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Contents

Essays and Articles

- Petr Vidomus: Czechs Give Asylum to US Family
*A “Different” Jazz Ambassador Herbert Ward
through the Lenses of FBI Reports* 5
- Stephan Stach: “It Was the Poles” or How Emanuel Ringelblum Was
Instrumentalized by Expellees in West Germany
*On the History of the Book Ghetto Warschau:
Tagebücher aus dem Chaos* 42
- Petr Orság: With Chinese Communists against the Czechoslovak
“Normalization” Regime
*Exile Listy Group and Its Search for Political Allies
against Soviet Power Domination in Central Europe* 62
- Petr Roubal: The Crisis of Modern Urbanism under the Socialist Rule
*Case Study of the Prague Urban Planning
between the 1960s and 1980s* 100
- Tomáš Vilímek: “He Who Leads – Controls!”
*Corporate Management and Rigours of “Socialist Control”
in Czechoslovak Enterprises in the 1980s* 125

Prague Chronicle

- Oldřich Tůma: Unreached 90th Birthday of Milan Otáhal 158
- Tomáš Hermann: Central European Historian Bedřich Loewenstein
(1929–2017) 163

Book Reviews

- Pavol Jakubec: A country on the Boundary 175
- Vít Hloušek: Swing Music and Its Fans during the Protectorate 185

Karol Szymański:	Czechoslovak Leviathan	191
Květa Jechová:	A Family Colonized by the State? <i>On a Book about Family Policy in the Czech Lands in the Previous Century</i>	203
<i>Summaries</i>		212
<i>Authors</i>		221

Review

A Country on the Boundary

Pavol Jakubec

SMETANA, Vít: *Ani vojna, ani mír: Velmoci, Československo a střední Evropa v sedmi dramatech na prahu druhé světové a studené války* [Neither war, nor peace: The Great Powers, Czechoslovakia and Central Europe in seven dramatic stories on the eve of the Second World War and the Cold War]. Praha, Lidové noviny Publishing House 2016, 664 pages, 33 photographs, bibliography, index of names, ISBN 978-80-7422-358-7.

There is probably no decade more dramatic than that from 1938 to 1948 in Czech and Slovak history. It encompasses multiple changes of borders, as well as of the social and political situation of the communities defined by them; under the pressure of tense circumstances, millions of people were forced to leave their homes and to look for new ones; millions lost their lives in genocides or on the battlefield. In the end of the mayhem, Europe was divided and the world faced a new global conflict. A scholar studying this period faces many challenges. We now have access to a tremendous amount of sources, both published and unpublished; our knowledge is influenced by abundant reflections. Moreover, new works emerge against the backdrop of an interpretation tradition, which is usually formulated on the basis of a nation-state principle; it is up to the historian's intellectual audacity and erudition whether he or she dares step out of or beyond its boundaries.

It is usually synthetic accounts that prompt such thoughts. Although *Neither war, nor peace* is neither a synthesis nor a "consistent monograph on Czechoslovakia's

role on the international scene” (p. 7), many readers will accept it as such – thanks to an attractive concept based on episodes, namely short dramatic stories, and an excellent style. It would be appropriate to appreciate how Smetana follows on from Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* when thematizing the civilization clash between the East and the West on the experience of Czechoslovakia, a country on the boundary.¹ The developments in Poland offer an alternative scenario. In my review, I will also use an example of another relatively small European country, Norway, whose political leaders have often had to deal with similar dilemmas.

Smetana indicates the structure he intends to use already in the subtitle of his book; the primary level is that of the relation between the Great Powers and Czechoslovakia, the secondary one is Czechoslovakia’s relation to its own political anchoring in a maze of international relations. The author abandons the tradition here. As a matter of fact, a significant feature of works related to the reviewed one by their topics has been a tendency to examine policies of the Great Powers primarily through the prism of their impacts on Czechoslovakia. In this respect, there has often been an tendency to a lenient evaluation of Czechoslovak foreign policy and its place in a broader context. What we are encountering here is a logical consequence of the situation in which most of Czech and Slovak historiography of that period is basically a contribution to the respective national histories. This is not a Czech or Slovak specific. Robert Frank recently noted that history of international relations was difficult to internationalize.² Thinking outside this box, Smetana has produced a novel study in *international history* – the approach the author identifies himself with (p. 8). However, his proposition about *diplomatic history* being outstripped in the 1970s is too strict; the discussion about innovations and the attitude to international relations is by no means over.³ Probably the latest methodological initiative

