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Author(s): Milan Hauner

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Milan Hauner

‘We Must Push Eastwards!’ The Challenges and Dilemmas of President Beneš after Munich

Abstract

This article has been inspired by the author’s editing of E. Beneš’ *Memoirs 1938–45*. One of the strongest challenges for the former Czechoslovak President Beneš was the relationship with the Soviet Union. Did Beneš, who formed his government in exile in the West, succumb to Stalin’s will during his visit in Moscow in late 1943 or later, during the communist putsch of 1948? The author believes that Beneš’ decision to *push eastwards*, for the sake of building a closer relationship with Soviet Russia, was formulated much earlier, as a response to the western betrayal of Czechoslovakia at Munich in 1938. However, Beneš’ motivation in the process of rebuilding Czechoslovakia was geopolitical rather than ideological, aiming at three objectives: a common border with the USSR (which entailed the sacrifice of Subcarpathian Ruthenia); crushing Slovak autonomy and reinforcing the Czecho-Slovak link; and the transfer of non-Slavic minorities, the Sudeten Germans and Hungarians. Moscow, rather than London or Washington, seemed to have satisfied Beneš’ objectives. This pragmatic dependence on Stalin led also to Beneš’ unwavering acceptance of the Soviet version of the Katyn massacre.

Keywords: Beneš, Czechoslovakia, Katyn, Ruthenia, Stalin, Sudeten Germans

We must push the Republic eastwards . . . Closest as possible to Russia, so as to attach Slovakia to us for ever.

(Beneš, January 1939)¹

Edvard Beneš (1884–1948), the second and fourth president of Czechoslovakia (1935–8, 1945–8), was considered — despite the trauma of Munich he carried

This article is based on new archival materials in several languages, published and unpublished, which I have scrutinized while editing the first critical and reconstructed edition of Edvard Beneš’ *Memoirs, Paměti 1938–45*, vols I–III (Prague 2007) [hereafter Beneš, *Paměti* (2007)]. This particular article attempts to bring the controversial personality of Beneš into the broader context of the War in the East: especially Beneš’ relationship with Soviet Russia, its dictator Stalin and the new geopolitical emplacement of Czechoslovakia. I am grateful to the Institute of Integrated International Studies at Trinity College for having invited me to Dublin in April 2006 to present an earlier draft of this article.

1 For the origins of this quotation see note 32.

with him — to be one of the most accomplished and resourceful European statesmen among those exiled in England during the second world war. Because the last decade of his life was marred by substantial contradictions in his political behaviour, the Foreign Office considered him a political liability, though it recognized his formidable negotiating abilities,² while his Czech contemporaries saw in Beneš a really outstanding but also controversial Czechoslovak statesman.

At least four serious charges have since been levelled against Beneš: the first concerns his surrender to the Munich *Diktat*. The second charge maintains that he, first among European statesmen during the war, sold the country to Stalin. The third, voiced by the Slovaks, accuses Beneš of being the main guardian of the artificial ‘Czechoslovak’ union, thereby effectively blocking throughout his lifetime Slovak aspirations towards full autonomy. Finally, the most serious charge, from the human rights perspective, has come from the Germans, who have maintained that Beneš was the chief architect of the expulsion of three million Sudeten Germans, mostly old men, women and children, of whom a quarter of a million are said to have died.³ Thus the same man who in 1939, upon his arrival in the United States, was hailed as ‘Europe’s most distinguished democrat’,⁴ whose country had been sacrificed by the western appeasers to Hitler in Munich in 1938, ended up after the war being branded as a genocidal culprit.⁵ And if we add his unwavering acceptance of the Soviet version of the Katyn massacre, Beneš seems to have carried a moral burden heavier than the average democratic statesman.

In this article, I would like to confront one of these charges, namely Beneš’ alleged surrender to Stalin, which was to bring about dire consequences for his country and Eastern Europe under Soviet domination.⁶ Most commenta-

2 Martin D. Brown, *Dealing with Democrats: The British Foreign Office and the Czechoslovak Émigrés in Great Britain, 1939 to 1945* (Frankfurt 2006), 59; Vít Smetana, *In the Shadow of Munich: British Policy towards Czechoslovakia from the Endorsement to the Renunciation of the Munich Agreement, 1938–1942* (Prague 2008).

3 German figures, calculated on overall population losses of the Sudeten German civilian population 1945–7. See Theodor Schieder et al. (eds), *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa*, vol. 4, *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus der Tschechoslowakei* (Bonn 1957–61). A critical Czech study by Jaroslav Kučera suggests figures ten times lower: see *Odsunové ztráty sudetoněmeckého obyvatelstva* (Prague 1992), 32, also quoted in J. Hoensch and H. Lemberg (eds), *Begegnung und Konflikt* (Essen 2001), 231–44. The Joint Czech-German Commission of Historians agreed in 1996 on Sudeten German population losses in 1945 at an undetermined level of between 24,000 and 30,000. See *Konfliktní společenství, katastrofa, uvolnění* (Prague 1996), 29–30. See also the more recent treatment in N. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA, and London 2001), 108–38.

4 *The University of Chicago Magazine*, November 1938, 17–18.

5 This appears to be the single most important reason why Beneš’ candidature for the Nobel Peace Prize was thwarted in 1947 by numerous protests, coming especially from German Social Democrats who had been exiled in Sweden during the war (author’s correspondence with the Nobel Institute in Oslo, July 1998).

6 Unsubstantiated and quite silly charges have been made by a former NKVD senior officer that his organization paid Beneš \$10,000 and helped him to escape to England via France in 1938. Beneš in fact flew to England quite overtly, via the Netherlands, in mid-October 1938. His journey was

tors observed that it was either at the end of 1943, as a result of Beneš' fateful pilgrimage to Moscow, or even later, in February 1948 during the communist seizure of power in Prague, that the Czechoslovak statesman had surrendered to Stalin. Beneš' declining health, and hence the growing margin of human error in his judgments, have been often mentioned as contributing factors.⁷ Did he err in putting his trust in Stalin? When Beneš negotiated with the Soviet dictator, did he succumb to Stalin's satanic charm, as did his successor Emil Hácha, when he faced Hitler during the night of 14–15 March 1939? What if Beneš embraced the pro-Soviet option purely pragmatically, or with a streak of vengeance, to overcome his humiliation resulting from the betrayal of France and Hitler's beastly verbal attacks?⁸

To find the answer, we may draw on several helpful testimonies. Jaromír Smutný, head of Beneš' presidential chancellery and one of his closest associates, has offered in his diaries a rare insight into his master's Machiavellian mind, while recognizing at the same time Beneš' unrivalled experience in international affairs.⁹ Eduard Táborský, who served his master during the war as personal secretary and legal adviser, and who, like Smutný, was also present in Moscow when Beneš met Stalin, has provided a comprehensive description of the pluses and minuses of Beneš as statesman and diplomat. With special reference to the enigmatic Beneš–Stalin relationship, Táborský enumerates several possible factors, such as Beneš' early love affair with socialism, his insistence on speaking Russian with Soviet leaders (notwithstanding his barely adequate knowledge of that language), his exaggerated loquacity, his belief in the 'theory of convergence', his late embracing of neo-Slavism, and other points, adding for good measure the 'Munich complex', which led to Beneš' notorious distrust of the British. However, Táborský's long catalogue of Beneš' virtues and vices

reported in the international press, including German papers! See Pavel and Anatolij Sudoplatov, *Special Tasks, the Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness — a Soviet Spymaster* (Boston 1994), 62–3. The Russian version of the Sudoplatovs' book carries a different, more plausible story about Beneš, but still implies collaboration between the Czechoslovak president and the NKVD, for which no data are offered: *Spetsoperatsii-Lubianka i Kreml, 1930–1950 gody* (Moscow 1997), 99.

7 One of the first political analysts who convincingly argued that Beneš' failure was caused not by physical exhaustion, but by his entrenched belief that Stalinism and democracy could converge, was Curt F. Beck in his brilliant article, 'Can Communism and Democracy Coexist? Beneš's Answer', *American Slavic and East European Review* 11(3) (October 1952), 189–206. See Beneš' own writing: *Democracy Today and Tomorrow* (London 1939), especially the expanded Czech editions published in 1942 and 1946 (*Demokracie dnes a zítra*), 247ff. In the last chapter of his *Memoirs* he repeats the question: is a transformation of postwar democracy actually possible, and is it possible for it to coexist and co-operate with the system of Soviet socialism? See: E. Beneš, *Paměti* (Prague 1948), 426–30; E. Beneš: *Memoirs* (London 1954), 182–6; *Paměti II* (2007), 281–5.

8 Attacks such as Hitler's Nuremberg speech of 12 September and the Sportpalast speech of 26 September 1938. As for the sarcastic comments on Beneš' trip to Moscow in 1943, see, among others, *The Times*, 20 December 1943; *Newsweek*, 27 December 1943; *New Leader*, 15 January 1944.

9 Smutný's diaries were published as *Dokumenty z historie československé politiky 1939–1943* (Prague 1966), eds L. Otáhalová and M. Červinková [hereafter *Smutný Diaries*] (Prague 1966), here vol. I, nos 69 and 288.

tends to exaggerate the role of ideology and minimize the decisive role which geopolitics played in Beneš' thinking.¹⁰

I am proposing a different approach. The study of Beneš' writings and the testimonies of direct witnesses has led me to a different hypothesis. Beneš' decision to turn to Russia in order to establish a common border to receive military assistance must have occurred earlier, as a direct consequence of the Munich tragedy, when France and Britain refused to defend Czechoslovakia against nazi Germany. Beneš believed he had found the answer to Czechoslovakia's vulnerable strategic placement, which was so nakedly exposed under the dramatic circumstances of the Sudeten crisis. Although one cannot exclude Beneš' deep emotional involvement, given the highly traumatic impact of the Munich *Diktat*, his decision to turn to Russia at this nerve-racking moment was nevertheless deeply rational. It was based on a perfectly logical but at the same time desperate analysis of Central European geopolitics of survival. During the Sudeten crisis, President Beneš was confronted with the ominous perspective that Czechoslovakia, whose borders he had literally helped to create at the Peace Conference in 1919, and which he tried to protect against fascist encirclement as the last surviving bastion of democracy in Central Europe, was abandoned by the West and sold down the river to Hitler. Hence Beneš' traumatic determination, born in the immediate aftermath of Munich at the most humiliating moment of his political career, to provide Czechoslovakia in the future with a permanent strategic guarantee of Russian assistance, which would be activated in the event of a German threat.

Already in 1935, following a belated French response to German rearmament, Beneš, in his capacity as foreign minister, went to Moscow to sign a treaty of friendship and mutual assistance, which, however, could be set in motion only in the event of German invasion and if the French intervened first.¹¹ In September 1938, while German divisions were massed along Czechoslovakia's vulnerable border, the Red Army was about 1000 miles away, separated by hostile Poland and hesitating Romania, whose governments refused to give permission for it to pass through.¹²

It was, therefore, not surprising that during the agonizing days following

10 Edward Taborský, *President Edvard Beneš Between East and West 1938–1948* (Stanford, CA, 1981), 1–29; see also an earlier document, Taborský's letter to the editor of the *Manchester Guardian* of 10 January 1949, entitled 'Dr Beneš and the Russians', and his 'Beneš and the Soviets' in *Foreign Affairs* (January 1949). The popular polemic books by Toman Brod, *Československo a Sovětský svaz 1939–1945* (Prague 1992) and *Osudný omyl Edvarda Beneše* (Prague 2002), fit the same category. Beneš' systematic study of socialist literature has recently been well documented in the new political biography by Jindřich Dejmek, *Edvard Beneš*, vol. 1, *Revolutionary and Diplomat 1884–1935* (Prague 2006), 58–88.

11 Text of the treaty published in *Izvestiia* and *Pravda*, 18 May 1935.

12 For further details see: M. Hauner, 'The Quest for the Romanian Corridor: The Soviet Union, Romania and Czechoslovakia during the Sudeten Crisis of 1938', in Fritz Taubert (ed.), *Mythos München* (Munich 2002), 39–77; Hugh Ragsdale, *The Soviets, the Munich Crisis and the Coming of World War II* (Cambridge 2004); Marian Zgórniak, *Wojskowe aspekty kryzysu czechosłowackiego 1938 roku* (Cracow 1966); Marian Zgórniak, *Sytuacja militarna Europy w okresie kryzysu politycznego 1938 roku* (Warsaw 1979).

Munich,¹³ Beneš was primarily thinking about how to bring about a major geopolitical change by radically correcting the desperate strategic balance in Central Europe in favour of Czechoslovakia. Such radical change could not be achieved without redrawing the existing borders in Eastern Europe, including those of Poland and Romania, so as to allow the Soviet Union to have a common border with the Czechoslovak Republic and to facilitate the transit of Soviet troops westwards against German invaders. A simple glance at the map will tell us that the easternmost province of Czechoslovakia, which was to serve as the *platsdarm* of Russian troops, was Subcarpathian Ruthenia, which until 1919, when the Peace Conference decided so, had for centuries been part of the Hungarian Kingdom and never connected with historic Czech territory.¹⁴

The second strategic lesson that followed the traumatic Munich settlement was to prevent the Poles and Hungarians from assisting Germany in carving up Czechoslovak territory. Beneš did not pretend to hide that his third aim was to keep the disaffected Slovak subjects in submission through the deterrent of the Red Army stationed in Ruthenia. Finally, regarding the Sudeten Germans, the largest 'minority' in the country and hostile to the entire Czechoslovak project, apart from a vague intention substantially to reduce their numbers by internal and external transfers, Beneš had to think hard about how much Sudeten German-inhabited territory of unique strategic significance he was prepared to sacrifice for good. And we shall see, unpredictably, that he would.

Czechoslovakia, however, did not disintegrate solely because of external threats posed by German, Polish and Hungarian revisionism. Beneš had to admit that the multiethnic republic had been even more vulnerable to internal disruptions. He would use the analogy of two revolvers: the one held against the Czechs by the Sudeten Germans, the other by the Slovaks. 'When we refused to give in, the former threatened us they would join Germany and the latter that they would separate; we must get rid of these two revolvers.'¹⁵ Much as he hesitated at first to invite the Soviet air force during the September crisis,¹⁶ after Munich Beneš did not seem to care that, as a consequence of the

13 The best testimony for Beneš' mental and physical exhaustion following Munich and his resignation on 5 October 1938 are the preserved diary entries by his wife Hana, in The National Museum Archives Prague, Hana Benešová private papers, Box 1.

