), Royen, Christoph, p. 402.

In sum, the Klaus government pursued a 'minimalist' strategy by considering the Visegrad co-operation as a consultative body which could serve as a complement to bilateral relations, but which should not be deepened. Only the European interest in the co-operation as a preparative instrument of enlargement could keep 'Prague in line'<sup>15</sup>.

#### The Polish case:

Very different from the Czech case, Poland has a 'maximalist' vision regarding the Visegrad Co-operation as its primordial topic of regional co-operation, internally undisputed. The interest in advancing the co-operation is not at all considered as an obstacle concerning the future entrance into the EC/EU, or rather considered positively not only as an instrument of reaching the entrance into the EC/EU but also as regional co-operation 'for its own sake'<sup>16</sup>. Poland assumes an active part proposing institutionalization and co-operation not exclusively on economical issues: when Russia reveals neo-imperial tendencies declaring that it wanted to maintain Central Eastern Europe as a zone of highlighted Russian influence, the Poles and Hungarians were in favor of security co-operation. President Walesa invited to a defense summit being rejected by the Czech partner<sup>17</sup>.

Apart from the Visegrad co-operation as Polish prior issue in regional co-operation<sup>18</sup>, this country is considerably active in regional politics, in contrast to the Czech Republic which will remain 'adversaire de toute forme de coopération politique régionale'<sup>19</sup> as long as Klaus is in power. By its active regional policy<sup>20</sup> and the participation in multilateral platforms like the Baltic Conference, the 'Weimarer Triangle' and the Central Eastern Initiative<sup>21</sup>, Poland wants to guarantee its security and to take part in the creation of the new European order, to serve as a linking element and mediator between the West and East: 'Poland constitutes factor of stability in this part of Europe and is active in bringing the Eastern part of our continent towards the West'<sup>22</sup>.

#### The Hungarian case:

Hungary's main objectives of foreign policy after the turning point in 1989/90 had been: a) European integration, b) good relations with neighbors and c) support for the Magyar minorities abroad<sup>23</sup>.

By joining the Visegrad Co-operation, the country combines its entrance aspirations with closer regional co-operation. Like Poland, Hungary would have supported closer co-operation also out of the economic space, but already mentioned above, the defense summit was rejected by the Czechs. Similar to the Polish case, Hungary is active in regional politics: the country is one of the founding members of the so-called Central European Initiative launched in 1989<sup>24</sup> and the 'Euroregion of the Carpathia'<sup>25</sup> came to existence by the country's proposal in 1993<sup>26</sup>.

However, Hungarian motivations of supporting regional co-operation in general and Visegrad in special are not that completely congruent with the Polish ones: Apart from the general support of regional co-operation, the fact that 3 of in sum 15 million Hungarians are living abroad depicts a decisive item leading also to an instrumental and pragmatic point of view: Visegrad

<sup>15</sup> See note (9), Kolankiewicz, George, p. 484.

<sup>16</sup> See note (9), Kolankiewicz, George, p. 484.

<sup>17</sup> Note (9), Royen, Christoph, p. 403.

<sup>18</sup> Bernatowicz, Grazyna, Las prioridades de la política exterior polaca, in: Meridiano CERI, Madrid, June 1996, p. 16-19.

<sup>19</sup> See note (13).

<sup>20</sup> Reconciliation and neighbor-ship treaties with Germany, Ukraine, Czechoslovakia, Russia and Belarus till 1992, with Lithuania only in 1994 on account on minority issues.

<sup>21</sup> See Weydenthal, Jan, The realignment of Polish foreign and military policies, in: RFE/RL Research Report, Munich, vol. 1, no. 30, 24 July 1992, p. 40-42.

<sup>22</sup> Skubiszewski cited by De Weydenthal, Jan, Poland on its own: the conduct of foreign policy, in: RFE/RL Research Report, Munich, vol., no.2, 8 January 1993, p. 3.

See also in this respect Olechowski, Andrzej, Poland's European Political Option, in: Yearbook of Polish Foreign Policy 1995, Warsaw, 1996, p.28

<sup>23</sup> Reisch, Alfred A., The New Hungarian Government's Foreign Policy, in: RFE/FL Research Reports, Munich, Vol. 3, No. 33, 26 August 1994, p. 50.