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- 1 See also BUGGE, Peter: “Land und Volk” oder: Wo liegt Böhmen? In: *Geschichte & Gesellschaft*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (2002), pp. 404–434; HLAVÁČEK, Petr (ed.): *Západ, nebo Východ? Česká reflexe Evropy 1918–1948* [West or East? Czech reflection of Europe 1919–1948]. Praha, Academia 2016.
 - 2 FRANK, Robert: L’historiographie des relations internationales: Des “écoles” nationales. In: IDEM (ed.): *Pour l’histoire des relations internationales*. Paris, Presses Universitaires de France 2012, p. 27.
 - 3 E.g., ELMAN, Colin – ELMAN, Miriam F. (ed.): *Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists and the Study of International Relations*. Cambridge, Massachusetts – London, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press 2001; GIENOW-HECHT, Jessica: What Bandwagon? Diplomatic History Today. In: *Journal of American History*, Vol. 95, No. 4 (2008–2009), pp. 1083–1086; HOBSON, John M. – LAWSON, George: What Is History in International Relations? In: *Millennium*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (2008), pp. 415–435; HOGANSON, Kristin: Hop Off the Bandwagon! It’s a Mass Movement, Not a Parade. In: *Journal of American History*, Vol. 95, No. 4 (2008–2009), pp. 1087–1091; REYNOLDS, David: International History, the Cultural Turn and the Diplomatic Twitch. In: *Cultural & Social History*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2006), pp. 75–91; SCHWEITZER, Karl W. – BLACK, Jeremy: The Value of Diplomatic History: A Case Study of the Historical Thought of Herbert Butterfield. In: *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (2006), pp. 617–631; SCHWEITZER, Karl W. – SCHURMANN, Matt J.: The Revitalization of Diplomatic History: Renewed Reflections. In: *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2008), pp. 149–186; ZEILER, Thomas W.: The Diplomatic History

is the so-called *new diplomatic history*: using a set of institutionalized practices, diplomats become co-creators of specific policies rather than mere go-betweens or mediators between governments and organizations.⁴

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One should appreciate the fact that Smetana does not avoid an analysis of several mutually incompatible “images”: Czechoslovakia’s “image” in Europe, the “image” of European great powers in Czechoslovakia, and, finally, Czechoslovakia’s perception of its own “image.” Actually, the concept of episodic “dramatic stories” indicates that the author is going to focus on a particular unravelling of a (foreign) policy dilemma. While research of value systems, information flow, and perceptions as processed by different players and their influence on key choices and formulation of policies enjoys a long-standing tradition in the discipline of international relations, it deserves more attention in historiography. After all, as George F. Kennan noted: “[I]n international [...] life, what counts most is not really what happens to someone but how he bears what happens to him”⁵ This is why it is good that Smetana does not pretend to be an “omniscient” narrator. He openly points at the fact that top-level political actors operate in an environment where unequivocal answers are rare, but which is rich in impressions and, in tight circumstances, also in *wishful thinking*. Emphasis on factual reliability of political intelligence plays along; as a matter of fact, a diplomat accredited to a foreign government is both a go-between/mediator *and* a correspondent, and – thanks to his experience and required knowledge of the local political situation – also as a first-instance analyst.

In the author’s probe into events of the autumn of 1938, especially Zdeněk Fierlinger and Jan Masaryk failed to pass muster, their reputation as being at home among Moscow or London elites notwithstanding.⁶ We can see it as a synecdoche of sorts, with the analysis confirming the notorious attitude of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain: viewed from London, Czechoslovakia was a remote, unknown,

Bandwagon: A State of the Field. *Journal of American History*, Vol. 95, No. 4 (2008–2009), pp. 1053–1073.

4 IKONOMOU, Haakon A. – KNUDSEN, Dino: *New Diplomatic History: A Short Introduction*. In: IKONOMOU, H. A. – KNUDSEN, D. (ed.): *New Diplomatic History: An Introduction*. Copenhagen, PubliCom – University of Copenhagen 2015, pp. 5–11.