14 The Russians, understandably, prefer the term 'Transcarpathian Ukraine' (*Zakarpatskaia Ukraina*). Peter Švorc, *Zakletá zem. Podkarpatská Rus 1918–1946* (Prague 2007); A.I. Pushkash, *Tsivilizatsiia ili Varvarstvo. Zakarpatie 1918–45* (Moscow 2006); V.V. Marjina, *Zakarpatskaia Ukraina v politike Beneša i Stalina 1939–1945gg. Dokumentalniyi ocherk* (Moscow 2003); *Piotr and Sergei Godmash, Podkarpatskaia Rus i Ukraina* (Uzhgorod 2003); Vincent Shandor, *Carpatho-Ukraine in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA, 1997).

15 Beneš' conversation with Jaroslav Stránský, recorded by Jaromír Smutný, 11 April 1941, Aston Abbotts: in *Smutný Diaries*, no. 153.

16 Apart from the lack of logistical preparations and inadequate airfields ready to receive the Soviet air force in September 1938, Beneš' main reason not to appeal for Soviet military assistance was political. He did not wish to be accused by France and Britain of having been instrumental in the 'Sovietization' of Eastern Europe by starting what he called 'the second Spanish Civil War'. (See Beneš' key letter of November 1938 to Ladislav Rašín; English translation in M. Hauner,

Soviet advance, Poland and Romania might become targets of Sovietization — as long as this could weaken German influence. Moreover, if communism was to come with the Red Army to Central Europe, it should be considered as the right punishment for the West's betrayal. It would also result in the necessary social purge of the reactionary and backward elements in Eastern Europe. Beneš believed in the inevitability of a social revolution in Central Europe, which, as he predicted many times, would accompany the new European war, and thus repeat in substance the experience of the Great War of 1914–18. To him, as a social thinker and practitioner of power politics, the coming war appeared as a powerful catalyst expediting the solution of many social problems, which would otherwise have taken centuries to solve.¹⁷ Beneš must be regarded as one of the earliest exponents of the concept referred to as the 'Thirty Years' European Civil War', whose interpreters maintained that both world wars must be linked together in one giant social conflict. Beneš had embraced it considerably earlier, before the concept caught the attention of political scientists.¹⁸

There is no other alternative policy than the one I pursued . . . and I am not going to give in even if I become an outcast for the rest of my life. Either my policy will prevail or fascism will spread. Do not worry; I shall take care of myself while in America. I shall neither give up nor retreat from my ideas. Will act as I used to with Masaryk.¹⁹

Thus spoke Edvard Beneš at the end of January 1939 — until four months earlier the President of the Czechoslovak Republic. He was now a private person, living with his wife Hana in political exile in the London suburb of Putney,

'Edvard Beneš' Undoing of Munich: A Message to a Czechoslovak Politician in Prague', *Journal of Contemporary History* 38(4) (October 2003), 563–77.) Two historians of Czech descent: Ivan Pfaß, *Die Sowjetunion und die Verteidigung der Tschechoslowakei 1934–1938* (Cologne 1996), 320, 363; and, to a lesser extent, Igor Lukeš, *Czechoslovakia between Stalin and Hitler* (Oxford 1996), 191, 198–201, have built their case on the intended Sovietization of Czechoslovakia in 1938, using as their main argument a conjured speech by Stalin's chief propagandist Andrei Zhdanov, allegedly delivered in Prague on 21 August 1938, and other fabricated evidence. My own critical analysis appeared in: 'Zrada, sovětizace, nebo historický lapsus?' *Soudobé dějiny* 4 (1999), 545–71; and 'Could Czechoslovakia have been Saved in September 1938 and the Myths of Munich: New Research and Old Problems', *Kosmas (Czechoslovak and Central European Journal)* (Fall 2004), 46–63.

On Red Army operational deployment and Soviet railway capacity I am most grateful to Professor Bruce W. Menning (US Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas) for allowing me to quote from his conference papers: 'Soviet Railroads and War Planning 1927–1939' (1996); 'Soviet Railroads and War Planning 1941' (1995); and 'The Munich Crisis in Light of Soviet War Planning and Military Readiness' (2000).

¹⁷ See E. Beneš, *Fall and Rise of a Nation: Czechoslovakia 1938–1941*, ed. and intro. M. Hauner (New York 2004), especially ch. VIII; *Paměti* (1948), 199, 218; *Memoirs* (1954), 136, 144; *Paměti II* (2007), 145, 154.

¹⁸ E.g. Ernst Nolte, *Der europäische Bürgerkrieg 1917–1945: Nationalsozialismus und Bolschewismus* (Frankfurt 1987).

¹⁹ T.G. Masaryk (1850–1937), together with Beneš the co-founder of Czechoslovakia and its first president, from 1918 to 1935. For the source of this quotation see note 31 below.

not even in his own apartment, but sharing a few rooms in a modest house rented by his nephew, Bohuš Beneš, a junior diplomat with the Czechoslovak legation.²⁰ Beneš had left Czechoslovakia after his resignation three months earlier and was preparing himself for his first visit to the United States as a visiting professor at the University of Chicago.²¹ The person who took down these notes was Jaroslav Drábek, a young lawyer from Prague on a legal business trip to London. He served at the same time as a messenger for one of the first resistance groups.²²

Beneš was still convalescing from the Munich trauma, which must have paralysed him both physically and mentally for a while.²³ The European crisis was not moving fast enough in the direction he would have favoured: that is, towards the formation of a 'Great Alliance' of democratic powers, including the United States and, above all, the Soviet Union — which of course was not a democracy but a totalitarian dictatorship. Beneš, however, like Churchill at the time, was convinced that without engaging the mighty human and industrial resources of Russia and America the fascist coalition of three revisionist powers, Germany, Italy and Japan, later to be known as the Axis, could not be defeated.

Beneš' mind was constantly preoccupied with the future of Czechoslovakia, whose final borders he had helped to determine at the Peace Conference of 1919. While his senior colleague and co-founder of Czechoslovakia, Thomas Garrigue Masaryk, received the honorary title President-Liberator, Edvard Beneš became known as the President-State Builder (*Budovatel*). Hence his obsession with the optimal configuration of the next Czechoslovak State that was to be reassembled after the war, which he regarded as inevitable.

After the *Anschluss* of Austria by Nazi Germany in mid-March 1938, Beneš appeared to be trying to cut a deal with Konrad Henlein's Sudeten German Party, the largest and most militant political party in the country. The negotiations between the Sudeten German Party and the Czechoslovak Government went through several stages — without any chance of succeeding. Henlein appeared to want autonomy; in reality he aimed to destroy Czechoslovakia.²⁴

The collapse of the so-called Fourth Plan in early September 1938 was

20 Author's interviews in 1992 with Bohuš Beneš's widow, Mrs Emilie Beneš, McLeane, Virginia.

21 The account of Beneš' stay in the USA between February and July 1939 had been originally drafted by his archivist Jan Opočenský. However, the chapter — with the exception of a few episodes such as Beneš' secret meeting with F.D. Roosevelt — was never incorporated in Beneš' *Memoirs*, published in 1947. Opočenský's manuscript is available in the critical edition: *Formování československého zahraničního odboje 1938–1939*, ed. and intro. by M. Hauer (Prague 2000) [hereafter cited as *Formation*].

22 Author's interview with Jaroslav Drábek in Washington, DC, in 1992. For his book, see further note 31.

23 According to the diaries of his wife Hana, preserved in the National Museum Archives in Prague (Hana Benešová, private papers, diaries, Box 1), the physically and mentally exhausted president spent most of October 1938 resting in bed.

24 Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918–1945, series D/I, no. 107 [hereafter cited as DGFP or ADAP].

followed in quick succession by a series of political explosions of varying intensity: Hitler's speech in Nuremberg; the uprising in the Sudeten districts; the sudden departure of Lord Runciman and his mission from Prague; Prime Minister Chamberlain's first visit to Germany to meet Hitler at Berchtesgaden; the Anglo-French ultimatum to the Czechoslovak Government to surrender to Germany all border districts with a German majority; the Czechoslovak general mobilization and Allied partial mobilizations in response to Hitler's excessive demands at the second meeting between Hitler and the British prime minister in Bad Godesberg; and, finally, Chamberlain's third flight to Germany to meet Hitler, Daladier and Mussolini at the crucial Munich Conference.

It was in response to the shocking news that Chamberlain took a plane to fly to Germany to meet Hitler that Beneš concocted a highly secret plan, later referred to as the 'Fifth Plan', in which he was prepared to offer Hitler territorial concessions — but only through French mediation.²⁵ Minister Jaromír Nečas, a Social Democrat, took this highly contentious and secret plan, summed up in a dozen points in the president's characteristic handwriting, to Paris on 15 September, the same day as Neville Chamberlain flew to Munich.²⁶ Beneš' plan was to prevent the anticipated Anglo-German deal calling for an amputation of Czechoslovakia. According to Beneš' highly secret counterproposal, around 6000 sq. km. of Sudeten territory would be offered to Hitler, but with the obligation to absorb into the Reich between 1.5 and 2 million Sudeten Germans from other districts. When Daladier brought the Beneš terms to London on 17 September, Chamberlain dismissed them as belated and inadequate, for he had already made a more generous offer to Hitler two days earlier.²⁷

In January 1939, however, when Beneš spoke to Drábek, he went beyond the limits of the earlier Fifth Plan. As his finger wandered over the map, he now considered giving up to Germany a territory larger than he had suggested in the instructions to Nečas four months earlier. Beneš was now 'offering' up to two

25 J. Křen, *V emigraci* (Prague 1969), 460; J.W. Brügel, *Tschechen und Deutsche 1939–46* (Munich 1974), 239–40; V. Kural, *Místo společenství konflikt. Češi a Němci ve velkoněmecké říši a cesta k odsunu 1938–45* (Prague 1994), 106; V. Kural, *Vlastenci proti okupaci. Ústřední vedení odboje domácího 1940–1943* (Prague 1997), 37; D. Brandes, *Der Weg zur Vertreibung 1938–1945. Pläne und Entscheidungen zum Transfer der Deutschen aus der Tschechoslowakei und aus Polen* (Munich 2001), 5–7.

26 Although Beneš ordered Nečas to destroy his handwritten instructions, they survived the war and were published by two communist historians in 1957. Their authenticity has never been challenged. For the Czech version: *Mnichov v dokumentech II. Zrada české a slovenské buržoasie na československém lidu* [Munich in Documents, vol. II] (Prague 1958), 209–10. A verified French translation is printed in: *Documents diplomatiques français 1932–1939*, 2nd series, vol. XI (Paris 1977), no. 192. See also the analysis of Jonathan Zorach, 'The Nečas Mission during the Munich Crisis', *East Central Europe* 1–2 (1989), 53–70. Beneš himself never admitted the existence of the 'Fifth Plan', assuming until 1943 that Nečas had destroyed his instructions. The document has been included in the recently published critical edition of Beneš' memoirs: *Paměti I* (2007), 21–3; *Paměti III* (2007), no. 52.

27 As confirmed by the Munich Settlement of 29(30) September 1938, Czechoslovakia ceded to Germany 29,000 sq. km. — a five times larger piece of territory than Beneš proposed — with 3.4 million inhabitants (of whom around half-a-million were Czech-speaking).

million Sudeten Germans with about 10,000 to 15,000 sq. km. of territory. Starting in the west from Cheb (Eger), running through Karlsbad, Ústí (Aussig), Děčín (Tetschen), Liberec (Reichenberg); in Moravia the new map of transferred territories included Šumperk (Mährisch Schönberg), Krnov (Jägerndorf), together with five major salients, plus three or four German-language pockets, containing altogether 1.4 million German-speaking inhabitants. The rest of the quota was to be provided through compensation transfers and by horse-trading the additional half-a-million Sudeten Germans in exchange for territories in Prussian Silesia, such as Glatz (Kladsko) and Ratibor, where Czech used to be spoken in earlier generations.

'The Republic's borders must be pushed eastwards,' Beneš kept repeating in front of his flabbergasted Prague visitor.

That's no panslavism, but a law of geography. We must become [Russia's] neighbours. That will make us stronger vis-à-vis Germany and help to zip up Slovakia definitively with us. There is too much rabble over there and they remain politically immature . . . the Slovaks will definitively fall in our arms when they see the great brethren marching from the east.

The last sentence was added rather mischievously. The bond between the Czechs and Slovaks was to be re-cemented by the dominant ideology of 'Czechoslovakism', of which Beneš was the most single-minded champion. (The bond, however, was completely broken in less than two months. Under direct German pressure, Slovak separatists proclaimed on 14 March their first 'independent' state in history; on the following day Hitler occupied Prague.)

Beneš' further fantasy reconstruction to achieve a more homogeneous and geopolitically viable Czechoslovakia was to be crowned by the creation of a new capital near Velehrad in southern Moravia. Regarding the prospects of the Hungarian (750,000) and Polish minorities (70–100,000) in the future Czechoslovak state, Beneš said nothing. He made, nevertheless, a few extremely negative comments about Poland. He could not forget the humiliating Polish ultimatum announcing the military occupation of the Těšín pocket (Zaolzie), with terms attached that sounded more arrogant than those demanded by Herr Hitler. In his thoughts Beneš had already punished the Poles. He wished their state to be reduced to 20 million inhabitants. His main target was the Polish aristocracy, a parasitic class that should be put away and cease to play the role of the nation's élite. A family friend, who visited him in Chicago in the summer of 1939, noticed that Beneš's aversion against the Poles was visibly stronger than against the Germans:

I don't believe in an agreement with the Poles. They will always betray us. We cannot link up with them against the Germans. It is useless. They will betray us! This is a law of nature! That does not mean that we should plot with the Germans against the Poles. They must settle it among themselves. It is Hitler who will help us to achieve [direct] neighbourhood with Russia!²⁸

28 Speaking to Frank Munk, who visited him in Chicago in July 1939, Beneš said that 'Poland must be beaten just as we have been . . . The Poles supported Munich and carry, therefore, 50

Germany was on the upswing and Beneš, abandoned by his former allies and by the League, was a realist who had to develop new ideas around a certain *modus vivendi* with his overwhelming, aggressive neighbour. Even after the annexation of the Sudetenland, the reduced rump-Czechoslovakia, among all 10 neighbours of Hitler's Reich, still had the longest frontier with Germany. The fragile new state, which had officially changed its title from Czechoslovakia to 'Czecho-Slovakia', was constricted from three sides by a python-like Germany. The German border was now less than 50 kilometres from Prague. All rail connections between Prague and the republic's major cities ran across German territory. Since the annexed Sudetenland contained most of Czechoslovakia's border fortifications, the new country was in a hopeless strategic position. Beneš' mind, therefore, seemed to be constantly preoccupied with designing the optimal shape of the future Czechoslovakia in response to the following challenges:

- (1) The contemporary Slovak trend towards autonomy and eventual separation had to be stopped through reinforcing the Czecho-Slovak link and by pushing the country's centre of gravity to the East. In Beneš' thinking, the future Czechoslovak Republic, paradoxically, with its core Czech population of 7 million, could survive without most of its original 3.5 million Germans; but would have lost its *raison d'être* if 2 million Slovaks were left out.
- (2) The transfer of the Sudeten Germans, together with substantial pieces of territory, would have to be accepted as inevitable. Beneš was ready to trim around 10,000 sq. km. of historic Czech and Moravian territories, provided Germany would also take 2 million Sudeten Germans: almost two-thirds of the total. He calculated that the future Czechoslovakia, with a solid Slavic majority of 10 million Czechs and Slovaks, could handle an extra 1 million loyal German-speaking citizens, composed mostly of Social Democrats, Communists and Jews, who should further be subjected to internal transfer and redistribution, so that in every constituency 'Czechoslovaks' would always outvote German-speakers.
- (3) The easternmost province, Subcarpathian Ruthenia (Transcarpathian Ukraine), was to be offered to the Soviet Union in exchange for a common border and guarantee of permanent military assistance. The purpose of this pragmatic transaction, concocted, needless to say, without the consent of its inhabitants, was perfectly rational from Beneš' point of view. It was meant to repair Czechoslovakia's catastrophic strategic deficiency, which had been so alarmingly exposed during the Sudeten crisis. By acquiring a direct border with Russia, the mighty Red Army would in future fulfil a double function: preventing German aggression and scaring off separatist Slovaks.

