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22nd – 23rd of April 2021

## **INTERNATIONAL LAW AND CRISIS – IMPACT AND CHALLENGES**



Zborník príspevkov  
z medzinárodnej vedeckej online konferencie  
22. – 23. apríla 2021

## **MEDZINÁRODNÉ PRÁVO A KRÍZA – DOPADY A VÝZVY**



SYMPOSIA, COLLOQUIA, CONFERENCES  
SYMPÓZIÁ, KOLOKVIÁ, KONFERENCIE

**INTERNATIONAL LAW AND CRISIS –  
IMPACT AND CHALLENGES**

**BRATISLAVA LEGAL FORUM 2021**

**MEDZINÁRODNÉ PRÁVO A KRÍZA –  
DOPADY A VÝZVY**

**BRATISLAVSKÉ PRÁVNICKÉ FÓRUM 2021**

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# **SMALL POWER IN CONFLICT WITH GREAT POWER: A CASE STUDY OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND GERMANY CONFLICT**

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**Abstract:** This paper focuses on analyzing the conflict between Czechoslovakia and Nazi-Germany that had the full capacity to lead to the Second World War. It presents all the relevant circumstances and actors of international relations from the respective historical epoch. In these regards the international system and international law in the interwar period is taken into consideration. The focus will be on Czechoslovakia and Germany. The study also presents the options that were opened to Czechoslovakia, the choices it made, and the reason the choices was decided that way. In all this, it is important to determine a certain paradigm of behavior of a small state in conflict with great power as well as the possible influence of third forces as allies. This paper will be analyzed by using some aspect of structural realism. The conclusion is that Czechoslovakia leadership did not believe that can act independently for its ally - France.

**Key words:** Czechoslovakia, Germany, international system, great power, small power, military conflict, international law.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The case study of the conflict between Czechoslovakia and Nazi Germany is a very interesting example and many conclusions can be drawn from it. It is a conflict between a small and a large state, i.e., a small power in the case of Czechoslovakia and a large power and a large state in the case of Nazi Germany. Historically, this crisis has been known as the 1938 Munich Crisis. To draw appropriate and credible conclusions about the collision of a small force with a large force, as in this case, it is especially important not to do the analysis in isolation that would be limited to the specific two countries. The former is especially true since no state exists on its own and is completely independent and unaffected by the actions and moves of other states. The previous one is even more valid for processing a case like this one, where it is not about some isolated island states in a distant ocean, but about states in the heart of Europe. Therefore, it is about two countries that together bordered with even 11 countries. Hence, if we start from the assumption that what is happening between the two countries to a greater or lesser extent affects at least their neighbors, we will see that we cannot even think that this particular case study can just be reduced to an analysis of relations between Czechoslovakia and Germany. It is obvious that the conflict between these two countries had the potential for a certain change in the balance of the power in Central Europe (if not beyond). As a result, it is logical and necessary to take into account the action and, even more, inaction of the other major powers (from the relevant historical stage), and above all the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) and France, but not excluding the USSR. However, to get the full picture and to be able to get the right conclusions, the analysis needs to take into account the international system in the <sup>1</sup>period between the two world wars. Of course, it must be considered as a fact that despite the dramatic advances in military technology and the production of modern weapons, nuclear weapons still do not exist at that time. Of course, if it existed, it could give a completely different dimension to the conflict, and thus the analysis would be different. Hence, the potential threat to Czechoslovakia's security, as scary as it was, was reduced to a classic military threat, excluding the nuclear threat. Additionally, it should be noted that the means of communication are not like today, but they are still quite developed, i.e., they are the most developed for that given moment in the history of mankind. Thus, this crisis would not be possible to manage in the way it was

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Neville Chamberlain was British Prime Minister from 1937 to 1940 and Adolf Hitler was Chancellor and Fuehrer of the German Third Reich from 1933-1945.



managed through summit diplomacy (at Chamberlain with Hitler<sup>2</sup>) if there were no planes. Nonetheless, we can only guess how this crisis would have unfolded if the parties had available internet and social networks.