5 From a letter which George F. Kennan addressed to Dean Acheson on 4 December 1950; quoted by John L. Gaddis, *George Frost Kennan: An American Life* (New Haven, Yale University Press 2011, p. 413).

6 Some British personalities also fueled Masaryk’s reputation (see DOCKRILL, Michael: *The Foreign Office, Dr. Eduard Benes and the Czechoslovak Government-in-Exile, 1939–1941*. In: *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (2009), p. 701). Fierlinger, known as “their [i.e. the Soviets’s] man” among diplomats posted in Moscow (p. 350), could not be a reliable informant (see BERRY, R. Michael: *American Foreign Policy and the Finnish Exception: Ideological Preferences and Wartime Realities*. Helsinki, Suomen Historiallinen Seura 1985, p. 244; ŻURAWSKI vel GRAJEWSKI, Paweł Radosław: *Brytyjsko-czechosłowackie stosunki dyplomatyczne, październik 1938 – maj 1945*. Warszawa, Wydawnictwo DiG 2008, p. 389).

and possibly artificial state. Even Harold Nicolson, a diplomat and *anti-appeaser*, noted in mid-September 1938: “Vita [Sackville-West] says that if it is as artificial as all that, then it should never have been created.”⁷ At the same time, Smetana presents a picture of the self-contradictory policy of the Soviet Union, the eastern ally. The result of the analysis is a substantial weakening of the “Munich treason” trope – with a supplement that the United Kingdom, not being Czechoslovakia’s ally, did not have any obligations toward the republic (p. 70). “Unprofessionalism, misunderstandings, mistrust” (pp. 69–75) – this unholy trinity was squeezing the already scarce enough room for maneuver of Czechoslovak foreign policy. The conclusion is even more important in the light of the fact that it was under the circumstances described above that the groundwork for developments taking place in the next several decades were laid.

The issue of guarantees of Czechoslovakia’s post-Munich borders is not a frequent topic in historiography, although it was, from Prague’s viewpoint, closely associated with the overall situation of the Second Republic. Smetana leaves the reader with no doubts: “Curtailed Czechoslovakia was indeed an object rather than a subject of international policy” (p. 102). Unlike Poland, which surprisingly – despite its participation in the dismantling of its southern neighbour – appeared as one of the guarantors of the future Czechoslovakia (or Czecho-Slovakia) in British deliberations in October 1938.

The subsequent small “dramatic story” revolving around the fate of the Czechoslovak gold reserves shows why the reviewed work is so useful and beneficial. Financial aspects of foreign policy viewed from a historical perspective tend to be a domain of a small community of specialists. Although vitally important, as proved, for example, by political representations in exile during the Second World War, it rarely appears in political historiography.⁸ Smetana succeeded in presenting both the technical and the political dimensions of the case. However, one must mention that, apart from the well-known British politicians listed by the author, Labourite leader Hugh Dalton also took a brief note of the case.⁹ Insofar as the medialization of the case is concerned, it is to Smetana’s credit that he does not present any categorical conclusions in matters in respect whereof he does not have enough support of sources. However, his strict assessment of the restrained Czechoslovak tactics, which lacked enough resolve to make use of the case for propaganda purposes (p. 144), is that of a historian aware of subsequent developments rather than that of an exile politician whose uncertain, albeit improving situation dictates him to prefer prudence to assertiveness in relations with key partners. It is also possible that a different approach would have been counterproductive. In his memoirs,

7 NICOLSON, Harold: *Diaries and Letters, 1930–1939*. London, Collins 1966, p. 360, entry for 15 September 1938.

8 See KUKLÍK, Jan: *Do poslední pence: Československo-britská jednání o majetkoprávních a finančních otázkách, 1938–1982* [To the last penny: Czechoslovak-British negotiations on property rights and financial issues, 1938–1982]. Praha, Karolinum 2007.

9 PIMLOTT, Ben (ed.): *The Second World War Diaries of Hugh Dalton, 1940–1945*. London, Jonathan Cape 1986, pp. 94 and 144., entries dated 24 October 1940 and 28 January 1941.