In summing up Beneš' thinking on reconstructed Czechoslovakia in early

percent responsibility for Munich': Record of the Munk-Beneš conversation in *Formation*, no. 60; *Paměti III* (2007), no. 114.

1939, one can assume, on the basis of the available evidence, that being a realist he accepted for the time being the annexation of the Sudetenland by Germany, enforced by at least three verdicts: the Lord Runciman Mission (Report of 21 September 1938), the Anglo-French Plan of 19 September 1938, and the Munich Settlement of 30 September 1938.²⁹ Not surprisingly, Beneš' geopolitical ideas for a sweeping reconstruction of Czechoslovakia were founded on the ultra-secret 'Fifth Plan', originally designed to deal exclusively with the Sudeten German Question. After Munich, however, Beneš became preoccupied with another radical concept: to 'push the republic eastwards', for the sake of establishing a common border with Russia and thereby gaining optimal security against future German attack. It would cost him Ruthenia — which in denial of international law and the promise of full autonomy was ruled during the 20 interwar years directly from Prague. Slovakia, on the other hand, was to be re-attached with a stronger bond to the Bohemian core.

The 'grand design' of Beneš — the President-State Builder — contained, nevertheless, additional flaws affecting Czechoslovakia's direct neighbours. If the Soviet Union was to gain direct access to Czechoslovakia through Ruthenia, those areas of Romania and Poland that blocked access to Ruthenia from the east would have to be occupied by the Red Army before it could enter Ruthenia. While Beneš was using the slogan 'Push the Republic Eastwards', it was in fact the Soviets who, in real geopolitical terms, were pushing westwards. Moreover, Beneš indicated that he was ready to cede to Russia not only the entire Subcarpathian Ruthenia up to the town of Užhorod, but also a portion of eastern Slovakia with mixed Slovak and Ukrainian (and Hungarian!) settlements, as far as Prešov.

The 'Ides of March' in 1939 — the day Hitler marched into Prague and dissolved rump-Czechoslovakia — shocked and surprised Beneš, who was then in Chicago. But he immediately seized the new opportunity offered by Hitler's outrageous breach of the Munich Settlement. A new stage of planning the future of Czechoslovakia would begin for Beneš, whose underlying purpose was to be the 'Undoing' of Munich.³⁰ The first portion of his three-tier plan, the solution of the German Problem, territorially and ethnographically, would undergo the most controversial changes until mid-1942, when the idea of a global transfer with as few territorial concessions as possible would win the upper hand in Beneš' thinking. The second point of his overall plan of reconstruction, the Slovak Question, would remain fundamentally the same — with the added proviso concerning the transfer of the Hungarian minority (which had to be abandoned in 1945 because Stalin opposed it for practical reasons). Regarding the third point, the sacrifice of Ruthenia for the sake of having a common border with the USSR, Beneš would use as an enticement, whenever he could win Soviet support. And also because he had nothing else with which to bargain with Stalin.

29 Beneš, *Paměti III* (2007), no. 54, no. 61, no. 62, no. 75.

30 M. Hauner, 'Edvard Beneš' Undoing of Munich: A Message to a Czechoslovak Politician in Prague', *Journal of Contemporary History* 38(4), 563–77.

As for the messenger Jaroslav Drábek, after his return to Prague he paid dearly for his underground activities under the German occupation. Arrested and transferred to Auschwitz, he survived by a miracle. Drábek himself published a volume of memoirs in which he recounted this memorable story.³¹

Don't be afraid of Germany. She cannot win. She is going to succeed in the beginning but in the end victory will come through the United States and through Russia.³²

Was Beneš aware what his pursuit of a common border with the Soviet Union would entail for the geopolitical balance in Central Europe? Like the sorcerer's apprentice in Goethe's poem, did Beneš not realize early enough the risk that by providing direct assistance to the Red Army through a common border, he would also open the floodgates to communist infiltration of Central Europe? He did, of course, realize that. This is why he hoped that Soviet military assistance in September 1938 would follow a French intervention that was supposed to come first. Since the latter failed to materialize, Beneš considered it too risky to make an exclusive appeal for Soviet help, for fear that the West would then regard Czechoslovakia, according to the current Nazi slogan, as the 'Soviet aircraft carrier' anchored in the centre of Europe. This is why, as Beneš passionately argued in his *Memoirs* and later before Stalin and Molotov, he refused to issue orders to resist German aggression and call to Moscow in September 1938, despite appeals from his military commanders and radical politicians.³³ The shock and the subsequent trauma of Munich, however, made such an impact on Beneš that he refused to absolve the West from its betrayal. He was now prepared to bank the future of Czechoslovakia on exclusive Soviet assistance against the German *Drang nach Osten*.

Beneš' overall relationship with Russia thus appeared to be fairly complex, for it contained elements of his early socialist idealism as well as his recent pragmatism. Although Beneš had never visited Russia prior to 1935, as a fellow socialist he was in touch with Russian exiles from the 1905 revolution and taught himself Russian. During the first world war Beneš did not go to Russia

31 I had the good fortune to meet Jaroslav Drábek in his retirement home in Washington in 1992, shortly before he died. He told me about this episode, since I knew that his report had survived and had been cited by several historians: see Jaroslav Drábek, *Z časů dobrých i zlých* (Prague 1992), 31–45. In addition, I am much indebted to his son, Jan Drábek, for letting me see the full text of his father's original manuscript. See also Stanislav Kokoška, *Z druhé republiky*, vol. II, ed. Antonín Klimek et al. (Prague 1993), 365–75.

32 Jaroslav Drábek, *Z časů dobrých i zlých*, op. cit.

33 Beneš, *Paměti I* (2007), ch. I.5.6. J. Smutný's notes taken in Moscow on December 11, 1943, after the Stalin–Beneš argument over Munich, are revealing: *Československo-sovětské vztahy v diplomatických jednáních 1939–1945*, vol. II (Prague 1999) [hereafter cited as *ČSV II*], 129–32; original in the Smutný Collection, No. 4894, Columbia University, Bahkmeteff Archives. Although Stalin blamed Beneš for failing to appeal for Soviet assistance, he never revealed details of how the Red Army and Air Force would have reached Czechoslovakia in September 1938, and whether the Soviet Union was then ready to start a lone war against Poland and Germany. For military and logistic aspects, see the detailed studies by Hauner and Ragsdale in note 12 above.

like his mentor T.G. Masaryk, who had spent a year there from 1917 to 1918 during the dramatic period of two revolutions. Masaryk's chief task was to organize the Czech Legion from prisoners-of-war to fight along the Entente for the establishment of an independent Czech state. When the war ended with the foundation of Czechoslovakia, one of Beneš' major tasks as the first foreign minister was to pull out the Czech Legion from Siberia, where it had been since May 1918, entangled in fighting the Bolsheviks. This was the main reason why diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia were not initiated until the nazis came to power in neighbouring Germany and Czechoslovakia began eagerly to look for new allies.

Although Beneš would usually stress geography first, history was equally important to him. He was well aware of the long tradition of Russo-Prussian military partnership, stretching back to the Tauroggen Convention of 1812. Beneš himself witnessed in 1922 the Rapallo Agreement and the ensuing collaboration between the *Reichswehr* and the Red Army. In 1935 he went to Moscow to sign the Treaty of Mutual Assistance. Two years later, Beneš feared that pro-German elements in the Soviet armed forces were allegedly plotting to overthrow Stalin. Without a second thought, he accepted Marshal Tukhachevsky's liquidation as the victory of the anti-German faction led by Stalin, thereby preventing a 'second Rapallo': 'No executions . . . can shake this [Soviet-Czechoslovak] friendship,' he told the Soviet ambassador.³⁴ But it also meant that Beneš was thereby directly consenting to the continuation of Stalin's bloody purges for the sake of his *Raison d'Etat*.

Thus, when the Czechoslovak crisis reached its climax in the second half of September 1938, Beneš' view of the Soviet Union reflected, paradoxically, two contrasting attitudes. On the one hand, he needed the Soviets against the naked German threat. On the other, when it became obvious that building a democratic alliance including Bolshevik Russia was a delusion, and that the German dictator would not be deterred from attacking Czechoslovakia, Beneš hesitated to avail himself of an unilateral Russian offer without the backing of France — for fear of starting a civil (i.e., another 'Spanish') war in Central Europe.³⁵ Even if it became clear that Britain would not fight to keep the Sudeten

34 AVP SSSR [Foreign Policy Archives of the USSR], f.48, op.43, p.252, d.37, L.35–42. The Beneš–Alexandrovsky meeting took place on 3 July 1937. Alexandrovsky's diaries are cited in: N. Abramov, 'Delo Tukhachevskogo — novaia versia', *Novoe Vremia* 13 (1989), 37–9; V.A. Lebedev, 'M.Tukhachevskii i voenno-fashistskii zagovor', *Voenno-istoricheskii arkhiv*, 1 (1993), 3–82. An inaccurate translation appeared in Yurii L. Dyakov and Tatyana S. Bushueva, *How the Soviets Militarized Germany 1922–1933, and Paved the Way to Fascism: From the Secret Archives of the Former Soviet Union* (Moscow 1994), 322–5. Although Beneš boasted to Churchill that he had received German evidence on the Tukhachevsky conspiracy earlier, which he had passed on to Stalin, a senior NKVD officer categorically denied this, insisting that there was no so-called Beneš dossier to be found in the Soviet archives and that no information reported by Beneš was included in the indictment of Tukhachevsky and his group. See Beneš, *Paměti II* (2007), 162; W. Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. I (London 1948), 225; cf. note 6 above: P. and A. Sudoplatov (1994), op. cit., 90–3; (1997), op. cit., 136–41.

35 S.S. Alexandrovskii, 'Miunkhen. Sviditelstvo ochevidtza', *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn* 11 (1988), 128–42.

Germans inside Czechoslovakia, Beneš still needed to convince the world that defending the Czechoslovak Cause — which, oddly enough, also meant keeping the Sudeten Germans within Czechoslovakia — should be identified with the defence of democracy at large.³⁶

Furthermore, it remains to be conclusively proved that the 80 Red Army divisions deployed in the Belorussian and Kiev military districts during September 1938 were meant for a war against Germany, rather than as a deterrent against Poland.³⁷ In spite of Litvinov's pressing, Stalin would not take a tougher line vis-à-vis Hitler;³⁸ nor was there any serious indication that the Soviets would repeat in Eastern Europe the Komintern performance in Spain.³⁹ The morale of the officer corps was badly shaken by the continued purges, which at the time of the Czechoslovak Crisis reached another high point in the persecution of the Soviet Far Eastern Army, involved in early August in the fighting against the Japanese near Lake Khasan. A cease-fire was negotiated soon afterwards, because Moscow had to avoid fighting simultaneous wars in Europe and in Asia.

Political geography was decisive. Beneš understood that neither the Red Army nor the Soviet Air Force could have reached Czechoslovakia to protect her from a direct German assault. He would, nevertheless, allow the legend of plausible Soviet assistance to spread in order to castigate the West for the Munich betrayal.⁴⁰ Yet Beneš remained a 'Westerner' at heart, in spite of the agony of Munich. After his resignation in early October 1938, he preferred to go into exile to England and the United States. If he occasionally threatened that he might go to Moscow in the event of an early outbreak of war, he knew very well that as a fugitive western statesman he could not function in Stalin's Russia.⁴¹ During a secret meeting with the American president on 28 May

36 As explained by Beneš himself in *Paměti I* (2007), 352.

37 This may be difficult to prove, because the Soviet mobilization plans had since 1935 considered Germany and Poland together as the main adversaries in the West: correspondence with Prof. Bruce W. Menning (US Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas) concerning Soviet mobilization plans in 1938 and 1939. See note 16.

38 Zara Steiner, 'The Soviet Commissariat of Foreign Affairs and the Czechoslovak Crisis in 1938: New Material from the Soviet Archives', *The Historical Journal* 42(3) (1999), 751–79.

39 Regarding the larger question of Komintern activities within the context of Soviet foreign policy and war preparations, see F.I. Firsov, 'Arkhivy Kominterna i vneshniaia politika SSSR v 1939–1941 gg.', *Novaia i noveishaia istoria* 6 (1992), 12–35; N.S. Lebedeva and M.M. Narinskii (eds), *Komintern i vtoraiia mirovaia voina*, 2 vols (Moscow 1994 and 1998); V.V. Marjina, 'Komintern: Likvidatsiia ili modifikatsiia 1939–1943gg.', *Slavianovedenie* 5 (1994), 14–28; N.S. Lebedeva, 'The Comintern and Poland 1939–1943', *International Affairs* 8 (1993), 83–94.

40 Erica Mann, writer and daughter of Thomas Mann, published an interview with Beneš in the *Chicago Daily News*, 18 April 1939, which was reprinted in *The New Republic* on 3 May 1939. Its most conspicuous headings were: 'Russia Faithful Till Last', and 'Willing to Act Alone.'

41 In the summer of 1939 Beneš indicated in his message to supporters at home that he might go to Moscow first, in the event of war. See *Formation*, no. 62 of 22 June 1939. In October 1939 Beneš was approached by the communist deputy Jan Šverma to move to Soviet Russia, so as to organize from there the movement for the liberation of Czechoslovakia under the banner of the socialist world revolution. Beneš declined, with an argument that he saw his role precisely in bringing West and East together in the fight against fascism. See also Beneš, *Memoirs* (1954), 140–3; *Paměti II* (2007), 150.