Czechoslovakia was a direct product of the Treaty of Versailles and an integral part of the international system established by the new balance of the powers after World War I. With the Treaty of Versailles of 1919, Germany was severely punished and forced to accept the so-called guilt clause for the outbreak of World War I. This was followed by huge reparations that it had to pay to the winners. Its ally in World War I, the European power Austria-Hungary, did even worse. The state ceased to exist as such and new states were formed on its territory or part of its territory was given to its neighbors. A new international entity with a majority Slavic element appeared in a part of the once-powerful Austria-Hungary. The name of the country was Czechoslovakia. Unlike Austria-Hungary where the German element dominated at the expense of the Slavic, the situation was now reversed. The population that had German as their mother tongue was now a minority, which the Slavic majority did not view most favorably because of the historical background inherited from Austria-Hungary.

## **2 CZECHOSLOVAKIA, INTERNAL CONDITIONS AND FOREIGN RELATIONS**

This newly formed state, according to the existing literature, was a prosperous economy and an enviable military force. The territory of Czechoslovakia was quite rich in numerous resources such as coal, iron, numerous forests, and large arable land. The state leadership used the resources and invested in the education and literacy of the population, not forgetting the defense where a good part of the budget (15-20%) went for this purpose, which is certainly more than a high percentage. According to some estimates, the Czechoslovak army had about seventeen infantry and four motorized divisions, which was not to be underestimated. Also, in the case of military mobilization, about 40 divisions of the infantry could be reached, for which the state had already provided weapons. These were modern weapons that were produced in Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia also had two large modern factories for the production of weapons, as well as nerve gas (Vaughan, Asiedu & Velinger, 2005). The military was well trained<sup>2</sup>, with state-of-the-art military tactics, and the trainers came from France. The highest and leading positions in the army were usually occupied by Czechs or Slovaks. The troops were organized in such a way that the Czechs and Slovaks were always in the majority, while members of minorities who served in the army mostly as reservists (and regularly called up) were not sent to serve in border areas. The external borders were well secured, especially the border with Germany, which naturally had a difficult and not the most accessible terrain. In places where this was not the case, numerous fortifications were built on the advice of French friends and the model of the Maginot line<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, it is logical to ask how did such a state cease to exist and was torn apart and, for the most part, how was it incorporated in Germany without a single bullet fired? To find the answer to this question, we must also analyze the weaknesses of Czechoslovakia. The country had a geostrategic position in the heart of Europe (which is both an advantage and a weakness) with long borders and a rather inhomogeneous population. Its five neighbors soon became four after the German unification with Austria. This practically meant that almost half of Czechoslovakia's borders were now with Greater Germany. Geostrategically, this meant that Czechoslovakia found itself in the mouth of Germany, figuratively speaking.

As already mentioned, one of the potential weaknesses of Czechoslovakia was its heterogeneous population. With a population of about 13-14 million people, just over a third were Germans, Poles, and Hungarians. Also, the Czechs and Slovaks were not always in ideal relations with each other and are unique in terms of a common future. Although the Constitution of Czechoslovakia spoke of a Czechoslovak nation<sup>4</sup>, in practice we can not ignore the fact that although the two ethnic groups were close, there were some differences between them, and the Czechoslovak nation was only in the process of being built because they were too very close but still different Slavic ethnic groups. Besides, the Czechs were far more numerous than the Slovaks. The construction of the Czechoslovak nation aimed to create a significant majority of 8-9 million Czechoslovaks versus all other minorities. In all of Czechoslovakia, it was hardly about 2.5 million Slovaks, who cost about 15% of the total population. Ironically, in the Czech and Slovak states, there was a larger German minority

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<sup>2</sup> Something that is confirmed by the British attaché in Poland, see more in Vital, 1971

<sup>3</sup> Vital, 1971

<sup>4</sup> While avoiding listing minorities

than the Slovaks.<sup>5</sup> Also, the large German minority of just over three million was not scattered throughout Czechoslovakia (although there were such examples), but was fairly homogeneous around the border with Germany, mostly in the area known as the Sudetenland.