<sup>24</sup> See note (4), p. 53

<sup>25</sup> Hungary, Poland, Ukraine and Slovakia participate in this European Region.

<sup>26</sup> See note (9), p.484.

was 'rather seen as a process than an entity'<sup>27</sup> being used as an instrument of its minority policy. Moreover, regional co-operation was not so much seen as complementary to European integration, there existed the fear that a functioning, deepened regional co-operation could lead the Western state to the conviction that regional co-operation might be a suitable alternative to Eastern Enlargement<sup>28</sup>.

Moreover, the particular Hungarian minority issue would lead the country's foreign policy into compromising positions: on the one hand, the entrance into the EU required the solution of the minority issues with Rumania and Slovakia; on the other hand, the Hungarian government 'could not ignore the violation of the rights of the Magyar minorities abroad'<sup>29</sup>.

Apart from the dilemma EU-minorities, the minority issue is linked with the question of (in)violability of the frontiers in the bilateral relations<sup>30</sup>. Reaching a treaty between Hungary and Rumania was not possible for a long time because Rumania demanded a 'frontier clause': that Hungary recognized the inviolability of current borders in order to prevent any incentive for autonomy or secessionist striving of the 2 mil. Hungarians living in Rumania.

### 3. Attitudes towards Enlargement and further integration within the EU

Having portrayed the varying points of view concerning regional co-operation, one might suppose that the hostile attitudes towards regional co-operation of the Czech conservatives, combined with serious distrust many Czechs are feeling towards its neighbors<sup>31</sup>, could have its impact: on the concept of European integration and the Czech behavior as a member of the EU/EC.

Klaus does not only reject political co-operation on the regional level, but also puts in question the 'wisdom of closer political integration within the EU as some of the union's other policies'<sup>32</sup>. Statements like this one evidently do not contribute to a more positive perception of the EU by the Czech population which is already the most skeptical one of the three considered countries<sup>33</sup>. Although Klaus would not reiterate to such statements which evidently were not judged positively by the EC/EU, there are no doubts left about his Euro-skepticism. After being voted out off office Klaus is prone to promote the fear of losing national identity by entrance into the EC/EU: the Czechs should pay attention that their nation 'ne se dissolve pas comme un morceau de sucre dans une tasse de thé'<sup>34</sup>. He criticizes the EMU as another step of standardization and declares that the Czech Republic might maybe not enter the EU<sup>35</sup>.

The parliament elections having taken place recently confirmed the social democrat government, Klaus ODC lost but stayed second political party. Probably, the social democrats will form a coalition with other pro-European forces not being dependent any longer on an 'opposition contract' with Klaus' party. So, from the integrationist point of view, the confirmation of the government can be judged in a positive way: The official position of the social democrat government is clearly pro-European and anyway, president Havel is known as a supporter of an European federation and European constitution<sup>36</sup>. However, the communists which definitely are not delighted about integration ambitions became the third party with 18 %.

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<sup>27</sup> See note (9), p. 484

<sup>28</sup> See note (4), p.57.

<sup>29</sup> Note (23) , Reisch, Alfred A., p. 50.

<sup>30</sup> In the case of the CEI, Hungary demanded the elaboration of a document about minority rights which led to tensions with Slovakia. See note (9), p. 56.

<sup>31</sup> Gabal, Ivan, Changing Czech attitudes toward Germany, in: Transition, Open Media Research Institute (ed.), Prague ,9 February 1996, p. 26-8.

<sup>32</sup> Note (2), Pehe, Jiri, p. 15.

<sup>33</sup> Neumayer, Laure, Les opinions publiques face à l'intégration européenne en Pologne, Hongrie et République tchèque, in: le courrier des pays de l'Est: L'intégration des pays d'Europe centrale et orientaoe en l'Union Européenne, Paris, no. 440, Juin 1999, pag. 38, 41.