1939, Beneš spoke as a champion of the convergence theory, suggesting that the West should accept communist Russia as a partner in the future war against the fascist powers.⁴²

This is why Beneš must have been profoundly shaken by the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 23 August 1939 — though he had feared it for some time. Regarding the anticipated social upheavals in Central Europe, spearheaded by the two radical protagonists, Germany and Russia, he knew he would be forced to take sides. If such revolutions were inevitable, Beneš recognized the Red Army as the instrument of social progress and hoped that it would cleanse thoroughly what he regarded as remnants of despised feudalism in neighbouring Poland and Hungary. As for Czechoslovakia, she would have to side with ‘the East’, he admitted to his Soviet interlocutors.⁴³

Beneš nevertheless feared strongly that one inevitable by-product of spreading communism in Eastern Europe with the Red Army would be the assistance of the so-called Soviet Germans, acting as Red Army commissars.⁴⁴ This perspective of another ‘Nazi-Soviet’ rapprochement directed against the West would torture his mind⁴⁵ until his meeting with Molotov and Stalin in December 1943.⁴⁶ It must have come to Beneš as a complete surprise when-

42 Beneš, *Memoirs* (1954), 75–81; *Paměti II* (2007), 86–93.

43 See further notes 74 and 75 below.

44 Soviet citizens of German ethnicity, of whom about two million lived in the USSR by June 1941. Between 1939 and 1941 the USSR gained over half-a-million new ethnic Germans in the annexed western territories, the majority of whom were, however, repatriated to ‘Greater Germany’ on the basis of Nazi-Soviet bilateral agreements. It was assumed that Moscow would use Soviet Germans to influence German minorities in East-Central Europe (cf. V.V. Marjina, ‘Vyselenie Nemtsev iz Chekhoslovakii: rozhdenie i modifikatsiia ideii, 1939–1943 gody’, *Slavianovedenie* 3 (2003), 26–7). In addition to manipulating ethnic minorities, Moscow had an additional advantage in its communist propaganda through the *Komintern*, which was largely run by German-speaking communists. Although Stalin decided to close the *Komintern* in May 1943, the irritation on the part of the Western Allies continued because of the spread of ‘Free German Committees’, created in many countries and run by communist sympathizers. Moreover, in July 1943 the Soviets initiated the communist-sponsored National Committee of Free Germany, chaired by the writer Erich Weinert (*Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland*), followed in September by the Federation of German Officers (*Bund deutscher Offiziere*), presided over by General Walther von Seydlitz. The existence of these organizations, which had no parallels among the Western Allies, only increased Allied suspicion that Moscow was trying to enter into secret peace-feelers with Berlin. See H. Bungert, ‘Ein meisterhafter Schachzug — Das Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland in der Beurteilung der Amerikaner 1943–1945’, in J. Heideking and C. Mauch (eds), *Geheimdienstkrieg gegen Deutschland* (Göttingen 1993), 90–121. Cf. Beneš, *Paměti* (2007), 145, 151. On 29 January 1942 Beneš told H.P. Smollett, head of the Russian section at the Ministry of Information, that ‘Russia will defeat Germany by November (1942!) . . . and that he is absolutely convinced that the aim of Soviet foreign policy is the spread of Communism in Europe’ (quoted from the Russian translation of the original English document, which had reached Moscow by September 1942, and was published for the first time in L.F. Sotskov (ed.), *Pribaltika i Geopolitika. Sbornik dokumentov 1935–1945* (Moscow 2006), 210–13).

45 See Beneš’ *Democracy Today and Tomorrow*; also recent Russian interpretation by E.P. Serapionova, ‘Eduard Beneš i jeho idej demokratičeskogo razvitiia obščestva’, *Slavianovedenie* 1 (1998), 11–20.

46 Beneš’ conversations with Stalin and Molotov in Moscow, 12–18 December 1943, and his

Stalin and Molotov told him that the Red Army, when eventually reaching Germany, would not spread revolution among the German proletariat but would instead carry out traditional conquest, terminated by unconditional surrender and the division of spoils. However, for reasons of maintaining an effective propaganda among German troops, Molotov enlightened Beneš, the Soviets could not afford to reveal their genuine plans for the time being.⁴⁷

This restraint, however, would not slow down the Red Army from acting as an instrument of social and political change in both Poland and Hungary. Thus, not only Beneš, but Roosevelt and Churchill too, had definitively misread Stalin's mind and his ultimate goals in Eastern Europe, as they were gradually taking shape with every victory the Red Army scored over Nazi Germany and her allies. Stalin's repeated assurances of non-intervention in the internal affairs of Poland and Czechoslovakia proved worthless.

Was there an alternative to Beneš' fateful decision to link up the fate of his country, and subsequently that of East-Central Europe as a whole, with Stalin's Russia? The obvious answer was to follow vigorously the federation projects that emerged among the exiled East and South European governments in London during the war. But, unlike in the case of the Benelux countries, the East European initiatives, alas, would not survive to become an indispensable component in the process of creating the Common Market and the European Union. Yet it is often forgotten that of these half-baked projects encouraged by the British, the Czechoslovak-Polish Confederation constituted the most advanced.⁴⁸ The project was developed by the Foreign Office's informal brains trust, Chatham House (the Royal Institute of International Affairs — RIIA) and its Foreign Research and Press Service (FRPS).⁴⁹ A similar scheme was proposed for Greece and Yugoslavia. As for Beneš, he embraced the Confederation project with considerably less enthusiasm than General Władysław Sikorski — the prime minister of the Polish government in exile (until his mysterious

report to the Czech State Council after his return from Moscow, London, 11 January 1944, ČSV II, 121–89, 198–229, nos 58–70, no. 75.

47 Stalin's and Molotov's reluctance to go into details of how the Soviet leadership imagined the break-up of Germany into smaller units had its reasons in the Soviet wartime propaganda, directed at German armed forces and population and intended to undermine support for Hitler, not to solidify resistance, which would prolong the war. See notes by Smutný in ČSV II, 159, no. 63. See also V. Mastný, 'The Beneš–Stalin–Molotov Conversations in December 1943: New Documents', in: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, vol. 20 (1972), no. 3, 367–402; Czech translation in: *Svědectví (Témoignage)*, vol. 12 (1974), 467–98.

48 See Joachim Kühl, *Föderationspläne im Donaauraum und in Ostmitteleuropa* (Munich 1958), especially ch. 5. The standard collection of documents edited by Walter Lipgens, *Europa-Föderationspläne der Widerstandsbewegung 1940–45* (Munich 1968), contains only a small fraction of Polish documents to reflect on the rest of Eastern Europe. In the more recent standard book by the same editor, *A History of European Integration* (Oxford 1982), in the earlier German version published in Stuttgart (1977), there are only a few pages devoted to the Czechoslovak-Polish Confederation.

49 Andras D. Bán, *Pax Britannica: Wartime Foreign Office Documents Regarding Plans for a Postbellum East Central Europe* (New York 1997). See also my review of this publication on the website *H-net*.

death in the aircraft accident of 4 July 1943).⁵⁰ The Czechoslovak-Polish Confederation was supposed to become a testing ground for a further reconstruction of alliances in Central Europe. As a new spatial and geopolitical alternative for East-Central Europe, the Confederation looked promising — but unrealistic to pursue under Soviet domination.⁵¹ From the Moscow perspective, confederations along the Soviet border were worse than irritating; they were anathema.⁵²

As soon as the Red Army recovered from the devastating defeats of the first year of the war, the Soviets started to pay more attention to the problem of the future geopolitical configuration of Eastern Europe. Although Beneš made his half-hearted support for the Confederation conditional on Soviet approval, after June 1941 the Czechs were wrongly assuming that Moscow might tolerate the British-sponsored confederation plans — as was reflected by Beneš' comments after his first conversation with the Soviet Foreign Minister V.M. Molotov, during the latter's passage through London in June 1942.⁵³ Even if Beneš tried during the subsequent weeks to make the confederation scheme more palatable to the Soviets by wishfully stipulating an early Soviet-Polish agreement on the future border as a precondition, it did not help. Within five weeks Moscow responded with a definite *Niet*.⁵⁴ As soon as Moscow vetoed the Confederation in July 1942, Beneš willy-nilly accepted the verdict while the Poles resisted. But for how long?⁵⁵

The recently released Soviet documents on restructuring Eastern Europe and further territorial expansion may offer a wider context. These include

50 Smutný's reflection on Sikorski's death of 4 July 1943: He was a friend of Czechoslovakia, but remained deeply distrustful of the Soviets. He insisted on the restitution of Poland's border as prior to September 1939, incl. the Těšín region. Smutný does not mention Katyn (*Smutný's Diaries*, no. 287). In Ivan Štoviček and Jaroslav Valenta (eds), *Czechoslovak-Polish Negotiations. Confederation and Alliance 1939–1944. Czechoslovak Diplomatic Documents* (Prague 1995) [hereafter cited as *Confederation*], nos 191–2. Speculations over the involvement of Soviet agents in Sikorski's death can never be excluded; see the recent survey by J. Tebinka in *Dzieje Najnowsze* 3 (2001), 165–85.

51 Essential reading: Piotr Wandycz, *Czechoslovak-Polish Confederation and the Great Powers 1940–1943* (Bloomington 1956); Eugeniusz Duraczynski, 'ZSRR wobec projektów konfederacji polsko-czechoslowackiej, 1940–1943', *Dzieje Najnowsze* 3 (1997), 129–53; Rudolf Žáček, *Projekt československo-polské konfederace 1939–1943* (Opava 2001); Jan Němeček, *Od spojenectví k roztržce* (Prague 2003); Marek K. Kamiński, *Edward Beneš contra gen. Władysław Sikorski 1939–1943* (Warsaw 2005). See documents in *Confederation*. While J. Němeček defends Beneš' goodwill, Kamiński disagrees sharply with both Czech authors, arguing that Beneš was not a sincere partner because he subjected the Confederation project from the beginning to Soviet approval, which of course turned out to be utterly negative.

52 Majsky's memorandum of 11 January 1944 on the postwar order, published for the first time in *Istochnik* 4 (1995), 124–44; and G.P. Kynin and J. Laufer (eds), *SSSR i germanskii vopros 1941–1949. Dokumenty iz arkhiva vneshnei politiki rossiiskoi federatsii*, vol. 1, 1941–1945 (Moscow 1996), 333–60, here 341, no. 79.

53 Beneš–Molotov Conversation, London, 9 June 1942, ČSV I, no. 171. For the Russian version in English translation, see Oleg A. Rzheshesky (ed.), *War and Diplomacy. The Making of the Grand Alliance. Documents from Stalin's Archives*, vol. II (Amsterdam 1996), 285–88, no. 113.

54 *Ibid.*, nos 178, 179; *Confederation*, nos 120, 121.

55 *Confederation*, nos 129, 169; Němeček, *Od spojenectví* (2003), op. cit., 181.

exchanges between the Soviet leadership and the NKID's (Foreign Ministry's) special commissions, established in the autumn of 1943. Two veteran Soviet diplomats, recalled from their overseas missions and promoted to deputy foreign ministers, were put in charge. M.M. Litvinov, until May 1939 foreign minister and then ambassador in Washington, headed the commission which drafted the first Soviet plans for the anticipated peace talks and the postwar world order; the former Soviet ambassador in London, I.M. Majsky, directed the 'Commission on Reparations'.⁵⁶ The blueprints drafted by the Litvinov and Majsky teams would have been used for extensive briefing by the Soviet leadership — J.V. Stalin, V.M. Molotov and his deputy, A.Ia. Vyshinsky — in all important negotiations with the Allies, starting with the Moscow Conference of foreign ministers in October 1943 and continuing with the two visits to Moscow by Winston Churchill and the three main summits of the 'Big Three'.⁵⁷ At the same time, the role of international communism — despite the discontinuation of the Komintern in May 1943⁵⁸ — should be studied through the next metamorphosis of the Kremlin's influence over the individual European communist parties whose representatives resided in Moscow. Georgij Dimitrov, Komintern's chief strategist, continued advising the Czechoslovak communist leader Klement Gottwald on key questions just as before.⁵⁹

Immediately after Teheran, Stalin received Beneš. Before Beneš even arrived in Moscow, Stalin and Molotov had known in advance his views on the Polish question, panslavism and the future of Ruthenia through detailed questioning by Alexander Korneichuk, one of Molotov's deputies, who accompanied the Czechoslovak leader on his trip.⁶⁰ There was no need for a permanent Soviet mole in Beneš' entourage. In less than two weeks after Beneš' departure from Moscow, Majsky's commission produced a confidential memorandum on Soviet war aims, specifying the desirable strategic frontiers, which should have

56 A.M. Filitov, 'V komissiiakh Narkomindela', in O.A. Rzheshesvsky (ed.), *Vtoraia mirovaia voina — Aktualnye problemy* (Moscow 1995), 54–71, 166–76 [hereafter *Aktualnye problemy*].

57 To understand the Soviet approach to the German question, the following collection of documents is essential: *SSSR i germanskii vopros 1941–1949*. According to the NKID guidelines in preparation for the foreign ministers' meeting (no. 59), signed Dekanozov, 3 October 1943: 'Czechoslovakia is to be restored in her old pre-Munich borders. The Soviet government agrees with the decision of the Czechoslovak government to transfer Germans after the war from the Sudeten region to Germany.' See also note 52 above.

58 See N.S. Lebedeva and M.M. Narinskii (eds), 'Rozpusk Kominterna', in *Aktualnye problemy*, 72–86.

59 V.V. Marjina, 'Sovetsko-kominternovskaia strategiiia v stranakh Vostochnoi Evropy i Zagranichnoe Biuro KPCH v Moskve 1939–1945gg.' (unpublished paper, 1999).