However, Czechoslovakia did not fear only from the German minority and the possibility that it could be used as a tool in German hands for territorial claims. Subsequently, the northeastern neighbor, the state of Poland, was dissatisfied with the fact that a good part of the Teschen region entered the newly formed state of Czechoslovakia. Poland has publicly claimed the historical right to this region in which, among others, lived a significant number of Poles.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the southern neighbor - Hungary - was not happy that some Hungarians, after the First World War, remained outside the Hungarian state as a minority in the southwestern parts of the new Slavic state. The Carpathian Ukrainians in the east of the country also contributed to the inhomogeneity of the population in Czechoslovakia, who, although part of the Slavic population, still made a clear distinction between them and the Czechs and Slovaks. From this, we can conclude that Czechoslovakia in terms of inhomogeneity of its ethnic population was a kind of Austro-Hungary in retail. The reasons for this can be traced to the obvious fact that the borderlines were not drawn solely based on ethnic population, but also took into account economic factors, such as the affluent Teschen region. It was probably assumed that with the creation of a clear Czechoslovak majority, minorities would remain only minorities and the state would still be able to function economically prosperously on a larger territory. Czechoslovakia with the Treaty of Versailles was the seventh-largest European country, but still with a fairly heterogeneous population.

In terms of its foreign policy, Czechoslovakia was entirely oriented towards France. Consequently, France was the first to recognize Czechoslovakia, and they allied in 1924. It seems that the alliance with France provided that additional and crucial moment for the security of Czechoslovakia. In the new balance of power imposed after World War I, victorious nations such as the United Kingdom of Great Britain, Northern Ireland (UK), and France agreed in principle that France would have the upper hand on the European mainland (certainly not alone and by no means bypassing the UK). Hence, the alliance with France (which, like Czechoslovakia, was a democracy) seemed to be the best opportunity for any country, especially a new state created after the First World War. This is because they were also supported by the UK. Hence, the irony could not be greater if we know that it was the alliance with France that led Czechoslovakia to fully accept the dictates and wishes of Hitler and the eventual destruction of the country before the outbreak of World War II. Also, it should be noted that in addition to the official alliance with France (which was confirmed and made public by both sides), Czechoslovakia also had indirect support from the USSR (which proclaimed that it would support Czechoslovakia if France did the same). Also, Czechoslovakia was part of the alliance with the smaller Yugoslavia and Romania, intended primarily for joint protection against possible Hungarian revanchism. Of course, this alliance was also under the umbrella of France. Despite this, at first glance, the well-established foreign relations of Czechoslovakia, its leaders directly or indirectly agreed to its capitulation without a single bullet fired in their defense. Hence, we cannot help but wonder how this epilogue came about, whether Czechoslovakia could at least try to correct the policies of the great powers (if it could not change them already) or whether it had such a chance at all?

Let us dwell for a moment on the alliance with France. It was seen as a very positive moment, but also as a necessity in Czechoslovak foreign policy. Additionally, we have already said that Czechoslovakia was a symbol of the new international order largely shaped by the will and plan of France and the UK after the First World War. Hence, the support for Czechoslovakia by both France and the UK was logical to expect. The Czechoslovak leadership considered the alliance with France to be more than promising for both sides. This alliance was the external guarantee of Czechoslovak independence. Internally, as we have already mentioned, Czechoslovakia had a fairly modern military force. The French directly trained and imparted modern military skills to Czechoslovak troops. Besides, the two arms factories were not to be underestimated. On the other hand, the very geostrategic location of the country and the rich resources at its disposal were such that it was