<sup>34</sup> Note (23)

<sup>35</sup> See Handl, Vladimir and Larischova, Kristina, Tschechien, in: Weidenfeld, Werner/ Wessels, Wolfgang (eds.), Jahrbuch der Europäischen Integration 1999/00, Gütersloh, 2000, p. 434.

<sup>36</sup> Note (35), Handl, Vladimir and Larischova, Kristina, p. 434.

The situation in Poland is marked by more coherence and continuity in foreign policy compared with the Czech Republic. Despite of government changes in Poland, in 1993 and 1998, the country's foreign policy is an issue of consensus between the different political camps, Enlargement and further integration are undisputed topics. Nevertheless, also in Poland anti-European voices could have been heard<sup>37</sup> but not comparable to the quite polarized Czech situation. The fact that Poland was interested in creating co-operation on the regional level even in 'high politics' suggests that sovereignty transfers and political deepening in the EU will more likely not face Polish rejections. It is also worth mentioning that the EU/EC meets striking support of the Polish population who is clearly disposed to transfer sovereign rights in foreign, security and economy politics<sup>38</sup>. Although losing support from 1996 on, in 1998 a 63% would vote in a favor of entrance into the European structures in the case of a referendum declaring like that the most positive attitude of the three countries examined.

Recently, the high importance put on the entry in the EC/EU after having reached membership in NATO and after having come to terms with pending domestic reforms is underlined by the creation of a Commission for European Law composed by members of all parties<sup>39</sup>.

With regard to the political party spectrum, there does not exist a 'Klaus party' in the Hungarian case. By a co-operative strategy all parliament parties are in favor of the EU entrance: since 1999, 'integration days' are taking place in the parliament and in autumn 2000, the political forces represented in parliament published a Common Declaration of supporting the government's efforts to prepare the EU membership<sup>40</sup>.

However, despite of the positive attitude of the political leaders, the Hungarian position towards Enlargement is about all characterized by uncertainty: while 48% had a positive opinion on the EU in 1998, a 46% were indifferent<sup>41</sup>, anyway the interest in European integration seems to have risen recently<sup>42</sup>. The high level of uncertainty depicts a compromising problem referring above all to the referendum which will be hold on the final entrance into the European structures: the debates on European integration have to take place not only in political and intellectual circles, but must include the whole society.

The country's efforts concerning popular support of and a better information about the EU become visible by the existence of an internal 'communication strategy' launched in 1996 in order to bring the EU closer to the people. Even if the results of that strategy are not too considerable and a lot of work has to be done in order to improve popular opinion and support for the European Union, at least the intentions of the political forces leave no space for doubts: although there is a feeling of uncertainty, skepticism like in the Czech case, promoted by negative statements of the ODC concerning integration, does not prevail having also its impact on the popular support: there is a feeling of uncertainty, but not of a skepticism like in the Czech issue partly due to the more negative government opinion on the integration process<sup>43</sup>. Apart from the information issue, the opinion on integration will also be dependent on the economic situation in the countries. On account of very good economic results this might not depict Hungary's greatest problem<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Above all out of the conservative, peasant sector which will not be the winner of enlargement

<sup>38</sup> In a survey 1998/9, even 84% of the European-critical Polish priests voted in favor of Poland's admission to EC/EU. See note (5), Brusius, Martin, p. 443.

<sup>39</sup> Von Redecker, Niels, Polen, in: Weidenfeld, Werner/ Wessels, Wolfgang (eds.), *Jahrbuch der Europäischen Integration* JEI 00/01, Gütersloh, 2001, p.438

<sup>40</sup> JEE 00/01, ungarn p. 471

<sup>41</sup> Potential negative effects launched by the Enlargement like social anonymity, drug consumption and criminality prevent a more positive perception of the EU

<sup>42</sup> Note (33), Neumayer, Laure, p. 44.

<sup>43</sup> Note (33), Neumayr, Laure, p.45.

<sup>44</sup> In 2000, the highest growth rate since the transition process have been reached, the unemployment rate of 6.4 % is fare better than the European average and the terms-of-trade relation has been positive. See for further information Inotai, András/ Vida, Krisztina, Ungarn, in: Weidenfeld, Werner/ Wessels, Wolfgang (eds.), *Jahrbuch der Europäischen Integration* 2000/01, Gütersloh, 2001.