60 No other foreign leader could have been so closely scrutinized by the Soviets as Beneš was. While the delegation was waiting at the RAF station Habaniyah between 28 November and 1 December 1943, Korneichuk would spend hours with Beneš; he continued his enquiries on the way to Moscow. See: Beneš, *Paměti II* (2007), 257–62; Z. Fierlinger, *Ve službách ČSR*, vol. II (Prague 1947), 182–9; Hoover Institution Archives, Taborsky Collection, boxes 2 and 7; *ČSV II*, no. 57. Conversations between Beneš, Stalin and Molotov were published by V. Mastný in *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 3 (1972), 367–402. Korneichuk's notes have not been published, but V.V. Marjina had access to them, in: 'E.Beneš — Vtoroi visit v Moskvu, dekabr 1943g.', *Aktualnye problemy*, 151–65.

guaranteed Soviet supremacy over Eurasia. With regard to Czechoslovakia, the memorandum came close to fulfilling Beneš' principal wishes by approving the idea of the German transfer and by stressing that 'even if borders with Romania and Poland should be modified, a common border with Czechoslovakia should be secured'. If in the course of cutting out the new map there should be left-overs, these should be added to Czechoslovakia, recommended Majsky, for we 'ought to consider Czechoslovakia in future as the forepost of our influence in central and south-eastern Europe'.⁶¹

The sacrifice of Subcarpathian Ruthenia, which was annexed for all intents and purposes to the USSR as soon as the regular and NKVD troops had overrun the region in November 1944, deserves to be reassessed in the light of new historical evidence. From Beneš' perspective, Subcarpathian Ruthenia went through three stages during the war. Throughout the period of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, 1939–41, Ruthenia had been used by Beneš as bait and a trade-off. Beneš' chief geostrategic aim, which had never changed throughout the war, was to secure a common border with the Soviet Union. From mid-1941 to mid-1944, Beneš' main effort switched to the restoration of the pre-Munich borders, i.e., the re-attachment of the Sudetenland, of Slovakia, the return of the Těšín district (Zaolzie, Śląsk Cieszyński), and of Ruthenia, and to acquiring full Soviet support for the expulsion of German and Hungarian minorities from Czechoslovakia. During the third and final stage, from November 1944, Ruthenia was occupied by the Red Army and the baffled Beneš was fighting a rearguard action, insisting in vain on proper legislative procedures. He would lose in the end, and had to agree to its rapid and unceremonious takeover by the Soviet Union.⁶²

During the immediate post-Munich stage, Beneš conceived Ruthenia as a kind of bait to induce Moscow to take advantage of the imaginary corridor through which the Red Army could march into Central Europe to prevent further German *Drang nach Osten*. Rumours began to circulate that Hungary, Germany's ally, might take control of Ruthenia, which had been finally granted an autonomous status by Prague following the Munich settlement and the Vienna Award. Budapest in the meantime reclaimed the Hungarian-speaking districts and towns of Slovakia and Ruthenia. The first autonomous government of Ruthenia under Rev. Augustin Vološin accepted German credits and opened a German consulate in the new capital Chust in a last-minute attempt to court Berlin's protection against Hungarian ambitions.⁶³

The traditional corridor for channelling Russian troops to Europe was of course not through Ruthenia, void of efficient communications, but through

61 Majsky's memorandum of 11 January 1944, *SSSR i germanskii vopros*, here 341–2 and 352, no. 79.

62 For recent literature, see note 14 above.

63 P.G. Stercho, *Diplomacy of Double Morality: Europe's Crossroads in Carpatho-Ukraine, 1919–1939* (Jersey City 1971); M. Vegeš and V. Zadorožnyj, *Velych i trahediya Karpatskoji Ukrajinny* (Užhorod 1993); Švorc, *Zakletá zem* (2007), op. cit., 237–54.

Poland. From the logistic viewpoint that was the established *marshrut*, with three straight double-track railway lines which converged on Warsaw. They had been completed before the outbreak of the first world war, when Warsaw had been part of the Russian empire. The strategic options as seen from the Soviet capital in 1938–9,⁶⁴ however, were less obvious, and one doubts whether Beneš, already in transit from London to Chicago, had a much clearer picture.

What were the options? Most Soviet diplomats, familiar with Hitler's description of the Ukraine in *Mein Kampf* as the food and raw material reservoir for the future Greater German Empire, believed that the most likely option would be a German-Polish crusade against Bolshevik Russia under the silent connivance of the West. Moreover, on a global scale, the eastern option seemed to have received a major boost through the renewed skirmishes in the Far East between Japanese and Soviet troops, and by Manchukuo and Hungary joining the Anti-Komintern Pact at the end of February 1939. On the other hand, rumours about a western option, in which Hitler would try to force the reluctant Mussolini into action by a joint Italo-German advance in the Mediterranean to eliminate the Anglo-French predominance, were also circulating. By mid-March, however, Hitler had decided first to get rid of the amputated Czecho-Slovakia (*Rest-Tschechei*).⁶⁵ He attached Bohemia and Moravia to the Third Reich as a protectorate. The reluctant Slovak autonomists were forced at the last minute to proclaim an independent state under German auspices to avoid the restoration of Hungarian rule. Ruthenia, however, was to return under the direct control of Budapest as an autonomous 'Carpathian Territory' (*Kárpátalja*). In exchange for Hungary's partnership in the destruction of Czechoslovakia, Hitler was apparently ready to abandon his vague plans leading to the construction of the *Groß-Ukraine*. Thus already, by early March 1939, the Soviet leadership seemed to have stopped worrying about a German thrust eastwards that would have established direct German control over Ruthenia as its bridgehead.⁶⁶

After the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Non-aggression Pact, Ruthenia's function as a bait to attract Moscow's attention became even more pronounced in Beneš' initiatives. He saw the Soviet ambassador in London, Ivan Majsky, on 23 August 1939, on the very day when the Nazi-Soviet Pact was signed.⁶⁷ During their next meeting, on 22 September 1939, Majsky took notice of Beneš' statement: 'In future, Ruthenia should either belong to us or to Russia

64 For more details see notes 12 and 16 above.

65 *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels: complete fragments*, edited by Elke Fröhlich, vol. 6 (Munich 1998), here 276–90.

66 For more details see Ingenborg Fleischhauer, *Der Pakt: Hitler, Stalin und die Initiative der deutschen Diplomatie 1938–1939* (Frankfurt am Main 1990), 102–8. The author provides not only an exhaustive survey of international reaction to the preparation of the Non-Aggression Pact of 23 August 1939, but also references to intelligence coming presumably from the anti-nazi Schultze-Boysen and Harnack groups.

67 *ČSV I*, no. 20; see *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR* [hereafter *DVP*], vol. XXII/1 (Moscow 1977), no. 493.

but never to Hungary or Poland.⁶⁸ For what they discussed thereafter, we have two different records. According to Beneš' notes,⁶⁹ Majsky was unable to tell whether the Red Army, which had just invaded Poland, would also occupy Ruthenia. According to Majsky's diaries, which are more detailed, Beneš eagerly agreed with the entry of the Red Army into Poland and urged Majsky to let Moscow know how much he wanted the USSR to have 'a common border with Slovakia'. This was very important to him, he emphasized. Even if he could not tell what kind of government would be established in postwar Czechoslovakia, Ruthenia, nevertheless, should become part of the Soviet Ukraine, for he, Beneš, when he was president of Czechoslovakia, had in his own thoughts always considered Ruthenia as in future becoming part of the USSR.⁷⁰

Privately, though, Beneš found the behaviour of the Soviets, as partners in the grab with the nazis, disgusting. But he was very careful not to say so in public. At the same time, *le drôle de guerre*, the Anglo-French way of fighting, or rather non-fighting, made him equally bitter. The French continued to intrigue against him during his political discussions in Paris (6–20 October 1939) over the establishment of the Czechoslovak Army and the Provisional Czechoslovak Government in France.⁷¹ Worse, Prime Minister Edouard Daladier refused to receive Beneš.⁷² While Beneš naturally anticipated to be recognized as the head of the Czechoslovak government in exile, the French pressed the candidacy of the former Czechoslovak envoy in Paris, Stefan Osuský, who was an American Slovak and an adversary of Beneš. The Paris negotiations ended for Beneš in a fiasco. He could not win his contest with Osuský as long as the French were around, but he was not prepared to play second fiddle. 'If the Frenchies continue to be so nasty to me,' he confided in a rather desperate mood to Jaromír Smutný, 'they will force me to go to Moscow.'⁷³

During November 1939, after Moscow annexed Eastern Poland and was making preparations to invade Finland, Beneš raised the subject of Ruthenia again. On 13 November he saw Andrei (Andrew) Rothstein, the London correspondent of the Soviet press agency TASS. They were speculating what

68 Hungary, which obtained a portion of Ruthenia with Hungarian population in the aftermath of Munich in the Vienna Award of November 1938, took the rest of the province in March 1939 when rump-Czechoslovakia disappeared from the map. Poland welcomed the creation of a common border with Hungary. When, six months later, it was Poland's turn to fight for her survival, neither German nor Soviet troops penetrated Hungarian-controlled Ruthenia. Beneš was indeed disappointed that the Soviets did not advance further west and that the new Nazi-Soviet demarcation line across Poland did not run closer to Slovakia.

69 ČSV I, no. 26.

70 'Beneš mysleno vseгда schital Ruteniyu budushchei chastiyu SSSR': *DVP XXII/2*, no. 625.

71 *Dokumenty československé zahraniční politiky. Od rozpadu Česko-Slovenska do uznání československé prozatímní vlády 1939–1940* (Prague 2002). Sixty protocols of meetings of the Czechoslovak National Committee in Paris between October 1939 and June 1940 have been published as a supplement in the same series (Prague 1999).

72 Élisabeth du Réau, *Édouard Daladier 1884–1970* (Paris 1993); Georges-Marc Benamou, *Le Fantôme de Munich* (Paris 2007).

73 *Smutný Diaries*, Paris 15 October 1939. See also conversation with Jan Šverma, note 41.

would happen in the event of Germany's defeat. Would there be a Soviet Union on one side and Western Europe on the other, and Czechoslovakia in the middle? In that case, Beneš continued, 'Would Czechoslovakia inevitably become part of the Russian/Eastern sphere, together with Poland?' Rothstein enthusiastically agreed, adding that Poland would certainly become a Soviet republic and the Soviet Union should have a common border with Czechoslovakia. When Beneš inserted the topic of Ruthenia in connection with Russia's plans in Central Europe, Rothstein suggested that he should write directly to Stalin to clarify the issue — advice which, so far as the archives can show, Beneš did not follow.⁷⁴

A week later Beneš met Majsky again, whom he had not seen for two months. He told him about his humiliating trip to Paris, charging the Daladier government with what was in his view the ultimate crime: the intention to restore the Austro-Hungarian monarchy represented by Otto Habsburg in the event of an Allied victory over Germany, which would consist, in addition to Austria and Hungary, of Bavaria and Czechoslovakia! He further admitted that the French wanted Osuský instead of him to lead the Czechoslovak National Committee in Paris. These recent defeats, and further betrayals he encountered from the Western Allies, seemed to have strengthened Beneš' resolve to throw in his lot with the Soviets. He never went that far, however. But he ventured to tell Majsky that the future existence of Czechoslovakia could be secured only on the basis of a close and inseparable liaison with the Soviet Union, such as a federation (*sic!*). Beneš used the occasion to repeat his view that in order to bring about this link, he regarded the establishment of a common border between his country and the Soviet Union as 'absolutely indispensable'. This was in fact more important to him than the future of Ruthenia; whether it would become again part of Czechoslovakia or become a region of the USSR, he did not care. It was the common border that mattered most to him. Regarding the hypothetical socialist revolution, yet to be started in Germany, with the West supporting the counter-revolution and the East backing the Revolution, Beneš wanted to hear from Majsky the confirmation that Czechoslovakia would join 'the side of the East' and that Moscow might even consider 'a federative link' with his country.⁷⁵ Never did Beneš' probing rapprochement with the USSR go that far.

Beneš obviously wanted to hear Majsky's positive response as an indication of a possible Soviet commitment to the restitution of Czechoslovakia. A premature Soviet commitment to a common border with a non-existent Czechoslovak State, just to please Beneš' imagination, at the time when the official Soviet policy recognized the Slovak Republic and the German annexation

74 ČSV I, 92, notes after no. 29. The original transcript of Beneš' stenograph is in the Masaryk Archives in Prague, Beneš Papers, EB-I, Box 99.

75 '[F]ederativnuyu svyaz': The Diaries of I.M. Majsky: Conversation Maisky–Beneš, 21 November 1939, *DVP XXII/2*, 327, no. 802. There is no record of this conversation in the Beneš papers.

tion of Bohemia and Moravia?⁷⁶ We do not know what Majsky may have told Beneš, since the printed version of his diary entry for 21 November does not include Majsky's own comments. But he recorded what must have been Beneš' strongest anti-western feelings. Moreover, like his previous conversation with Majsky of 22 September, it contained an unambiguous desire to extract a Soviet promise of a common border. Beneš was to experience some unpleasant surprises at the end of the war, when Stalin and Molotov would pull out Majsky's diaries of 1939 and quote Beneš' own words regarding the surrender of Ruthenia.

For the following year and a half, until Hitler's onslaught on the Soviet Union, Beneš would not see Majsky again. He remained cautious in his instructions to the underground movement not to blame Russia. He would apologize for her aggressive imperialist behaviour, such as the invasion of Poland, of Finland, the occupation of the three Baltic republics, of Bukovina and of Bessarabia.⁷⁷ Yet 'Russia still remains a sphinx,' he wrote in February to his followers in the protectorate, adding that the only logical explanation he could find was that Russia was gathering her strength for starting revolution in Central Europe after the defeat of Germany.⁷⁸

Jaromír Smutný remembered that Beneš was defending the Soviets even at times when their international reputation was at its lowest. During 'their numerous betrayals Dr B. had always stood fast by them', maintained Smutný, though in private he would curse the Bolsheviks, their calumnies, their villainies. Not because they were villains by themselves but because, emphasized the pragmatic president, all these Bolshevik perfidies delayed Russia joining the Allies in the European War. Beneš considered this to be the most important strategic factor and a proof of Soviet obligation to help the Czechs in the restoration of their country's independence within the pre-Munich borders.⁷⁹

In the spring of 1940, several months before the British government would recognize the Czechoslovak provisional government, Beneš submitted a comprehensive memorandum to the visiting US Deputy Secretary of State Sumner Welles. Entitled 'The Peace Aims of Czechoslovakia', it demanded in principle the restoration of pre-Munich Czechoslovakia, but admitted the necessity of border adjustments and population transfers in order to reduce the share of hostile German and Hungarian minorities. But it declared explicitly that Czechoslovakia would have again 'her German minority'. The fate of Ruthenia should be decided in a postwar referendum.⁸⁰

76 Russian source quoted in V.V. Marjina, *Zakarpatskaia Ukraina — Podkarpatskaia Rus v politike Benesha i Stalina 1929–1945gg.* (Moscow 2003), 21.

77 E.g. messages from Beneš to the Czech underground: no. 9 of 28.10.1939 and no. 14 of 8.2.1940, published in J. Šolc (ed.), *Vzkazy do vlasti* (Prague 1996) [hereafter *Messages*].

78 *Ibid.*, 47, no. 14, para. 6.

79 *Smutný Diaries*, no. 193.