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<sup>5</sup> Čadová, 2005

<sup>6</sup> Although it is difficult to find exact numbers, the assumption is that Poles were probably the majority in the region.

assumed that the French would hardly agree so easily to fall into the hands of Hitler and become his geostrategic advantages and resources. If nothing else, then it is because it could significantly affect the balance of power in Europe. The alliance with Czechoslovakia allowed France to eventually deploy French military aircraft on the Czechoslovak territory. Previously, it would mean a direct reach and the possibility of the bombing even Berlin, which would be within a reach much closer than anywhere within the French borders. Nonetheless, as is usually the case in asymmetric alliances between a large and a small power like this, Czechoslovakia was expected to give a blank agreement in advance on the use of its territory, as well as resources on the part of France in a possible Franco-German war. Czechoslovakia was simply expected to follow France in any decision against Germany (or anyone else). In Czechoslovakia, this was seen as more or less a fair price they had to pay for their safety. Of course, such a position of France in Czechoslovakia was not greeted with too much sympathy by growing Nazi Germany. As a growing great power, Germany has at least two attempts to distance Czechoslovakia from France.<sup>7</sup> Thus, Germany directly tried to negotiate and even offered a non-aggression pact with Czechoslovakia to distance them from France. Without much thought, however, such policies were completely rejected by Czechoslovakia, which remained loyal and saw no alternative to the alliance with France, which was seen as sacred. The logic of things in Czechoslovak thinking was that Germany would not dare to invade Czechoslovakia not because of itself, but precisely because of the alliance with France and thus risking creating the conditions for the start of another great European war. Hence, Czechoslovakia did not even have to hope for direct help from France simply because the very serious possibility of declaring war on Germany (by France) was seen as a sufficient guarantor of Czechoslovakia's security. Hence, the Czechoslovak leadership reasoned that there were at least two reasons to hope for the strength of this alliance. The first was the French interest in this alliance, and the second was the French promises made to Czechoslovakia. It seems that somehow too much hope was placed on this second reason, especially at a time when the first reason was fading more and more. There were clear signals that France was hesitant to keep its promises and commitments to the alliance. For example, the statement by French Foreign Minister Lacroix is interesting: "Mr. Hodge asked me if I was sure that France would abide by its obligations in the event of a conflict. I answered I do not know (...)", a statement given before the French Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry.<sup>89</sup>

This shows the unclear position of France, i.e., the retreat from the position of clear support for the obligations of the alliance with Czechoslovakia. Yet despite such signals, France's faith in fulfilling its promises is astounding even when it no longer has a clear interest in doing so. This blinded position of the Czechoslovak leadership was reflected in Benes's<sup>10</sup> statement at a meeting with his friend, Hubert Bev-Mary, in the spring of 1938. At this meeting, Bev-Mary came to warn Benes that there shouldn't be complete and unlimited trust in the alliance with France.<sup>11</sup> Thus, Benes replied in the following way: "How dare you say such things about your country? Who are you French!? (...) I know the history of France. It never broke its word. It does not mean that it will start doing so today".<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the situation was not ideal for Germany either.

### **3 GERMANY, INTERNAL CONDITIONS AND FOREIGN RELATIONS**

However, after the First World War, Germany found itself on the losing side. As we have already mentioned, Germany was forced to formally accept the so-called guilt clause, which practically meant that it admitted its guilt for the outbreak of the First World War. In this way, Germany was further humiliated. Combined with the reparations it had to pay to the victors, a great economic crisis arose which in turn gave rise to extreme nationalism that grew into fascism and the image of Hitler promising a powerful German state again. After capitulating in World War I, Germany had to agree to a new balance of power to its detriment, both in Europe and around the world. Globally, all its colonies have been taken away from it in addition to any strategic opportunity to ever try to re-think its way against

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<sup>7</sup> Vital, 1971

<sup>8</sup> Milan Hoxha was the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Czechoslovakia from 1935 to 1938 and from 1945 to 1948.