Consequently, one can sum up that as a member in the EC/EU the Czech Republic might be more difficult to handle as Poland and Hungary if resistance towards political co-operation will be maintained. Despite the fact that the social democrats are on power, the popular support for the integration remains quite weak<sup>45</sup>, European topics might easily be used in election campaigns polarizing the society and a new emergence of the conservatives to power does not suggest easy negotiations within the EU. Poland in contrast, is characterized by a broad support of the integration process and by an open will to co-operate also on political issues and not only on economic issues to which the Czechs under conservative rule might be prone to. The Hungarian case is also marked by the fact that the integration process meets full support of the political forces, no party like the Czech ODC exists in the country. The public opinion lacks a favorable support for Europe and convincing work remains to be done concerning the referendum to be hold in the case of entrance into the EU. But neither the Poles might be completely sure of a positive vote in the referendum<sup>46</sup>.

## II. RELATIONS WITH GERMANY

### 1. German motives

Concerning Eastern Enlargement, Germany is one of the fervid advocates for various reasons:

First of all, Germany pursues obviously economic interests because Central Europe offers a great export market with a 100 million consumers; besides, Eastern Europe offers good investment conditions on account of cheap labor compared with the Western wage standards<sup>47</sup>.

Another argument concerns security: the membership of the Eastern states in the European system and with this the inclusion in the Western security system reduces the potential of further conflicts and security threats in Europe, a point of view to which the appearance of new security threats and the grave wars in former Yugoslavia have contributed crucially<sup>48</sup>.

On account of its geopolitical position, Germany must be highly interested in integrating these countries in order to have an Eastern border which does not portray the frontier between Western wealth and stability and Eastern instability<sup>49</sup>.

An essential aspect also arises from German history: on the one hand, there still prevails a feeling of guilt and an obligation to compensate the Eastern states because of the atrocities committed under the Nazi regime. On the other hand, political élites and population feel grateful towards the so-called Visegrad states on account of their positive actuation concerning German's unification. This gratefulness is based on 'Poland's Solidarity movement since 1980, Hungary's opening of the barbed wire in 1989, the co-operation of the Polish and Czech governments in the crisis involving the East German embassy refugees later that year and also the united rejection of neutralization of Germany<sup>50</sup>.

But although all the German motives for supporting the Enlargement are valid the same for Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, the relations between the countries developed in a different way.

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<sup>45</sup> See note (35), Handl, Vladimir and Larischova, Kristina, p. 434, 458. In 1999, only a 44% would vote in favor of entering into the EU.

<sup>46</sup> Statement given by Professor Zielonka during the Summer School in Barcelona, 17-21 June 2002.

<sup>47</sup> Lowry Miller, Karen/ Templeman, John, a.o., Germany's new East Bloc, in: Business Week, European Edition, February 3, 1997, p. 14-18.

<sup>48</sup> Suddenly, after the absence of war in Europe for decades, war has to be considered as a measure of politics once again and not least the development in Kosovo has urged the IGC's decision in Helsinki of opening admission negotiations with all candidates

<sup>49</sup> Freudenstein, Roland, Poland, Germany and the EU, in: International Affairs 74, I, 1998, 41-54.

<sup>50</sup> Note (49), Freudenstein, Roland, p. 46.



## 2. Polish-German relations

The crucial moment in the countries' relation is the Treaty on Friendship and Neighborly Relations in June 1991 which could come in existence after the Germans had recognized the Oder-Neisse border; Poland's Foreign Minister Skubiszewski even created the notion of a 'Polish-German Community of Interest'. In the future, Germany would adopt the role of 'Poland's advocate within the EU and NATO'<sup>51</sup> and nowadays Germany faces distrust only to a less extent, but meets recognition for its effort to promote Poland's aims: Germany is judged as 'nuestra puerta del acceso a Europa'<sup>52</sup>. But also from the German point of view, Poland seems to be regarded as the most important partner resulting from the Polish geopolitical and strategic position<sup>53</sup>, economic reasons not excluded.