80 The Czech and English versions are different. Both versions nevertheless emphasized the restoration of pre-Munich borders. See detailed description in Beneš, *Paměti III* (2007), no. 126. Sumner Welles refused to receive Beneš, and the document was ignored by the State Department. The FO's reaction was largely negative; Beneš was ridiculed as a selfish and pompous

It still remains unclear whether the Soviets had plans to occupy Ruthenia during the summer of 1940, when the Red Army occupied the Baltic States, Bessarabia and Bukovina. Berlin would most likely have accepted that. The Slovaks, for instance, in order to offset Hungarian pressure, tried on many occasions to convince the Soviet minister in Bratislava that the Red Army should seize Ruthenia from the Hungarians. All in vain. After June 1941, Beneš tried a new tack by insisting on the return of Ruthenia as the first step towards the restitution of the pre-Munich border of Czechoslovakia, hinting at the possibility of allowing the Ruthenes — presumably through a kind of referendum — later to join the Soviet Ukraine, in order to establish the common border with postwar Czechoslovakia. Moscow's reaction was: no comment.⁸¹

Churchill's historic speech of 22 June 1941, on the morrow of Hitler's onslaught on the Soviet Union, constituted a turning point for Beneš as well.⁸² He admitted how nervous he was all day, before he could listen to Churchill's speech on the radio. Until then, Beneš could never rule out that a negotiated peace might be reached between Hitler and Churchill's opponents, to allow the former to fight the war in the East single-handed. Only six weeks earlier (11 May 1941), the Führer's deputy Rudolf Hess had arrived in Scotland by air, carrying with him what everyone suspected must have been a peace proposal. Furthermore, the day before Germany invaded Russia, Beneš allegedly had received a telegram from Moscow, warning that Germany was about to reach an agreement with Britain and America against the Soviet Union.⁸³ However, hearing Churchill's fiery speech on the following day must have liberated Beneš from his agony. 'Munich is vindicated; it is a splendid justification of our policy; I was right, they were wrong! We could have finished Hitler a long time ago,' he was telling Smutný with a hardly concealed excitement.⁸⁴

Regarding the Russians, Beneš castigated them as he did the Poles in September 1939:

The Russians must be taught a lesson. I would not like to see them as big winners, because then they and their communism will become unbearable . . . I had to wait three long years . . . and had not a moment to spare in getting the Russians involved, while cursing them at the same time because they had done to me some very nasty and ugly things . . . I did anticipate

troublemaker: 'Benes opened his mouth pretty wide in this memo', commented F.K. Roberts (FO 371/24370, C 4305-28.3.40).

81 The newly appointed Soviet envoy to the Slovak Republic, G.M. Pushkin, who arrived in Bratislava on 2 February 1940, was repeatedly asked whether the Soviet Union intended to incorporate Ruthenia. His replies were evasive. See Marjina, *Zakarpatskaia Ukraina* (2003), op. cit., 15-19; and her earlier articles: V.V. Marjina, 'Brána na Balkán. Slovensko v geopolitických plánech SSSR a Německa 1939-1941', *Soudobé dějiny* 6 (1993-4), 827-46; V.V. Marjina, 'SSSR i chekhoslovatskii vopros, 1939 god', *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia i strany Tsentralnoi i Iugovostochnoi Evropy* (Moscow 1990), 95-128.

82 W.S. Churchill, *Great War Speeches* (London 1965), 105-9. Beneš, *Paměti II* (2007); *Memoirs* (1954), 154-6, 165-6.

83 Conversation Beneš-Feierabend, Aston Abbots, 27 June 1941: L.K. Feierabend, *Politické vzpomínky II* (Brno 1994), 231 [hereafter *Feierabend*].

84 *Smutný Diaries*, 23 June 1941, no. 193; *ČSV I*, no. 84.

that Russia would enter the war, but it was not so easy to say even among our own people to prevent something irredeemable to happen.⁸⁵

During the same conversation, Beneš revealed to Smutný the secret why his political prognostications had been, as he liked to hear, so flawless and always on the target:

I never count on people; I am interested in 'social forces' only. This is why I am not watching what ordinary people do, but follow where the trajectories of social forces are aiming. This is why I remained absolutely convinced that Russia must sooner or later clash with Germany.

Beneš' obsession with his own self-righteousness at the correct moment in history led him further to lay foundations of another legend, namely one of direct personal involvement in Churchill's historic speech of 22 June. Churchill, according to Beneš, had sent him earlier the draft of his speech with a request for comments. Beneš apparently was not entirely happy with the draft and changed a few passages here and there, which were then taken by a special messenger back to Chequers, the prime minister's residence in Buckinghamshire, not far from Aston Abbots, where Beneš lived.⁸⁶

As Beneš anticipated, ambassador Majsky soon sent for him to propose a Soviet recognition of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile with President Beneš as its head, based on the juridical continuity with pre-Munich Czechoslovakia — but without explicitly mentioning the borders.⁸⁷ The Soviet offer, nevertheless, appeared more generous than the incomplete recognition of the 'provisional' Czechoslovak government-in-exile which the British government granted in July 1940.⁸⁸ Beneš also cleverly used the meeting to reintroduce the issue of Ruthenia, now upgraded from mere bait to a more advanced bargaining chip. It must, he maintained, be first reinstated as part of Czechoslovakia, and only thereafter should its future be decided through direct talks between the Czechoslovak and Soviet governments — but never, as he stated earlier in the autumn of 1939, through Polish or Hungarian mediations. Majsky did agree with everything Beneš suggested. This time Beneš did not repeat his chief requirement from 1939 — the common border with the Soviet Union. Whether this was caused by the retreat of the Red Army, suffering devastating losses under German attack, or the opening of negotiations between the Soviets and the London Poles, one can only speculate. Beneš further insisted that the

85 Ibid.

86 Conversation Beneš–Feierabend, 30 June 1941, in: *Feierabend*, 232. My inquiries in the Churchill Archives in Cambridge during March 2006 produced no specific evidence regarding the alleged comments on Churchill's draft by Beneš on that particular day, i.e. 22 June 1941. I wish to express my thanks to Mrs Caroline Herbert from the Churchill Archives for her help.

87 Meeting Beneš–Majsky, 8 July 1941, ČSV I, no. 88; *Smutný Diaries*, no. 198; B. Lockhart to A. Eden, 9 July 1941, in: *British Documents on Foreign Affairs. Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print*, Part III (1940–1945), Series F, Europe, vol. 3, *January 1940–December 1941* [hereafter *B DFA*] (HMSO & University Publications of America, 1997–9), 281.

88 Detlef Brandes, *Großbritannien und seine osteuropäischen Alliierten 1939–1943* (Munich 1988), 149–201; Brown, *Dealing with Democrats*, op. cit., 109–49.

Czech communist group under its leader Klement Gottwald, which had been sheltered in Moscow since the German occupation of Prague, must be subordinated to his government-in-exile. Given the fact that the Komintern was still operational in 1941, this was from Moscow's perspective a truly exceptional gesture.⁸⁹ Beneš further requested the same subordination with regard to the Czechoslovak military units to be raised in the USSR from, among others, the ex-citizens of Ruthenia. Czechoslovak officers appointed by the Beneš government would be in charge, but the overall command would be under the Red Army. Majsky agreed. It seemed as if the Czechoslovaks enjoyed a special status in Moscow, which only increased Polish suspicions that Beneš must have signed a secret pact with the Soviets, sacrificing Ruthenia in exchange for a common border with the Soviets. Beneš, of course, denied that, arguing that his dedication to the Czechoslovak-Polish Confederation remained as strong as ever.⁹⁰ At the same time, the border questions remained glaringly unsolved. Beneš categorically refused to leave the Těšín (Cieszyn) district in Polish hands, while Sikorski insisted on the return of Polish eastern territories invaded by the Soviets in September 1939 and expected the Czechs to support him.

Beneš' world view seemed to be focused on the outcome of the duel between the two giant land powers Germany and Russia. He told Smutný that in five years Europe would be a different continent, with France eliminated at least for the next 20 years, with Britain withdrawing from Europe and

going with America a different path . . . only two powers will be left in Europe, Russia and Germany. Since Germany will be devastated by the war, the decisive role, certainly in Eastern Europe, I hope, will be assumed by Russia . . . and I am concerned that she does it the right way!⁹¹

From Beneš' perspective, doing it 'the right way' meant that Russia would be inescapably dragged into the war on the side of the Anglo-Americans, even against its own will, and even if the Poles might still prefer to fight the Russians than the Germans. Could the confederation project succeed in spite of the fact that the Poles represented such a stumbling-block? Not only for the Czechs. Neither the issue of Ruthenia's future nor the threat of an alternative Czechoslovak national committee set up by the Czech communists in Moscow could have represented a greater menace to Beneš than the stumbling-block of the Czechoslovak-Polish Confederation with Russia fighting 'the right way'. Indeed, it was to be Poland, or rather the issue of Poland's massacred prisoners-of-war, which was to cast a long shadow on Czechoslovak-Soviet relations.

⁸⁹ On the Komintern see note 39 above.

⁹⁰ *Confederation*, nos 59, 62; Duraczynski, 'ZSRR' (1997), op. cit., 132–3.

⁹¹ *Smutný Diaries*, 12 July 1941, no. 198; also Beneš' notes after meeting Majsky on 8 July 1941, *ČSV I*, no. 88.

[I]t is very nasty.

(Cadogan's Diaries)

[T]hat a monstrous crime has been committed by a foreign government — albeit a friendly one.

(Owen O'Malley)

Since 22 June 1941, the Poles and the Czechoslovaks,⁹² though fighting under the same (British) flag, were fighting different wars with different war aims. The Poles were fighting against Hitler in the open and continued their war against Stalin in secret — at least in their thoughts — for both dictators had invaded their country in September 1939. By contrast, the Czechoslovaks felt no enmity towards the Russians and wished to fight Hitler alone. This suited British interests at the time, whereas the inborn Polish hostility vis-à-vis Bolshevik Russia caused serious headaches among the Allies. The above simple differential also helps to explain why the exiled Czechoslovaks were predisposed to develop good relations with both the British and the Russians — whereas the Poles, who started as the Number One ally of the British, were replaced after June 1941 by the Soviets, on whose shoulders the main burden of war with Germany now rested.

Molotov's promise to Beneš in June 1942 of Soviet recognition of the pre-Munich borders of Czechoslovakia⁹³ was to cause bad blood not only among the Poles but also with the British government. Eden reminded Beneš that this was clearly a breach of a previous Anglo-Russian agreement, the so-called Self-denying Ordinance, 'the object of which was to prevent the greater Allies from making treaties with the smaller Allies.'⁹⁴ It was not until the Moscow conference of Allied foreign ministers in October 1943 that, under Soviet pressure, Eden decided not to insist on the Self-denying Ordinance, thereby giving up his opposition to the Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty proposed by Beneš.⁹⁵

After the unmitigated Soviet *Niet* on the subject of the Czechoslovak-Polish Confederation, delivered only several weeks after Molotov's seeming approval during his stopover in London, Beneš appeared depressed for a while.⁹⁶ But he quickly recovered and accepted the Soviet alternative. Soviet ambassador Alexander Bogomolov, appointed to the exiled governments in England, assured him that the defensive function of blocking the notorious German *Drang nach Osten* could be more reliably performed by the Soviet Union than

92 I am conscious of the fact that the Slovaks are an independent nation. Here 'Czechoslovaks' has been used to designate exiled Czechs and Slovaks who had accepted President Beneš' leadership for the restoration of Czechoslovakia.

93 As referred to in note 53.

94 Eden writing to Philip Nichols, British minister to the exiled Czechoslovak government in London, 25 June and 7 July 1942, in: *BDF*, vol. 4, 161–3.

95 See proceedings of the Moscow Conference on 24 October 1943, in: *Foreign Relations of the United States/1943/1*, 626–7; Vojtěch Mastný, 'Soviet War Aims at the Moscow and Teheran Conferences of 1943', *Journal of Modern History* 47 (September 1975), 481–504.

96 See note 54 above.

by Poland.⁹⁷ Moreover, the Soviet offer of a bilateral pact would come with a guarantee of Soviet non-interference in the internal affairs of Czechoslovakia. Furthermore, Moscow appeared to be ready to listen to Beneš' plans to expel the Sudeten Germans from Czechoslovakia. The Soviet approval of the transfer would come one year later, apparently as a reward, some historians would argue, for Czechoslovak support for the Soviet version of the Katyn massacre.⁹⁸

During 1943 Beneš made two important political trips. The first was to the United States. He twice met President Roosevelt and gained the impression from him that he agreed with his pro-Soviet course and approved of the expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia. Beneš' most decisive trip was the second one, to Moscow at the end of 1943. Having signed on 12 December 1943 the Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty of 'friendship, mutual aid and post-war cooperation', Beneš appeared jubilant when he left Moscow.⁹⁹ Neither Roosevelt nor Churchill could satisfy so fully his ambition to remodel Czechoslovakia to suit his vision of a homogeneous Slavic state, protected by a common border with the Soviet Union. Beneš was able to extract from Stalin support for his big scheme of expelling the Germans and Hungarians, while restoring Czechoslovakia to its pre-Munich borders (and reclaiming the 'treacherous' Slovaks). Beneš briefly mentioned before Stalin and Molotov his opinion about Ruthenia: that it should first be restored to Czechoslovakia and then its citizens left to decide whether they wanted to return to Czechoslovakia or to join the Soviet Ukraine.¹⁰⁰ Molotov was overheard saying 'Khorosho,' and so it was decided — but not in the manner Beneš expected, as he would soon bitterly learn.¹⁰¹ Beneš' return trip came close to a triumph. He stopped in Algiers to see General de Gaulle, who enthusiastically approved Beneš' policy of close co-operation with Moscow.¹⁰² Churchill, convalescing next door in

97 Conversation Beneš–Bogomolov, 31 July 1942, *ČSV I*, no. 183.

98 During Beneš' visit to the USA, the Czechoslovak State Council, in session between 17 and 19 May 1943, approved unanimously a resolution condemning the Polish government for serving German propaganda in the Katyn Affair (*Confederation*, no. 181). The Soviet approval for the transfer of Germans from Czechoslovakia reached Beneš in the United States on 6 June 1943, one day before his scheduled farewell to President Roosevelt. According to Beneš' notes — no record was made on the American side — Roosevelt is said to have approved the transfer of 'minority population from East Prussia, Transylvania and from us', as well as the Soviet annexation of the Baltic countries and of eastern Poland (*ČSV I*, nos. 241, 248, 249; *Confederation*, no. 182; *Paměti* (1948), 330, 361–2). For fierce criticism of the lack of sincerity on the part of Czechoslovak politicians, see Marek K. Kamiński, *Edvard Beneš* (2005), op. cit., 274–85; M.K. Kamiński, 'Czechoslowacka emigracyjna Rada Ministrów wobec kwestii stosunków z Polską i Związkiem Sowieckim 1943 r.', *Dzieje Najnowsze* 1 (2007), 41–59; 3 (2007), 57–87; Dušan Segeš, 'Edvard Beneš a sprawa polska w kontekście podpisania układu czechoslowacko-sowieckiego z 1943 r.', *Dzieje Najnowsze* 3 (2006), 17–53.