“Jock” Colville mentioned that Winston Churchill, careful about the reputation of his co-workers, was extremely critical to a hail of criticism falling on Robert Boothby, who was accused in the case.¹⁰

It is undoubtedly attractive for the reader to immerse into a geopolitical “drama,” into the still not fully resolved issue of the genesis of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, *alias* the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and the failure of the parallel trilateral negotiations of military representatives of France, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union taking place in Moscow in August 1939. Unlike previous narrations, the picture canvassed by Smetana is incomparably more comprehensive, as it contains, *inter alia*, a positive assessment of Polish diplomatic tactics in the spring and summer of 1939 (p. 202). In our traditional climate, burdened with anti-Czechoslovak attitudes of Józef Beck, it is an interesting, but substantiated precedent. Critical comments addressed to the British intelligence service seem to be justified; however, it would be appropriate to say that there were a lot of snippets of information of a varying level of reliability circulating in the air on the eve of the Second World War (see p. 191). Seen through the prism of the indisputable fact that geopolitics fully prevailed over ideology in the summer of 1939, it is possible to agree with the author’s statement that “Polish stubbornness’ was a mere pretext” (p. 246).

The axis of Smetana’s story is the Second World War. The development of the relationship between the Western democracies and the Soviet Union was far from harmonic; on the contrary, as the end of the conflict was approaching and different visions of the postwar arrangement of the world were coming to the fore (compare pp. 274 and 352), internal disputes within the coalition became more prominent. The author fittingly wrote: “The imaginary curve of politics of the Great Powers [...] was oscillating between partial victories, sometimes of the universalistic principle, at other times of the realist principle” (p. 253). On this political chessboard, Czechoslovakia was represented by exiled politicians led by Beneš. He ultimately succeeded in achieving a dual continuity – that of the occupied republic and that of himself as its president. In connection with the “federalist moment” which prevailed in the United Kingdom and across the Atlantic, the absence of the Habsburgs is rather surprising – their “shadow” was legitimately and justifiably noted by many historians.¹¹ Smetana’s well-conceived analysis contains quite a few inspiring observations; I appreciate that he allocated a sizable amount of space to the so-called Polish question. Especially Soviet plans for postwar arrangement have been subject to lively discussions for quite some time, but the author’s conclusion to the effect

10 COLVILLE, John: *The Churchillians*. London, Weidenfield & Nicolson 1981, p. 181.

11 BRANDES, Detlef: *Großbritannien und seine osteuropäischen Alliierten, 1939-1943. Die Reaktionen Polens, der Tschechoslowakei und Jugoslawiens im Londoner Exil vom Kriegsausbruch bis zum Konferenz von Teheran*. München, Oldenbourg 1988, pp. 74–75, 284; MAIMANN, Helene: *Politik im Wartesaal: Österreichische Exilpolitik im Grossbritannien, 1938 bis 1945*. Wien – Köln/R. – Graz, Böhlau 1975, pp. 94–97; Reiner Franke collected circumstantial evidence of Beneš’ preference of the anschluss to the Hapsburgs; FRANKE, Reiner: *London und Prag: Materialien zum Problem eines multinationalen Nationalstaates, 1919–1938*. München – Wien, Oldenbourg 1982, p. 458.

that “we still cannot be quite sure [about them]” (p. 290) holds true even today. However, it is not possible to overlook Moscow’s preparations to take control over Central Europe, or –in the words of Donal O’Sullivan – to build a reversed “cordon sanitaire” in favour of the Soviet Union.¹²

In connection with unending “disputes about Beneš” one might ask: What was the Czech “contribution” (p. 313) to Smetana’s “allied drama”? Certainly not a negligible one, especially for the “turn to the East,” whose climax was the signature of the friendship and mutual alliance treaty. O’Sullivan characterized Czechoslovakia as the “first Soviet satellite.”¹³ In February 1944, Norwegian Foreign Minister Trygve Lie, himself rather accommodating toward Moscow, even predicted the birth of the Czechoslovak Soviet Republic (soon to be followed by Finland).¹⁴ Smetana’s analysis confirms that President Beneš assumed an almost submissive attitude toward Soviet representatives even at the early stage of the war (compare p. 316) and chose an unilateral orientation at the time when he was a “*persona grata* in London, Moscow, and Washington” (p. 321); it is, at the same time, fair to Beneš, as it does not withhold the fact that significantly pro-Soviet attitudes had spread among Czechoslovak exiles regardless of consequences for relations with the British hosts (compare pp. 325 and 505). One may conclude that Czechoslovakia became a *test case* of Soviet policy toward a significantly weaker ally (p. 331), i.e. an object on a boundary of sorts in international politics. However, it was hardly the proclaimed “bridge” – that idea was declined by Moscow as the treaty between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union had been signed, at the latest (p. 344). In a broader context, Antoine Marès was thinking along lines similar to those of Smetana when using a metaphor of a seismograph.¹⁵ The liberation of the Carpathian Ruthenia worked as a litmus paper of sorts, with Beneš’ secretary Edvard Táborský pointing out that “the President does not have any other option but to *pretend* [emphasis in original] that we fully believe Stalin’s promises” (p. 341). The Czechoslovak role in the key partnership thus remained “accommodating,” but hardly “respectable at the same time” (pp. 357 and 505).