Apart from the intense bilateral co-operation, the 'Weimar Triangle' comes to existence as a forum of co-operation between Poland, Germany and France in 1991 with the aim of stabilizing the continent, especially focussed on Eastern Europe. By this co-operation, Poland maintains very close contact to the so-called 'engine of Europe'<sup>54</sup> and gains two powerful supporters because eventually, probably also due to this co-operation, France loses its objections to Eastern Enlargement. Besides, the two Western countries make Poland to their main Eastern ally in promoting stability and the Poles make great efforts to fulfil these hopes by pursuing a friendly and very extensive regional policy.

A recent proof of the very good German-Polish relations and the successful reconciliation was given in last October: a congress of cities and communities of the Oder-Neisse area debating regional subjects and the EU Enlargement took place; the most surprising: it had been organized by Germans, expelled once from their home in Eastern Prussia by the Poles after the defeat of Hitler Germany<sup>55</sup>.

## 3. German-Hungarian Relation

The approach between the two countries would be easier than in the case of Poland and the Czech Republic for various reasons:

In both World Wars, Hungary was an ally of Germany so that the countries 'do not face historical problems such as territorial disputes'<sup>56</sup>. Furthermore, Hungary contributed decisively to German unification by opening its frontiers with Austria giving Eastern German refugees the opportunity of entering Western Germany that way. Referring to the topic of minorities, there exists a small German one in Hungary, but without being a source of problems. Apart from the unproblematic historical and minority issue, there can be perceived a very positive Hungarian opinion on Germany, especially in the case of persons 'over age 40, who have taken advantage of guest-worker agreements, education exchanges, and ( a general positive image on account of) the overwhelming number of German tourists'<sup>57</sup>.

In 1989/90, agreements about Hungarians working legally in Germany and about recognition of diplomas were concluded and the Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Partnership, signed in 1992, tackled not only economic and political co-operation, but also minority and security issues<sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> Note (49), Freudenstein, Roland, p.53.

<sup>52</sup> Note (18), Bernatowicz, Grazyna, p. 19.

<sup>53</sup> See note (2), Pehe, Jiri, p.15

<sup>54</sup> Kazana, Mariusz, Relations with France, in: Yearbook of Polish Foreign Policy 1995, Warsaw, 1996, p. 134.

<sup>55</sup> Stoldt, Hans-Ulrich, 'Schlimmes Trauma', in: Der Spiegel, 15/2002, p. 70.

<sup>56</sup> Szilagyi, Zsofia, Hungary seeks to strengthen bilateral relations, in: Transition, Open Media Research Institute (ed.), Prague, 9 February 1996p. 36.

<sup>57</sup> Note (56), Szilagyi, Zsofia, p.64.

<sup>58</sup> See in this sense note (56), Szilagyi, Zsofia, p. 36. So Germany supported the reduction of defense shortcomings by giving a 150 million DM, invested in military training and equipment.

Germany plays an outstanding role as an investor and creditor, moreover there exist traditionally close trade links between some German Länder like Bavaria, North Rhine-Westphalia and Baden-Württemberg and Hungary<sup>59</sup>: Till 1996, half of Germany's total regional investment was directed to Hungary, in 1995 more than 5.000 German-Hungarian joint ventures could be counted<sup>60</sup>.

So we can conclude that the relations between the two countries are free from historical burdens, Germany represents Hungary's main trade partner, co-operation also in military and political terms takes place<sup>61</sup> and Germany is perceived like 'the key to Hungary's Euro-Atlantic integration'<sup>62</sup>.

#### 4. German-Czech Relation

The relations of the Czech Republic and united Germany were not, and are not till the present day, not free from historical burdens resulting from the Second World War: the compromising issues of compensation for Nazi war crimes and, above all, the question of expulsion of the so-called Sudetendeutschen from Czech territory should represent severe obstacles to the normalization of the Czech-German relations.