99 Beneš, *Memoirs* (1954), 239–91; *Paměti II* (2007), ch. II.7.3–4; *Paměti III* (2007), documents nos 151–4; *ČSV II*, documents nos 58–71. For Beneš' enthusiastic summary, see his address before the Czechoslovak State Council on 11 January 1944, in: *ČSV II*, no. 75; *Messages*, no. 80.

100 *ČSV II*, 157, 179. Repeated in Compton Mackenzie, *Dr. Beneš* (London 1946), 290.

101 See notes 131ff. below.

102 Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires de Guerre: l'Unité 1942–44* (Paris 1956), 249–51. Little did de

Marrakech, also received Beneš. Constantly irritated by the continuing deadlock in Polish-Soviet relations since the revelations of the Katyn massacre, he expressed support for Beneš' arrangement with Stalin without murmurs.¹⁰³

It was on the eve of Beneš' departure to the United States that the Katyn Affair exploded in the media. What was the Katyn massacre, and why was its lasting impact upon the two East European governments more important than any other event? The affair, revealing the existence of mass graves of massacred Polish POWs, was the work of German wartime propaganda, designed to drive a wedge between the Allies; while the massacre itself was the work of Soviet genocidal practices in dealing with Polish 'class enemies' in captivity. When German radio announced on 14 April 1943 the 'discovery' of thousands of mutilated corpses in Polish military uniforms, it also claimed that the victims had been executed by the NKVD, Stalin's secret police.¹⁰⁴ Moscow angrily denied any involvement in the massacre and accused the Germans of the crime. When, however, the Polish government of London asked the International Red Cross in Geneva to send out a commission of experts to conduct exhumations at Katyn, the Soviet government indignantly broke off diplomatic relations with the London Poles, never to resume them again.

When the Katyn affair broke out Beneš was preparing for his state visit to the United States. He accepted the Soviet version of the Katyn massacre without vacillation. Equally, although Beneš had acknowledged the renewed Soviet invitation to travel to Moscow at the height of the Katyn Affair, he was unable to fly until the preparations for the Teheran Conference were completed. Under the pretext of 'bad weather', Beneš' party was diverted to a British airbase in Iraq until the conference in Teheran was over. Only then did the Beneš party receive the green light to proceed to Moscow. Beneš was therefore going to meet Stalin, who must have been in an extraordinarily optimistic mood, having returned from the conference of his lifetime with the two most powerful men of the Western world, who treated him as an equal and basically accepted his territorial demands. As the Czechs under Beneš' leadership seemed to demonstrate to other East Europeans that the Soviets were no cannibals and could be trusted, the entrenched Poles, the 'Betrayed Ally', were further driven into the corner, until finally abandoned by the Czechs as well.¹⁰⁵

Regarding the future extension of the Soviet border westwards, Beneš, implicitly already in 1939, and now explicitly, accepted the Curzon Line by reiterating his wish to establish a common border between the restored Czechoslovak Republic and the enlarged Soviet Union. The subject of Ruthenia and its inhab-

Gaulle know that 12 months later he would be standing before Stalin and subjected to even greater pressure and humiliation than Beneš. See Henri-Christian Giraud, *De Gaulle et les Communistes*, vol. II (Paris 1989), chs 11–12.

103 *Churchill and Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence*, vol. 1, ed. W.F. Kimbell (Princeton, NJ, 1984), 533; Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill — Road to Victory*, vol. VI (London 1986), 635–6. See further note 117.

104 *The Goebbels Diaries* (New York 1948): entries between 9 and 30 April 1943.

105 Anita Prazmowska, *Britain and Poland 1939–1943. The Betrayed Ally* (Cambridge 1995), 166–98.

itants re-emerged in the detailed military negotiations, as it became clear that the bulk of the soldiers serving with the Czechoslovak units in the Soviet Union would have to be recruited from the inhabitants of Ruthenia, who were found in various Gulag or POW camps. The Soviets allowed them to serve under the Czechoslovak flag as long as they were listed as 'Ukrainians'.¹⁰⁶

As far as the Katyn massacre was concerned, however, the affair had a much deeper significance than could be confined to a theoretical discussion over the treatment of POWs. If the foremost task of the three great powers on the European front was to fight Germany into unconditional surrender, how were British and American statesmen, not to mention the representatives of the exiled governments, supposed to react to the grisly evidence coming (through the German-controlled media!) from the mass graves of Katyn? Moreover, in the discussion over the future of former Polish eastern territories, annexed to the Soviet Union after September 1939, the Atlantic Charter could be invoked. It stipulated that no territorial changes should be effected without the freely expressed wishes of the people concerned, who should choose in free elections the government under which they wished to live (Articles 2 and 3). Should all this paper ballast be pushed under the carpet because morality cannot overrun practicality of military co-operation amidst war? Although Churchill refused to back up the Poles, he could not identify himself with the Soviet version either. When Majsky came to him complaining about the Poles, Churchill declared: 'We have got to beat Hitler . . . this is no time for quarrels and charges.'¹⁰⁷

Fortunately, a few individuals refused to shut their eyes and plug their ears when one group of Allies had massacred another group of Allies in the most ghastly fashion. At the end of May 1943 a substantial memorandum with the most detailed and convincing reconstruction about the Polish officers in captivity, written by Owen O'Malley, ambassador to the Polish government, began to circulate inside the Foreign Office, where it was characterized as 'a brilliant, unorthodox and disquieting despatch'. Outside, it was read by the Cabinet and the King; Churchill insisted that President Roosevelt should read it too. 'If, then,' concludes O'Malley,

morals have become involved with international politics, if it be the case that a monstrous crime has been committed by a foreign government — albeit a friendly one — and that we, for however valid reasons, have been obliged to behave as if the deed was not theirs, may it not be that we now stand in danger of bemusing not only others but ourselves, of falling . . . under St. Paul's curse on those who can see cruelty 'and burn not'? . . . And so, if the facts

¹⁰⁶ Marjina, *Zakarpatskaia Ukraina* (2003), op. cit., 30ff; *ČSV II*, no. 230.

¹⁰⁷ In volume IV of his memoirs, completed during the summer of 1950, Churchill admitted that he had access to 'other facts', but avoids taking a clear-cut stand by escaping through a 'pirouette', referring to the Soviet failure to present evidence on German responsibility for the Katyn massacre, and rounds it off by a non-committal conclusion: 'Everyone is therefore entitled to form his own opinion' (Churchill IV, 681). For more details on Churchill's cover-up of the Katyn massacre see the superbly researched book by David Reynolds, *In Command of History. Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War* (London 2005), ch. 22.

about the Katyn massacre turn out to be as most of us incline to think, shall we vindicate the spirit of these brave unlucky men and justify the living to the dead.¹⁰⁸

Sir Alexander Cadogan, the Permanent Under Secretary at the Foreign Office, after reading O'Malley's cataclysmic memorandum, wrote in his diary that for years before Katyn the Soviets were butchering their own citizens by the tens of thousands, when the British flung themselves into their arms in 1941. He felt that this act made the British position hardly less delicate:

The blood of Russians cries so loud to Heaven as that of Poles. But it is very nasty. How can Poles *ever* live amicably alongside Russians, and how can *we* discuss with Russians execution of German 'war criminals', when we have condoned this?¹⁰⁹

It took the indefatigable Poles half a century to extract a Soviet admission to the Katyn crime. Finally, in October 1992, the Polish government obtained from President B. Yeltsin the key document, the actual execution order of 5 March 1940, which originated from L. Beria and was countersigned by Stalin and his closest collaborators. It requested permission to execute 14,700 Polish POWs, in addition to 11,000 so-called 'civilians' — shopkeepers, lawyers, doctors, priests and others — who were to be liquidated as 'agents' and 'class enemies'.¹¹⁰

Returning now to Beneš and the Czechoslovak attitude to Katyn: how much of it was based on ignorance and for how long could such a claim be maintained? Although the Czechoslovak government in exile, along with the rest of the Allies, was quick to condemn the 'Katyn Affair' as a German propaganda ploy to split the Allies,¹¹¹ there is ample evidence that rumours about the massacre of Polish officers in Soviet captivity had been circulating among the Czechs and reached Beneš and his entourage long before April 1943, when nazi radio stations first broadcast the news. Several hundreds of Czechoslovak soldiers and officers volunteered in 1939 to form the 'Polish Legion' within the Polish Army and fell into Soviet hands after 17 September. Although handled by the same NKVD authorities as the unfortunate Polish POWs, they were interned in separate camps. Their lives were spared and most of them were allowed to leave for France via Turkey. Paradoxically, at the same time as Stalin ordered

108 Foreign Office, Confidential Prints: C 6160/258/55, Mr. Malley to Mr. Eden, 24 May 1943 [available on the website] with the accompanying minutes. Papers of Sir Owen O'Malley, National Library of Ireland, Ms. 21, 691–1302. O'Malley's despatch and the FO minutes are reprinted in Louis Fitzgerald, *Katyn Massacre* (London 1977). See also Sir Owen O'Malley, *The Phantom Caravan* (London 1954), 229–34.

109 *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan 1938–1945*, ed. D.N. Dilks (London 1971), 537.

110 *Katyn. Dokumenty ludobójstwa . . . przekazane Polsce 14 Pazdziernika 1992 r.* (Warsaw 1992), 34–9; Natalia S. Lebedeva, *Katyn: Prestuplenie protiv chelovechestva* (Moscow 1994), 159. The facsimile of Beria's letter of 5 March 1940, countersigned by Stalin and his closest collaborators, was delivered by hand to President L. Walesa on 14 October 1992 by Prof. R. Pikhoia, director of the Russian Federal Archives.

111 E. Táborický, 'A Polish-Czechoslovak Confederation. A Story of the First Soviet Veto', *Journal of Central European Affairs* 9(4) (1950). See note 98 above.

the execution of Polish POWs, he agreed to the release of the Czechs against a written promise not to fight against the USSR. These Czechoslovak soldiers were well aware of what had happened to their Polish comrades. Further information about the fate of Polish officers in Soviet captivity came unofficially from the Czechoslovak Military Mission (Col. Píka) in the Soviet Union.¹¹²

Professor Stanislaw Kot, member of the Sikorski Government and the ambassador-designate to Moscow after the signing of the Soviet-Polish Agreement on Amnesty, told some Czechs in July 1941 that thousands of Polish officers, captured in September 1939, were in fact unaccounted for, and that German broadcasts repeatedly claimed that the Polish POWs had been massacred by Stalin's secret police.¹¹³ Four months after Moscow vetoed the Confederation,¹¹⁴ Ladislav Feierabend, the finance minister in the Beneš government in exile, happened to speak with Adam Tarnowski, the Polish ambassador to the Czechoslovak government. Tarnowski complained that the Poles could not find over 10,000 of their officers, taken prisoner by the Russians. He and many Poles in the government were now convinced that these officers had been killed, but the Poles hesitated to come out in the open with accusations, since Soviet-Polish relations were already so appallingly bad. Tarnowski nevertheless criticized Beneš' policy of friendship with Moscow. Russian promises, he warned, cannot absolutely be trusted.¹¹⁵

Although the Czechoslovak-Polish Confederation appeared defunct after the Soviet veto of July 1942, there were moral obligations towards the Polish ally as the first member of the anti-German coalition. There were, alas, also powerful anti-Polish and anti-Czech stereotypes present in both exiled communities. Beneš often aired his anti-Polish feelings in the presence of foreigners, especially the Russians. He would speak of the need to get rid of the Polish aristocrats, and of the Red Army as the optimal tool for carrying out the much-needed 'Social Revolution'. Beneš' views were quite infectious among his collaborators, who seemed to defend them even 40 years after the Katyn massacre.¹¹⁶

112 See ČSV I, docs nos 24, 26, 33, 36, 38–9, 43, 49, 50, 52–3; Anna M. Cienciala, N.S. Lebedeva and W. Materski (eds), *Katyn — A Crime Without Punishment* (New Haven, CT, 2007), docs nos 14, 63, 91. Author's conversation and correspondence with Mjr. Jaroslav Kašpar-Pátý, member of the Czechoslovak Military Mission in the USSR and colleague of Col. Píka, October 1983. One of the interned Czechoslovak officers, Staff Captain Jan Krček, having reached France in May 1940, left a written testimony about being blackmailed to collaborate with the NKVD. When he resisted, he was threatened that his future might follow the path of the Polish officers who 'were never to revisit their homes and families': 'Zpráva škt. Jana Krčka o československém legionu v Polsku', *Historie a vojenství* 2/1993, 134–62, at 158.

113 *Válečné deníky Jana Opočenského*, ed. Jana Čechurová et al. (Prague 2001), 131–2, 284; *Feierabend* II, 180.

114 See notes 55 and 111 above.

115 *Feierabend* II, 186.

116 See Taborsky, op. cit.; Beneš, *Between East and West* (1981), 121; Hoover Institution Archives, Taborsky Collection, Box 2, Taborsky's Diaries, vol. III, 218–22. In the British press similar views were supported by the leader writer for *The Times*, E.H. Carr, and the paper's Moscow correspondent, Ralph Parker: P.M.H. Bell, *John Bull and the Bear: British Public Opinion, Foreign Policy and the Soviet Union 1941–1945* (London 1990), 124.

Beneš, who was at the time on a state visit in the United States, agreed with President Roosevelt that the Poles had been deluded and that the reactionary Polish government had been using the confusion over Katyn to divert attention from the Russo-Polish boundary controversy. After discussing the Curzon Line with Roosevelt, one of his Czech colleagues (Feierabend) reminded him that the Poles had suspected for some time that the Soviets had killed at least 10,000 of their officers. Beneš admitted that he had already heard such rumours, but that he did not believe them.¹¹⁷ Stalin insisted that the Soviet Union should regain her borders of 1939–41, which she had negotiated with Nazi Germany and subsequently lost because of the armed aggression by the latter country three years later. The Poles refused to be pushed several hundred miles westwards from their ancient lands in the east, where bigger towns were mostly Polish-speaking and the countryside was inhabited by Ukrainians, Belorussians and Jews. Roosevelt, Churchill and Beneš also thought that Stalin's proposal to exchange Eastern Poland up to the so-called Curzon Line for a portion of East Prussia, Danzig and other German territories up to the river Oder was a fair proposition. They could not understand why this kind of advantageous horse-trading was unacceptable to any patriotic Pole. As much as he disliked at that stage Polish national egoism, Churchill liked Beneš' reasoning on the theme of the Czechoslovak-Soviet partnership as the future geopolitical axis of anti-German defence in Eastern Europe. 'You and Wilhelmina,' he told him approvingly, 'you are the only leaders who have the nation behind them.'¹¹⁸

The rationalist Beneš considered foolish the dispute with the Soviets over the ownership of the mass graves of dead Polish officers. Their lives could not be saved, anyway. Was it so difficult to get over the loss of the pre-war territory, mostly agricultural land and marshes with some 15 million inhabitants, of whom seven million were Polish, as were the ancient cities of Wilna and Lwów, when, on the other hand, the Allies offered the Poles in exchange German territories with advanced farming, superior infrastructure and prosperous cities? Having mapped the terrain and assessed first the 'social forces' present there, Beneš contemplated the Polish-Soviet confrontation with the cool eyes of a sociologist. Since he had always anticipated that a social revolution was necessary for Poland's path towards modernization, he welcomed the inevitable sweep through Poland by the Red Army as the necessary instrument of social cleansing. He also had to look at the Polish-Soviet conflict with the eyes of a 'builder' of postwar Czechoslovakia, whose supreme task was to reconstruct and reshape his own country, expel the non-Slavic nationalities and transform future Czechoslovakia into a truly homogeneous 'Czechoslovak'

117 *Feierabend* III, 66. In Beneš' *Memoirs* (1948), 400, Katyn is mentioned in passing as a convenient date causing the break in diplomatic relations between the USSR and the Polish government. In the English version of the *Memoirs*, of 1954, an impartial commentary is provided by the translator, Godfrey Lias (at 265). See also Beneš, *Memoirs* II (2007), 25–7, 332–4.