<sup>9</sup> as cited in Vital, 1971, pp. 37-38

<sup>10</sup> Edward Benes was President of Czechoslovakia from 1935 to 1938 and from 1945 to 1948.

<sup>11</sup> Vital, 1971

<sup>12</sup> as cited in Vital, 1971, p. 21

colonial empires like the UK or France. The colonial empire that Germany lost was several times larger than the territory of European Germany. Concerning Germany, it had to agree to several territorial concessions in favor of its neighbors, and also to additional restrictions on its sovereignty over the territory that remained in the German state (Treaty of Versailles, 1919). The goal was for Germany to never be able again to try to regain the power and position it had before the war. As a result of this, she had to accept several restrictions on the number and type of military and military equipment she could maintain, both onshore and offshore, where she could and should not deploy. Thus, on the western German border, the territory known as Alsace-Lorraine was taken from Germany and, according to French terminology, returned to France. The smaller region of the West German border with Belgium known as Eupen and Malmedy was annexed to Belgium. On the northern German border, Denmark had considerable territorial expansion annexing the northern part of the former German region of Schleswig. In the east of the country, the coastal region of Memel was assigned to Lithuania, which significantly changed the strategic positions in the Baltic Sea in favor of it. Germany made the largest territorial concessions to its eastern neighbor Poland, which gained parts of western Prussia and Silesia. Due to the famous Polish Corridor to the sea, the German territories were practically separated from each other. Thus, what interests us most in this study is Czechoslovakia that won the Hultschin district. Practically what was once part of Germany after the First World War was divided between six neighboring countries, and also, two protectorates were formed on its territory. It is the famous raw material rich Saar region that was placed under the administration of the League of Nations for a term of 15 years and the strategically important city of Danzig which was declared a free city, which is also under the protectorate of the League of Nations. If this was not enough, at the request of France, Germany had to agree not to have full sovereignty over much of its territory. It covers the entire German territory west of the Rhine, which has been declared a demilitarized zone. This means that although it is part of Germany, it is practically not allowed to hold troops throughout the region, leaving the western border with France incompletely secured.

Due to the above, the speed with which Germany was recovering after the First World War and in a very short time re-emerged as an important factor in international politics is astonishing. Hence, Germany was undoubtedly a large and increasingly powerful country led by Hitler, who in 1938, with great success and success in both the West and the East, propagandistically sold the image he wanted to project for himself. That image portrayed Germany as a major European power with undoubted power to revise the Versailles agreement. In addition, Germany was considered to be at least an unavoidable factor in resolving international relations (probably the most powerful factor, at least, in Central Europe). The general feeling of guilt in the UK and France for the severe punishment of Germany with the Versailles Peace and the severe economic crisis that followed gave additional weight to this projection. The success of this German self-projection was also reflected in the fact that the UK and France tacitly agreed that certain controlled revisions of the Treaty of Versailles would have to be allowed. Previously, there would be a double benefit. On the one hand, they would to some extent satisfy humiliated Germany and, on the other hand, they would still maintain (albeit changed, but not completely changed) the international order in which they were the creators and dominant after the First World War. After all, neither the citizens nor the governing factors in the UK and France wanted another big war. However, what the political leaders in the UK and France could not or did not want to acknowledge and see was the fact that Hitler did not just demand a revision of the Treaty of Versailles and the return of German sovereignty to certain lost territories with it, but he in his speeches, procedures, and policies had an expansionist policy that did not stop at the revision of the Treaty of Versailles, but at least was based on the general demand for the unification of all German-inhabited territories (and much more than we will witness before and during World War II). Therefore, this case was seen in the developments and demands regarding Austria, and later Czechoslovakia. The unification of Austria meant the territorial expansion of Germany with a territory that was not previously part of the German Empire, and therefore could not be considered a territory lost by the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>13</sup> The example of Czechoslovakia is in this direction. Thus, it is true that like the other neighbors, after the First World War, Czechoslovakia gained a small part of the former German territory. As already mentioned, this is the Hultschin district. However, in Hitler's policy towards Czechoslovakia, the Hultschin district was not the only (nor major) territorial problem and claim. Hitler was much more concentrated on the so-called Sudetenland, where German-speaking