In 1990 already, an attempt was made to resolve these pending problems by the creation of a German-Czech commission of historians in order to 'investigate the role the Sudeten German minority played in pre-war Czechoslovakia and the events concerning its post-war expulsion'<sup>63</sup>. But instead of promoting to a solution, the investigative process did not always favor a rapprochement or increased understanding, but led partly even into 'morbid games'<sup>64</sup>. Furthermore, the Friendship Treaty ratified in 1992 did not tackle these two central topics. The Common Declaration in 1997 could only solve the problem of compensation for war crimes committed by the Nazis, till then the Czech Republic was 'the only country occupied by the Nazis that has never received wholesale compensation from postwar Germany'<sup>65</sup>.

The still pending, tiresome Sudeten subject has recently become a hotly-discussed issue and produced a strain of German-Czech relations: in February 2002, Hungary's prime minister Orbán demanded the lifting of the Benes Decrees<sup>66</sup> before the Czech entry in the EU expressing a claim already being mentioned above all by German ultra conservatives politicians, supporters of the Sudeten organization Landsmannschaft<sup>67</sup>. This renewed demand triggered off a fierce Czech reaction, the Czech prime minister Zeman characterized the Sudetendeutschen as 'Hitler's fifth's convoy' and classified the expulsion as a 'lenient punishment'<sup>68</sup> so that finally, chancellor Schröder finally cancelled his planned visit to Prague in March, the opposition and the Landsmannschaft even claimed an excuse from Zeman.

As a reaction to Zeman's incautious reproaches of collective guilt, the German Minister of Home Affairs demanded the cancellation of the compromised decrees during the traditional Whitsun meeting of the Sudetendeutschen. This demand represents an inflexion point in the actual German-Czech relations because it is a breaking off with an unwritten rule valid already in the time of chancellor Kohl and Prime Minister Klaus: we simply will leave the Benes issue apart<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> Those countries depict up two third of the German-Hungarian trade.

<sup>60</sup> See in this sense note (56), Szilagyi, Zsófia, p.37.

<sup>61</sup> Germany supported the reduction of defense shortcomings by giving a 150 million DM and there exists p.e. a program which promotes the education of adults in Hungary, see for further information Hinzen, Hubert: orientación y cualificación bajo la presión de desarrollo, in: Educación de Adultos y Desarrollo, IIZ/DVV(eds.) no. 50, 1998.

<sup>62</sup> Note (56), Szilagyi, Zsófia, p. 36.

<sup>63</sup> Kettle, Steven, Czechs and Germans still at odds, in: Transition, Open Media Research Institute (ed.), Prague, 9 February, 1996, p. 23.

<sup>64</sup> Note (63), Kettle, Steven, p. 23.

<sup>65</sup> Note (63), Kettle, Steven, p. 24. Also Kettle, Steven, Burying the hatchet?, in: Transition, Open Media Research Institute (ed.), Prague, 6 April 1995, p. 28.

<sup>66</sup> Hungarians had been expelled out off territory which is today Slovakia, see [www.Spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,180605,00.html](http://www.Spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,180605,00.html)

<sup>67</sup> Note (65), Kettle, Steven, p. 31 and see note (63), Kettle, Steven, p. 24.

<sup>68</sup> [www.Spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,180605,00.html](http://www.Spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,180605,00.html)

<sup>69</sup> Brössler, Daniel, Deutsch-tschechischer Graben, Süddeutsche Zeitung, 20.05.2002.

### **Roots of the problem<sup>70</sup>**

The problem's roots are found in the proclamation of the new Czechoslovakian state in 1918: the constitution conceded only limited representation to the Slovaks, while the Germans, with 3 million a 23 percent of the population and the second-largest national group stayed without any representation. Between the World Wars, the German parties always obtained around 20 percent of the votes, but were fobbed up with minor minister posts, 'little or no effort (was made) to integrate the German population socially'<sup>71</sup>.

In the early 30s, the radical and separatist Sudetendeutsche Partei being sponsored by the Nazi regime drew large crowds on account of the grown German resentment and of the economic depression affecting extremely the industrialized areas in which the German lived. In 1935, the party became the strongest fraction, but it would not be represented in the government depicting the climax of German discrimination.

