

Czech leader outlines plan for free Europe

by Laurent Murawiec

“A united Europe will not need to be protected by superpowers,” Czechoslovak President Vaclav Havel told the Polish Parliament on Jan. 25. It was seated in special session to hear him outline his conception of the rebuilding of the European order. Central Europe, Germany, and Europe as a whole were the three themes he tackled.

Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia should seek “some form of foreign policy coordination to jointly return into Europe. On its own, each of our countries will be slower,” Havel said, and joint efforts would prevent rivalries. “We should not compete in who is going to overtake whom and who will first win a seat in some European body, but we should do just the opposite: help each other in the spirit of that solidarity with which in worse times you protested against your repression and we against ours. . . . If we were to return to Europe individually, it would certainly take much longer and it would be much more complicated than if we act together.

“Before us is a historic opportunity to fill a large political vacuum created in Central Europe after the fall of the Hapsburgs,” he said, and the countries “until recently colonized by the Soviets” should unite into a “new formation,” though he added that it was “hard to forecast the institutional shape that our East European or Central European cooperation will create.”

Irony was not missing from the situation. Havel told the Parliament—including President Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski, who had administered martial law in Poland for the Russians—“we were dissidents.” He reminded his audience of the clandestine meetings held 12 years ago between Czech and Polish opponents of the regimes: “We were then dissidents, ridiculed, hunted down, and repressed by police. If anyone had then told my friends [Adam] Michnik, [Jacek] Kuron, and [Karel] Litynski that one day, we would be deputy, minister, or President, we would all have had a good laugh. Now, we can only laugh when TV cameras are not on us.”

Havel stressed, “We do not want to step back into Europe as poor relatives, or former prisoners who have just been freed. *We have to wake up those in the West who missed out on our awakening.*” Havel was equally frank toward Moscow: “We hope that the Soviet Union, in the interest of good relations with her former satellites, will gradually withdraw her armies. Talks are under way and sooner or later will lead to a positive end.” Indeed, on Jan. 30, the Czech

Foreign Ministry issued a communiqué announcing that an agreement on the withdrawal of the 80,000 Soviet occupation troops would be arrived at “before Feb. 12.”

The German question

Both in Warsaw and in Budapest, where Havel addressed the Parliament on Jan. 26, he addressed the theme of German reunification. “It is *impossible* to imagine a united Europe with a divided Germany,” he said, or, conversely, “a united Germany in a divided Europe.” Indeed, “the German question is the key to the future of Europe. . . . The artificial division of Europe must be overcome,” and similarly, “the artificial division of Germany.” His strong words raised eyebrows in the Polish Parliament, just as some Polish newspapers had criticized him for having chosen Germany, East and West, for his first official trip abroad. Acknowledging that his choice had also “caused some reservations” in his own country, Havel explained: “That is precisely why I chose to go. On both sides of Germany, people are reasonable.”

What Havel was facing was precisely what he has committed his foreign policy to: breaking down the legacy of the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, and the Teheran, Yalta, and Potsdam conferences, which shaped World War II and the Cold War dominated by the Soviet threat. Quite some courage was necessary for him to state, in Czechoslovakia, that the bloody mass expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Germans from the western part of Bohemia had been a crime and a mistake. This raised a storm of criticism among Czech chauvinists who justified every murder in the name of “anti-fascism.” “Had there been even one innocent among those expelled, that sufficed to make it an injustice,” Havel retorted. “The principle of collective guilt which was invoked as the grounds for the expulsion is an immoral principle.” The Archbishop of Prague, Cardinal Tomasek, seconded the President on the issue.

Those are the principles, which Havel in his essays has called “ethical responsibility,” that inspired his activity as “dissident,” and now as President.

The leaders of Hungary and Poland have been invited to join him in Bratislava for a one-day meeting, where the perspective of a Central European “unit” of some form or shape should be reviewed, which clearly should be the motor for the new definition of the European order. “We want to be part of a friendly community of independent States,” he said, “of a stable Europe, a Europe which does not need any longer the protection of the superpowers, because it will be able to protect itself by having developed its own security system.”

In centuries past, Poland, Bohemia, and Hungary had often had the same king, and shared dynasties—in the 15th century, the Bohemian King Jiri of Podebrady had even launched the idea of an “international peace league,” in cooperation with French King Louis XI. Given the keen sense of history that prevails in Prague, one may suspect that such ideas are not forgotten.