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<sup>13</sup> "Germany annexes Austria", 2010

people lived. Historically, the Sudeten Germans were part of Austro-Hungary, but not of the German Empire before World War I. It was the demands for the unification of the Sudetenland that indicated that this was not a revisionist policy but an aggressive and conquering policy. Undoubtedly, Germany behaved aggressively for the most part by the contours of offensive realism.

However, the positions of the UK and France, on the one hand, and German propaganda, on the other hand, have created a relatively comfortable position for Germany as a factor which, at the very least, must be allowed some (controlled) revision of the Treaty of Versailles. This position of Germany could be further strengthened or undermined by a possible war with Czechoslovakia. In the event of a war with Czechoslovakia, the dilemma would not be whether Germany can emerge victoriously, but how long it can take a military victory and what price (militarily and politically) it will have to pay? Hitler considered it necessary to achieve concrete military success in the first few days because any other scenario would be unfavorable for Germany. Simply for the character of Hitler, and also the German propaganda, anything but a quick, decisive, and successful military action with a clear demonstration of military superiority would be a failure and would negatively affect the German projection as a powerful state. Also, with a possible more determined Czechoslovak resistance and thus a longer military operation, the possibility and potential for a larger European war was opened due to the possible involvement of France and even worse for Germany and the UK. That is why Hitler insisted on a quick and decisive military action, and this position was supported by German propaganda, which in turn aimed to convince external factors in the readiness of the German military machinery for such an operation. Besides, this was to discourage Czechoslovakians from trying to defend their Republic. However, the conviction of exactly how and at what speed the military operations on the ground would take place was not shared by everyone in Germany. Especially not with those who were most knowledgeable in military affairs. Thus, during the planning and finalization of Operation Green, serious disagreements broke out between Hitler and some of his generals. The generals cited three major reasons as arguments against Hitler's insistence on swift military action. First, swift action will undoubtedly take many casualties when it occurs on naturally geographically difficult terrain on the German-Czechoslovak border, further well guarded by numerous Czech fortifications. Second, German military intelligence reported the existence of high morale and readiness of Czechoslovak troops to offer serious resistance at the border. The third and perhaps most worrying reason was that the generals were unsure of having their hands free for a military operation in Czechoslovakia in a situation where such a swift and effective operation would have to leave the western border with France which is significantly weakened by the troop relocation to Czechoslovakia. The generals simply thought that it was not most rational to simply believe that France would not intervene and that there would be no military response if that were not the case. Such largely reasonable arguments were confronted with that of Hitler's, which is not always the most reasonable for the determination of swift and effective military action. Although there was no real response or argument to the generals' concerns, the retorts that followed were in the form of various attacks on other grounds, such as Jodl's remark that the general staff did not believe in Hitler's genius. Jodl's Diary, expressing opposing views from that of Hitler, hid the possibility of qualifying the exponent as a state enemy and a traitor<sup>14</sup>. However, even those who in these crucial moments stood firm in support of their Führer's views later admitted that they were not most sure that such a plan would go as planned. Thus, Kaye stated: "We were extremely glad that there was no military operation (...) our means of attack are not adequate to combat the Czechoslovak border fortifications."<sup>15</sup>

An additional trump card in German hands was the Sudeten Germans and the threat of an uprising in Czechoslovakia. However, this trump card of the Germans, when it was realized in practice, proved to be a trump card of the Czechoslovaks who decisively suppressed this uprising on September 12, thus demonstrating great military readiness.<sup>16</sup> However, Hitler, who was probably aware that he might not have the most appropriate solution in hand, was still willing and convinced to do the same, even if it meant gambling with German security on the western border, and even betting on a bigger war in Europe. It seems that this courage of Hitler in combination with the extremely good political maneuvers practically put the UK and France on their side. The crown of his political efforts