When looking at postwar tribulations of Central Europe, Smetana concentrates even more on perceptions, which the representatives of Western democracies could have drawn from local developments. It is, again, appropriate to praise the perceptively written “Polish pages” of the story, which do not attempt to hide the fact that the imaginary line between liberation and new occupation was precariously thin (pp. 376, 378, 380, 410, generally p. 502) – just like the line between hope and fear of a new world war, this time between the West and the East, the outbreak of

12 O’SULLIVAN, Donal: *Stalins “cordon sanitaire”: Die sowjetische Osteuropapolitik und die Reaktionen des Westens, 1939–1949*. Paderborn, Schöningh 2003.

13 *Ibid* pp. 172–174.

14 *Nasjonalbibliotek Oslo* (ďalej *NBO*), Håndskriftssamlingen, signature (sign.) Ms. fol. 2653:9, WORM-MÜLLER, Jacob Stenersen: *Dagbøker* [Diaries], Vol. 9, p. 94, entry dated 2 February 1944.

15 MARÈS, Antoine: En guise d’introduction. In: IDEM (ed.): *La Tchécoslovaquie – sismographe de l’Europe au XX^e siècle*. Paris, Institut d’études slaves 2009, p. 9.

which Beneš had thought possible already in London (pp. 347 and 382). Insofar as the key question, namely why the advance of US troops in the spring of 1945 halted in West Bohemia, is concerned, the author concludes that military priorities prevailed over political ones, with the Czechoslovak government not making any significant effort in favour of an alternative scenario. From the viewpoint of Western observers, two situational aspects were prominent while the republic was being liberated; the fact that the presence of the Red Army did not play into the hand of the Communist Party, and a marked contrast with the situation in Poland: “Although Czechoslovakia was in a much better position to influence Soviet policy than Poland, it lost its chance due to extreme acquiescence” (p. 412, compare with p. 416). One has to agree with Smetana again.

Ambitions to mediate between the Great Powers of the anti-Hitler coalition notwithstanding, Czechoslovakia was losing significance as a subject of international relations, and was increasingly turning into a mere object of them; in Smetana’s words, initially an “indicator” or a “test case,” it turned to, in the spring of 1948, a “catalyst (p. 417) of bipolar Europe. While the author pillories the judgment of Czechoslovak diplomats during the Munich crisis, Laurence Steinhardt, the US Ambassador to liberated Prague, was not doing much better in his eyes (pp. 450–452). The function of an “indicator” on the eve of the Cold War – just like the increasing volume of the US economic aid (p. 429), as opposed to that provided to Poland – challenges the deep-rooted image of the United States disinterested in Czechoslovakia and Central Europe. At the same time, however, Smetana diagnoses an incapability to effectively support civic parties vis-à-vis an unfavourable geographic position and the “Munich complex”: “[...] it is remarkable how little US policy could come up with to retain this ‘outpost’ [to combat communism] and how slow it was in implementing that little” (p. 443). The picture of British diplomacy is a bit more positive – the work and moderate optimism of Ambassador Philip Nichols were influenced by experience acquired in the wartime London (compare p. 476) which his American colleague could not rely on. However, even Nichols did not see any possibility of weakening Soviet influence without Czechoslovakia’s initiative. At the end of the day, there was nothing like that; according to Steinhardt, “the principal feature of Czech mentality [...] which could be described as sullen obedience toward an unquestionable authority” (p. 490), in this case Moscow, won the upper hand.