With the Munich Agreement in 1938, Czechoslovakia was divided between Nazi Germany, Poland, Hungary, in other words sacrificed to Hitler's demands. The government running the country during the Second World War collaborated with the Nazis, a fact the Czechs are prone to ignore. Moreover the expulsion of about 3 million Germans from the Czech country at the end of and after the war is considered as a justified act. The legal base for this expulsion, by the Czechs called 'resettlement', were the Benes Decrees of 1947 attributing to Germans and Hungarians the guilt of the Czech breakdown in 1938. After the communist fall, the Czechoslovakian parliament passed laws amnestying crimes and atrocities having been committed before the 25 February 1948 preventing like this the lawfulness of German demands for citizenship or property.

So far the facts, but both sides possess a different perception of history and draw conclusions which are not easily to reconcile.

### **The German position**

Regarding the German side, it can generally be maintained that ultra conservative circles represent fiercely and hard-line the demands of the Landsmannschaft, on top the lifting on the Benes Decrees. Various times, CSU members like Otto von Habsburg have mentioned that the Czech Republic will not enter the EC/EU as long as the degrees remain valid<sup>72</sup>. Stoiber, prime minister of Bavaria, who challenges Schroeder in the elections in September 2002, is known as the Sudeten 'lawyer'<sup>73</sup>: in Bavaria 'up to 30 percent of (the population) claim Sudeten origin ... and generally support the Christian Social Union'<sup>74</sup>. If Stoiber wins the elections, he has already announced that he will take special care of the issues; an imprudent statement for which he was criticized inside and abroad.

But however, the perception of the expulsion as an 'immoral (act) because they (the degrees) were based on the assumption of collective guilt shared by an entire ethnic group'<sup>75</sup> is not only a conservative opinion. Like already mentioned, Zeman's behavior provoked the break with the taboo not to tackle the Benes issue and there might be perceived a tendency of more comprehension and public attention for the Sudeten case throughout the political spectrum: the highly regarded German political magazine *Der Spiegel* has published a series this spring in which the expulsion and crimes committed on Germans after the Nazi's defeat are investigated, showing a more differentiated view of history, but without the slightest will of playing down the German guilt; however, in contrast to the Czech case, in Germany there does not prevail a

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<sup>70</sup> Steven Kettle gives a good sum of the Sudeten issue, see Kettle, Steven, *Burying the hatchet?*, in: *Transition*, Open Media Research Institute (ed.), Prague, 6 April 1995, p. 31.

<sup>71</sup> See note (63) and note (65), Kettle, Steven, p. 31 and p. 28.

<sup>72</sup> Note (63), Kettle, Steven, p. 24.

<sup>73</sup> He traditionally takes part in the Whitsun celebration of the Landsmannschaf and moreover, his wife is a Sudeten German

<sup>74</sup> Note (65), Kettle, Steven, p. 30.

<sup>75</sup> Speech of the former German president, see Weizsaecker, 'Understanding at the Center of Europe', lecture at Charles University, Prague, 14 Dec. 1995

great consciousness about the fact that the Landmannschaft still claims financial compensation and their former properties depicting a nightmare for most Czechs.

Apart from the Spiegel series, a fierce literal debate concerning German's Nazi past has broken out recently: new novels of famous authors like Günter Grass presenting the German civilians during the Hitler time not exclusively as criminals but also as victims have to stand strong criticism and reproaches: the reproach of playing down German guilt and of contributing to the conversion of a committers' society to a victim one undertaken by the after-war generation.

In how far such reproaches can be maintained is not meant to be tackled here, but the debate makes visible that future discussions about German guilt might be more differentiated and might receive more public attention, probably not facilitating discussions about the Sudeten case.

### ***The Czech position***

The Czech side perceives the Benes decrees in an absolute opposite sense: the decrees are seen as a legal base for the existence of the state and the cruel expulsion is not judged as a crime by the great majority of the Czechs but regarded as justified reaction. This conviction is shared by all political camps, however the articulation may differ<sup>76</sup>: in April of this year, the parliament decided unanimously the inviolability of the decrees.

Besides, distrust on account of Germany's strong position in the EC/EU and fear that 'Sudeten German want to return to their homeland'<sup>77</sup> are still widespread.