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<sup>14</sup> Jodl's Diary as cited in Vital, 1971, p.34

<sup>15</sup> as cited in De Mendelssohn, 1946, p. 77

<sup>16</sup> Thatcher, 2011

was the Anglo-French proposals, which took the form of an ultimatum to the Czechoslovak government, which now unjustly bears the full burden of whether or not there will be a new war in Europe. Also, the UK and France have made it clear that in the event of war, and because they rejected their proposals for a peaceful solution to the crisis, Czechoslovakia will be left alone to deal with the German invasion. Previously, it practically meant that if Czechoslovakia did not accept the German dictatorship, it would be accused of disturbing the peace. This created pressure on Czechoslovakia was determined to accept the Anglo-French proposals for resolving the crisis of 19 September. Conditionally speaking, the Czechoslovak capitulation had a huge effect inside Germany itself, where Hitler's attitude triumphed over the "hesitant" generals who did not believe in their military power when that power was recognized by the UK, France, and even Czechoslovakia. The line between Hitler's triumph and the shattering of the image of Germany as a powerful power again seems to have been extremely difficult during the Czechoslovak crisis. We can only guess what would happen in an alternative history where German troops were stuck in a protracted war in Central Europe and how truly the French leadership would remain immune to pressure from the French public to take action on one of the few democracies in Europe and ally of France - Czechoslovakia, especially in conditions when the border with Germany is a fairly easy target.

#### **4 PRISONERS DILEMMA CONCLUSIONS**

Below we will present the four possible scenarios of this framework viewed, above all, from the prism of Czechoslovak options. According to one possible scenario, Czechoslovakia cooperates fully with the aggressor (certainly through the mediation of the UK and France). This option meant that Czechoslovakia would cede the requested territories without any resistance and under conditions demanded by the aggressor. In all this, the Czechoslovakian should simply hope that the aggressor (together with the mediators) will respect the agreement after this and will not endanger the rest of the territory of the country (because the Czechoslovak army would not be able to act effectively due to shifts from border fortifications and short time for reorganization due to the onslaught and conditions from the Germans). In this scenario, Czechoslovakia, although with the reduced territory and humiliated, still survives as a subject without the sacrifice of any soldier and is no longer a threat in the future. This would not be the worst-case scenario for Czechoslovakia (although to be realistic, giving up territory is far from a good outcome for any country) (Scenario No. 1 in green - see upper left column of the table below). However, if Germany decides to deceive and use this full cooperation of Czechoslovakia to carry out a full-scale attack to destroy the country (and the mediators do not react, and the Czechoslovak army is not able to react in such conditions), then this is the worst outcome for a Czechoslovak who would then cease to exist as a subject and be divided or incorporated in Germany (scenario No. 2 marked in yellow - see upper right column of the table below). The best possible outcome under this theoretical framework for Czechoslovakia would be if it somehow managed to deceive Germany by making some promises of greater rights to the Sudeten Germans and the like, thus turning international pressure on Nazi Germany, which in turn would simply wait and not invade Czechoslovakia (scenario No. 3 marked in yellow - see left lower column of the table below). With this scenario, Czechoslovakia not only survived but also kept the entire territory without a single sacrificed soldier. However, in real circumstances and under the leadership of the aggressive Führer Hitler who wanted a military solution, this scenario was far from possible and real. The fourth option for Czechoslovakia was a war with Germany where it would be clear that it was trying to defend itself with dignity and was indisputably subject to aggression. This raises the question of what would have happened if Germany had not been able to overcome the Czechoslovak resistance as quickly as Hitler had wished and whether all this would not have interfered with third parties, both against and in favor of Czechoslovakia (Scenario 4 highlighted in red - see lower right column of the table below). Of course, this scenario also contains (with a high percentage) the option for the eventual extinction of Czechoslovakia as a subject, but the difference with the second outcome is that that option is the only option there. Thus, Czechoslovakia playing perhaps less naively in Scenario No. 1 ended up in Scenario No.2 and ceased to exist.