The story about the “Victorious February” as the catalyst of the trans-Atlantic collective security arrangement (p. 508) is well-known. One might add that the events in Prague prompted a willingness to re-evaluate geopolitical attitudes also in Norway, at that time ruled by the Labour with a reserved attitude toward the West and having good relations with Moscow.¹⁶ The similarity can be illustrated

16 See ERIKSEN, Knut Einar: *DNA og NATO: Striden om norsk medlemskap innen regjeringspartiet 1948–49* [Norwegian Labour and the NATO: The dispute about Norway’s membership in the ruling party 1948–1949]. Oslo, Gyldendal 1973, pp. 73–80 and 83–87; LIE, Haakon: *Skjebneår, 1945–1950* [Fateful years, 1945–1950]. Oslo, Tiden 1982, pp. 264–267; RISTE, O.: *Norway’s Foreign Relations*, pp. 198–201; SVERDRUP, Jakob: *Inn i storpolitikken, 1940–1949* [Into the big politics, 1940–1949]. Oslo, Universitetsforlaget 1996, pp. 193–195.

using a telling example: while Anthony Eden did not receive an invitation to visit Prague (p. 475), Winston Churchill had had to wait for an invitation to Oslo until the country was anchored clearly in the West.¹⁷ Smetana also joined the intermittent discussion about the viability of a Czechoslovak version of finlandization, and his attitude toward this option is positive (p. 494). However, his justified comparison of the presidents of Czechoslovakia and Finland, Edvard Beneš and Juha Paasikivi, ignored a significant difference; as a former subject of the tsar, the latter had undoubtedly accumulated more experience with the Russian mentality and made repeated use of it when negotiating with Moscow.

* * *

Edvard Beneš is the central character of Czech and Slovak history during the period under scrutiny. It is thus natural to ask: How does Vít Smetana view Beneš?

First and foremost, there is “less Beneš” in the reviewed book than we tend to see in books on similar or related topics. The reason is the author’s preference of the view of the Great Powers, i.e. the perspective of the players whose deliberations and decisions had a greater influence on the processes under study. As a matter of fact, the global conflict which Smetana’s work is centered on escalated the power asymmetry between the “Big Three,” to be joined by the rehabilitated France, and other members of the anti-Nazi coalition, often operating in difficult exile conditions (since 1942, their relations were being cultivated the United Nations organization in the making). Despite all his creativity and unquestionable successes, Beneš was unable to play as important a role as he had been accustomed to in the League of Nations in Geneva.

Smetana makes it clear that the “President Builder” did not belong to politicians who arouse sympathy easily. Even his unbreakable optimism, sometimes (especially as regards the Soviet Union) bordering on naivety, did not help. Similarly, Beneš’ leaning toward academism, often perceived as a manifestation of excessive self-confidence or even egocentrism, did not play into his hands.¹⁸ Under the

17 NBO, Håndskriftssamlingen, sign. Mss. fol. 2656:5, WORM-MÜLLER, Jakob Stenersen: *Historiske opptegnelser* [Historical notes], Vol. XVI, p. 6 (entry for 18 June 1946).

18 In an account of a dinner hosted by Labourite politician Philip Noel-Baker in the beginning of February 1944 on the occasion of Beneš’ return from Moscow, Norwegian historian Jacob Stenersen Worm-Müller noted: “Then it started.” He referred to a “lecture” (Beneš stated, *inter alia*, that the war would be over already in 1944) and wording indicates that the experience was by no means unique. (NBO, Håndskriftssamlingen, sign. Ms. fol. 2653:9, WORM-MÜLLER, J. S.: *Dagbøker*, Vol. 9, p. 94, entry for 2 February 1944.) already the 1950s, Henry L. Roberts pointed out that the generation of the 20-years-old of the summer of 1914, who subsequently played a major role in the shaping of politics between the wars, was overtly confident in their own realism and. (ROBERTS, Henry L.: *The Diplomacy of Colonel Beck*. In: CRAIG, Gordon A. – GILBERT, Felix: *The Diplomats, 1919–1939*. Princeton (New Jersey), Princeton University Press, p. 580.) Although Beneš did not belong to this generation, he was young enough to share some of their mental characteristics, such as the above-mentioned confidence.