118 Beneš on the visit in Marrakech, 4 January 1944 (*Confederation*, no. 205; *ČSV II*, 215, no. 75). The equation of President Beneš and Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands is truly Churchillian and tends to be misleading.

nation that would require for its protection a stable and safe Russo-Polish border. It seemed, therefore, to Beneš, as it did to Roosevelt¹¹⁹ and Churchill,¹²⁰ that such an optimal border corresponded to the Curzon Line.¹²¹

No rationalization can legitimize the approval of the grisly murder of 25,000 Poles, let alone to carry on with the lie that they were massacred by the Germans. Beneš' avoidance of responsibility, and those of other Czechoslovak representatives, has to be confronted with T.G. Masaryk's legacy 'to live in Truth', evoked recently by Václav Havel.¹²² But can we blame Beneš for his failures 'to live in Truth' in stronger terms than those leaders of the democratic bloc Churchill and Roosevelt, who led the crusade for democracy against the 'evil Axis empires'? According to the Russian writer Victor Zaslavsky, Soviet leaders would not have succeeded for half a century in hiding the truth about the Katyn massacre without Western government complicity.¹²³

How do the challenges and dilemmas with which Beneš was confronted look from the broader perspective of the common European heritage? In his recent book *Postwar*, Tony Judt has singled out the recognition of the Holocaust as the common denominator for 'our contemporary European entry ticket'. He cited approvingly President Kwasniewski's official recognition of the wartime sufferings of Polish Jews, including their victimization at the hands of Poles themselves, as an attempt 'to close a painful chapter in his nation's past and bring Poland into line with its EU partners'.¹²⁴ How about bringing the EU into line with the suffering of the Poles, one might ask? I would suggest including Katyn on 'our European entry ticket' as a symbolic tribute to all victims of Stalinist terror.¹²⁵

119 Although the United States obtained authentic detailed information about the massacred Polish officers either during (e.g. by H. Szymanski, J. Drexel Biddle, G.H. Earle) or shortly after the war in Europe ended, e.g. from Lt.Col. John Van Vliet, who had been captured by the Germans and brought to Katyn at the time of the exhumation in the spring of 1943. His report was concealed by the Pentagon and the State Department so as not to damage the reputation of the Soviet ally needed to defeat Japan. Roosevelt steadfastly refused to listen to information that the Katyn massacre had been perpetrated by the Russians. See Allen Paul, *Katyn. The Untold Story of Stalin's Polish Massacre* (New York 1991), 308–15; Benjamin B. Fischer, 'Stalin's Killing Field — the Katyn Controversy', *Studies in Intelligence* (Winter 1999–2000); George Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940* (London 2005), 159–66.

120 See note 107 above, and Sanford, *Katyn* (2005), op. cit., 166–87. The long controversy around the Katyn massacre, which so scandalously tinged the Foreign Office until only a few years ago, is contained in great detail in the so-called Butler Memorandum of 1973 (available on the website). It has been published recently, together with other documents, under the title *Katyn — British Reactions to the Katyn Massacre 1943–2003* (PRO, Kew, 2003).

121 *Confederation*, nos 170, 172, 75, 177, 187.

122 Cf. Václav Havel's essay 'The Power of the Powerless' (1979).

123 V. Zaslavsky, *Il Massacro di Katyn: il crimine e la menzogna* (Rome 1998), 58; 'The Katyn Massacre', *TELOS* 114 (Winter 1999), 67–107.

124 Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York 2005), 803.

125 Despite the first official attempt to recognize the Katyn massacre as a brutal crime by the Yeltsin government in 1992, the present Russian authorities are still playing a game of hide-and-seek. The office of the Russian Military Prosecutor issued in March 2005 a statement in which the genocidal nature of the Katyn massacre was explicitly denied, accompanied by a dry announce-

'I never count on people. I am interested in Social Forces only.'

(Beneš in June 1941)

As the Red Army took physical possession of Ruthenia by the end of 1944, Soviet authorities decided to challenge the Czechoslovak title and claim to the province by applying their 'reunification strategy' to bring fellow Ukrainians under the banner of the Soviet Ukraine.¹²⁶ A good indicator of Moscow's future intention vis-à-vis Ruthenia was the planting of partisan units. Until the spring of 1944 there were no guerrilla activities in Ruthenia whatsoever. Gradually, however, Soviet-trained partisan instructors were flown in.¹²⁷ The Czechoslovak exiled government in London had no influence over the partisan movement in eastern Slovakia and Ruthenia. General Heliodor Pika, the head of the Czechoslovak Military Mission in the USSR, who was loyal to Beneš, reported that several different Soviet army outfits, in addition to the Czechoslovak Communist Party HQ in Moscow and the NKVD, had been training and flying in their hand-picked teams, without bothering to co-ordinate their subversive activities on the territory with either Pika or London.¹²⁸ With the creation of seemingly autonomous foreign ministries for the Belorussian and Ukrainian republics, and the Ukrainian Staff of Partisan Movement (UšPD), agitation in Ruthenia and eastern Slovakia among the Ukrainian population intensified conspicuously.¹²⁹

On 8 May 1944 an agreement was signed between the Czechoslovak exiled (London) and Soviet governments which anticipated the advance of the Red Army into Ruthenia and stipulated explicitly the transfer of civilian powers into the hands of the Czechoslovak administration. The outbreak of two important anti-German uprisings in late summer in Eastern Europe, in Warsaw and in Central Slovakia, probably changed the attitude of the Soviet leadership vis-à-vis Ruthenia. Henceforth all indigenous activities had to be under strict Soviet administrative control. Meanwhile, in accordance with the May Agreement, Beneš despatched a government delegation led by Minister František Němec, which arrived in Ruthenia in October 1944.¹³⁰ They found the reality on the ground very different. Not only was the Czechoslovak Army Corps diverted

ment that 40 per cent of the available documents would soon be released for historical research, whereas the remaining 60 per cent would retain the classification of 'state secrets' and remain unavailable to researchers (*MosNews*, 11 March 2005).

126 Using predominantly Russian, Ukrainian, Hungarian and Czech documentation, a prominent researcher writing in Russian has recently published results: V.V. Marjina, 'K sobytiim v Podkarpatskoi Rusi (Zakarpatskoi Ukraine) oseniu 1944 — zimoi 1945 goda', *Slavianovedenie* 3/2001, 27–48, at 28; V.V. Marjina, *Zakarpatskaia Ukraina (Podkarpatskaia Rus) v politike Beneša i Stalina, 1939–1945 gg. Dokumentalnyi ocherk* (Moscow 2003).

127 Between May and October 1944, over 260 instructors were flown into Ruthenia to organize and train guerrillas: Marjina, *Zakarpatskaia Ukraina* (2003), op. cit., 44–6.

128 *Slovenské národné povstanie: Documents*, ed. V. Prečan (Bratislava 1965), 220.

129 Marjina, *Zakarpatskaia Ukraina* (2003), op. cit., 44–8.

130 Ibid.; Švorc *Zakletá zem* (2007), op. cit., 258–62.

from the 18th (Soviet) Army, advancing into Ruthenia, and despatched to a front segment facing northern Slovakia, where it was thrown against strong German defences at the Dukla Pass, resulting in heavy losses.¹³¹ In Ruthenia itself, Minister Němec and his administrative unit encountered nothing but hostility from the Soviet authorities, especially the NKVD, who sabotaged the Czechoslovak call-up orders. Němec and his powerless team watched how 'spontaneous' grass-root activities of local branches of the National Council of Transcarpathian Ukraine sprang up like mushrooms and demanded 'joining the Soviet Ukrainian Socialist Republic' the moment the Red Army touched the ground. The mobilization of able-bodied men in Ruthenia was to be carried out only by and for the Red Army.¹³²

Beneš in London was shocked by this hostile reception. To his diplomatic representative in Moscow he expressed his outrage and demanded that the Soviets should adhere to the May Agreement.¹³³ To no avail. Instead, on 28 January 1945 Beneš was handed a personal letter from Stalin, the only one he ever received from the Soviet dictator. Stalin's cynicism transpired in a rather refined form. Even the hardened Beneš must have been taken aback as Stalin described the manipulation of the local population in favour of joining the Soviet Ukraine as the spontaneous 'expression of national will'. Moreover, he expressed surprise at Beneš' opposition, recalling the latter's own words in Moscow in December 1943, as he had witnessed Beneš voicing his readiness to transfer Ruthenia to Soviet authorities.¹³⁴ Beneš, under strong pressure, had no option other than to apologize the next day to Stalin in a long letter that bordered on sycophancy.¹³⁵ The following day Beneš recognized — after six months of vacillation — the pro-Moscow (Lublin) Polish government, in the hope that he would regain in return the Těšín region.¹³⁶

Thus, regarding the legal restoration of Subcarpathian Ruthenia to postwar Czechoslovakia, it became obvious that the exiled Czechoslovaks were fighting a rearguard action. Its fate was sealed by March 1945, during Beneš' final trip

131 During the Dukla operation in September and October 1944, the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps suffered more than 50 per cent casualties within eight weeks and was practically decimated for the rest of the war.

132 K. Kaplan, *Poválečné Československo 1945–1948: Národy a hranice* (Munich 1985), 23–42. Kaplan summed up his views on Ruthenia earlier, in a popularized version, in the Czech exile monthly *Zpravodaj* 3/1981, published in Zurich. Kaplan's critical passages on Ruthenia, although published in exile three decades ago, have retained their value.

133 See note 138.

134 ČSV II, no. 228, Stalin's letter to Beneš, 23 January 1945, and Beneš' reply of 29 January 1945 (no. 236).

135 Ibid., 129–36, no. 228 and no. 236; Beneš, *Paměti III* (2007), nos 159–60: the only exchange of personal letters between Stalin and Beneš during the war. See also *Vostochnaia Evropa v dokumentakh rossiiskikh arkhivov*, ed. G.P. Murashko, vol. 1 (Moscow 1997), nos 43, 46, 52–5, 62–7, 77.

136 ČSV II, no. 237. For more detailed analysis of the diplomatic recognition of the Lublin government, see Ivan Štoviček, 'Diplomatické pozadí uznání polské Lublinské vlády', *Sborník archivních prací* 1–43/1993, 3–64.

to Moscow.¹³⁷ When the Soviets produced written records of previous verbal commitments by Beneš since 1939, suggesting Ruthenia be attached to Soviet Ukraine, he had to make a written promise (*obeshchanie*) to Molotov, with the necessary proviso that Czechoslovak legislation would have to confirm the transfer after the end of the war by an Act of Parliament.¹³⁸

Weighing the gains and losses of Beneš' pro-Moscow policy, his unquestionable gain was the recapture of Slovakia from earlier attempts of Slovak communists to join the Soviet Union. His second gain was a Soviet promise in June 1943 for the transfer of German and Hungarian minorities. However, although he succeeded, with the help of the Allies, in cleansing Czechoslovakia from its German inhabitants, he failed in the ethnic cleansing of the Hungarians. Whether the creation of a common border with the Soviet Union by forsaking Ruthenia could be rated as the ultimate geostrategic gain must remain open to question. Long-term considerations would certainly make all Beneš' gains questionable.

Already, in June 1945, serious border clashes occurred along the Czechoslovak-Polish border. Prague, in competition with Warsaw, turned to Moscow as the supreme arbiter. The Czechoslovak delegation in Moscow decided to 'deliver Ruthenia as a kind of ransom',¹³⁹ in exchange for much-needed Soviet pressure applied against the Lublin Poles, who did not want to recognize the strategic Těšín salient as part of Czechoslovakia. The ratification of Ruthenia's transfer by the Czechoslovak Parliament on 22 November 1945 then became a sheer formality.¹⁴⁰

Shortly after the occupation of Ruthenia by the Red Army, Beneš belatedly instructed his representatives not to give in to extortion and to follow the law in all conflicts with Soviet authorities. 'The moment we abandon the foundation of law and legal agreement in any question we will begin our downfall in all other questions as well,' he warned.¹⁴¹ Coming from Beneš, it sounded pathetic. The downward slide had already begun a long time ago, when Beneš had approached the Soviets with the intention of making a deal with them before the others. His acceptance of the Soviet lie regarding the Katyn massacre was therefore symptomatic of someone who preferred to count on social forces rather than people.

137 E. Táborický, 'Beneš and Stalin — Moscow 1943 and 1945', *Journal of Central European Affairs* XIII (July 1953), 154–81; V.V. Marjina, 'E. Beneš: Poslednii visit v Moskvu (Mart 1945 g.). Dokumentalni ocherk', *Slavianovedenie* 6/1996, 77–88; Marjina, *Zakarpatskaia Ukraina* (2003), op. cit., 139–64.

138 ČSV II, no. 258; Marjina, *Zakarpatskaia Ukraina* (2003), op. cit., 285; Kaplan, *Poválečné Československo* (1985), op. cit., 42. The Czechoslovak Cabinet had already approved of the accession of Ruthenia to the Soviet Union on 29 June 1945.

139 Kaplan, *Zpravodaj* (1981), op. cit., 12.

140 Kaplan, *Poválečné Československo* (1985), op. cit., 39–42, 43–66.

141 Beneš' telegram of 25 November 1944, ČSV II, no. 162.

Milan Hauner

is a Czech historian who had to leave Czechoslovakia in 1968 during the Soviet invasion. He holds PhD degrees from Charles University, Prague and the University of Cambridge. He has taught and researched in England, the USA, Germany and the Czech Republic. When in the USA he is affiliated with the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Among his recent publications are the critical edition of *Memoirs 1938–45* by Edvard Beneš in three volumes (Prague 2007) and the *Chronology of Adolf Hitler* (London 2008).