Different from the German case, the Sudeten question is a very sensitive issue and of highest public interests<sup>78</sup> containing big polarizing potential, about all in election campaigns: if Zeman had not condemned the claim of the lifting that fiercely, the conservatives would have blamed him of betraying the country and he would have risked losing many voters. With the victory of the social democrat Spidla as Zeman's successor the position will not differ from the conservative one, but at least the language is supposed to be less fierce than in Klaus and Zeman's case who disqualified himself politically with those imprudent, polemic statements.

## **IV. CONCLUSION**

Having focussed on the Visegrad co-operation and relations with Germany, it becomes visible that the Czech membership in the EC/EU includes more conflict potential than Poland's and Hungary's entrance:

First of all, the critical voices on regional co-operation and rejection of further co-operation and institutionalization on this level come from a powerful fraction, the actual second political force. But integration is not only seen in a critical way on the regional level, but also further integration concerning the EU does not meet the support of the Czech conservatives. Recently Klaus even declared his doubts if the Czech Republic should enter into the European structures, statements which polarize and arise doubts on the European side. For this, another ODS government might complicate negotiations and might implicate a stressing of nationalist positions.

The Euro-skepticism prevailing in two powerful parties, apart from the ODS neither the Communist are pro-European, is reflected in the population's low support of entry in the EU, not very suitable for a country being in the final period of negotiations. In Poland and Hungary, in contrast, we meet broad support for European integration throughout the political spectrum. Critical statements on integration do not possess comparable weight and moreover, above all the Polish population but also the Hungarian one show a more positive opinion on European integration than the Czechs. But however, also in these countries a successful referendum can not be predicted.

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<sup>76</sup> In 1990, president Havel asked for pardon in public what triggered off fierce criticism from all social camps. See note (65), Kettle, Steven, p. 28.

<sup>77</sup> Note (31), Gabal, Ivan, p. 28.

<sup>78</sup> Note (63), Kettle, Steven, p. 24.

While the historical burdens in the Hungarian case did not exist and could be resolved in the Polish-German relation, the Czech case gets a lot complicated by the compromising issue of Sudeten Germans which is still to resolve. The Czechs oppose fiercely the lifting of the Benes Decrees before entering the EC/EU, demanded openly by some social groups in Germany, Austria and Hungary. It might be remarkable that Italy has already succeeded with its 'longtime block of Slovenia's association agreement with the EU due to outstanding Italian claims to property it lost in Slovenia after World War II'<sup>79</sup>. But, of course, Germany is not Italy and the taboo of public discussion regarding crimes committed on Germans in World War II will only be softening slowly<sup>80</sup>.

Even if there might be now more voices in favor of the Sudeten case, also the conservative CSU loses its hard-line vision on the Sudeten case if other interests, e.g. economic ones, are at stake<sup>81</sup>.

Facing a pragmatic German position, there could even be found, at least, a juridical solution to the Sudeten question: the Czech side could apologize for the injustice committed while the Sudeten cancel any property demand. And by declaring the Benes Decrees to be void like it occurred with the Munich Agreement, however not from the beginning on, the decrees would continue forming part of the Czech constitution, but would not be applicable any more.

The Czech indisputable position seems to be the essential problem, an attitude deriving from the lack of an open debate on own history. The Czechs' historical perception is one sided and not differentiated, because 'widespread Czech collaboration (...) and the lack of popular support for resistance to the Nazis are painful subjects (...) most Czechs appear to want to gloss over or ignore'<sup>82</sup>.

Even if the Czech government might be obliged to relent in the juridical questions, the progress of reconciliation remains inescapable; if not so, German-Czech relations will never be free of strain potential, with all its negative effects within the EU, the Czech Republic once a Member State.

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<sup>79</sup> Note (65), Kettle, Steven, p. 31.

<sup>80</sup> See Hage, Volker, Unter Generalverdacht, in: Der Spiegel, no. 15, 8 April 2002. pp. 178-181.

<sup>81</sup> In this sense, the Bavarian government consented to a pipeline project between Ingolstadt and the Czech Republic ignoring the Sudeten's protest.

<sup>82</sup> Note (65), Kettle, Steven, p. 31 and note (63), Kettle, Steven, p. 28.