circumstances, the substantiated claim of the equivocal, even confused diplomatic signaling, which did not contribute to the credibility of Czechoslovak foreign policy, lacking an apparent *red line*, is a serious accusation. According to Smetana, Beneš failed to vindicate himself as a top-ranking diplomat in the autumn of 1938 (p. 72). To some extent, his reputation was rehabilitated by the faith in the unsustainability of the Nazi-Soviet alliance (p. 315). The author also notes that, insofar as contacts with the Soviets were concerned, Beneš was prepared to revisit “the very foundations of his own political concepts,” including “postwar cooperation of the Great Powers,” a prerequisite of Czechoslovakia’s independence (p. 345). Even so, he retained some credit in the eyes of the Brits, and in 1947 and 1948 was seen as the only relevant counterweight against Soviet hegemony about to establish itself in the liberated republic (p. 478). It would be worth giving a thought as to how and to what extent these developments were affected by the president’s volatile attitudes, as Smetana correctly asks the question: “Beneš negotiating with whom?”

* * *

Vít Smetana ranks among historians with an extraordinarily broad scope. His monograph is based on the study of archival sources at home and abroad and of a number of published documents and memoirs. In addition, he often uses sources which have left a rather unjustly weak footprint in Czech and Slovak historiography. In the beginning of the review, I noted that one can no longer expect total heuristics from researchers today. However, it is a pity that the author did not reflect the rich monograph on Czechoslovak-British relations during the Second Republic and the Second World War by Polish historian Paweł Radosław Żurawski vel Grajewski,¹⁹ which, in my opinion, presents a more balanced analysis of Czechoslovak foreign policy than, for example, the books by Marek Kazimierz Kamiński.²⁰ Although Smetana offers rich contextualization, an explanatory note would be useful here and there; for example, why and how could Moscow use the Åland Islands issue as a “crucial” pretext in the summer of 1939? Similarly, the evaluation of the *Council on Foreign Relations* as “the most influential think-tank” (p. 240, see p. 433) remains unexplained: why should it be regarded as unquestionably more influential than the sister *Royal Institute of International Affairs*, especially if we consider the power of American isolationism between the wars? As to details, labelling Edward H. Carr as a philosopher (p. 328) is rather surprising, as is the transformation of Grace Tully from a female assistant to a male one (p. 592, fn. 139), Anglicized transcription of a Slavic name taken *litteratim* from a quoted source (“Izhipska,” p. 379), or

19 ŻURAWSKI vel GRAJEWSKI, R. P.: *Brytyjsko-czechosłowackie stosunki dyplomatyczne*.

20 KAMIŃSKI, Marek Kazimierz: *Edvard Beneš kontra gen. Władysław Sikorski: Polityka władz czechosłowackich na emigracji wobec rządu polskiego na uchodźstwie 1939–1943*. Warszawa, Instytut Historii PAN – Wydawnictwo Neriton 2005. A newer – and more biased – of his two works is not reflected by the author (IDEM: *Edvard Beneš we współpracy z Kremlem: Polityka zagraniczna władz czechosłowackich na emigracji, 1943–1945*. Warszawa, Instytut Historii PAN – Wydawnictwo Neriton 2009).

a mutilated surname of Soviet diplomat Boris F. Podcerob (p. 574, fn. 377; p. 582, fn. 120). The somewhat anonymous “International Bank” where Czechoslovakia applied for a credit in 1947 (p. 476) was, of course, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Still, in a book as voluminous as the reviewed one, it is hardly possible to avoid all minor flaws.

* * *

In his monograph, Vít Smetana managed to prove his erudition and to make good use of his long-term focused interest in the period of Czech and Slovak, but also European history in question in a convincing manner. However, this does not inhibit his presentation of the “dramas” as open-ended stories. Furthermore, he inclines to discuss rather than to formulate categorical statements. In conclusion, *Neither war, nor peace* should become a classic – as a colourful canvas of historical plots stretched taut in a strong frame, which is what I was trying to outline in my review. My reservations, however, are mostly of a nature that makes one recall the adage *non omnia possumus omnes*.

The Slovak version of this review, entitled Krajina na rozhraní, was originally published in Soudobé dějiny, Vol. 24, No. 3 (2017), pp. 403–416.

Translated by Jiří Mareš