1. Czechoslovakia cedes the requested territory. Germany respects the agreement.	2. <i>Czechoslovakia is deceived by Germany and ceases to exist.</i>
3. <i>Germany has been deceived by Czechoslovakia. There is no aggression and change of borders.</i>	4. <i>Czechoslovakia settles on its own. Germany is aggressing.</i>

Picture No. 6

*Theoretical framework: The prisoner's dilemma - The case of Czechoslovakia, and the threat from Germany in 1938*

## 5 CONCLUSION

According to the existing literature and available facts, we have seen that the Czechoslovak state was the seventh-largest in Europe. Earlier, it raises the question: can a Czechoslovakian be considered small then? According to several existing definitions, Czechoslovakia proved to be incapable of changing the rules of the game of the "big", which is an essential element that places it in this group of small countries.<sup>17</sup> Throughout the previous analysis, it can be seen that Czechoslovakia's demands are limited to its areas, which in turn is an essential element for a country to be considered a small power.<sup>18</sup> In all the events with Czechoslovakia, its leadership seemed to be reconciled with the position of marginal power (unwillingness to fight for its defense without the support of France, etc.), and such a position was confirmed by the other "players" (who even invited the Czechoslovaks representatives when deciding the fate of Czechoslovakia). According to Keohane, it was the self-perception of the state elites as powerless to make any difference that put the state in the group of small states.<sup>19</sup> Rothstein is in a similar position, according to which small countries recognize that they are not able to enjoy security without relying on other countries, but this inability is also recognized by other countries.<sup>20</sup> According to other authors, the small state is recognized by its characteristic of the weaker side in an asymmetric relationship and is not able to change the nature of the function of that relationship.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, a small state is one that cannot handle a war with a powerful state on an equal footing.<sup>22</sup> According to Bjøl, the state is small only in relation to the larger one.<sup>23</sup> Knudsen believes that relationships, not size, are the deciding factor that can help define.<sup>24</sup> All these definitions are more or less applicable to the case of Czechoslovakia and define it as small. However, we should be objective and say that there are definitions according to which we can ask ourselves: was Czechoslovakia small? Thus, according to certain definitions, small states are unable to defend their national interests through political or military tools<sup>25</sup> i.e., small states are consumers, not creators of security policy.<sup>26</sup> Or, small states do not expect to be able to make significant progress by acting alone or even in small groups in terms of security.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, it is debatable whether Czechoslovakia was (completely) incapable of defending (or at least providing strong resistance) its borders through military tools, given the modern weapons it had, the inaccessible terrain at the border, as well as the numerous fortifications along the border with Germany. Also, its generals (as opposed to its political leadership) believed that it could even deal with the German threat on its own (at least for a while). At the same time, the situation of this relationship in Germany was

<sup>17</sup> Archer, Bailes and Wiver, 2014, and in this direction are Jaquet, 1971

<sup>18</sup> Fox, 1959

<sup>19</sup> Keohane, 1969

<sup>20</sup> Rothstein, 1969

<sup>21</sup> Archer, Bailes, & Wivel, 2014

<sup>22</sup> Vandenbosch, 1964

<sup>23</sup> Bjøl, 1971

<sup>24</sup> Knudsen, 1960

<sup>25</sup> Vaicekauskaite, 2017

<sup>26</sup> Army, 1964

<sup>27</sup> Keohane, 1969

the opposite. Hitler wanted a quick and decisive military action, but some of his generals were not sure that it was possible (at least not an unnecessarily large number of casualties). However, it can be concluded that the political leadership in both countries makes the final decisions. We believe that (according to the terminology given in the beginning) Germany was indisputably both a great state and a great power, while Czechoslovakia was indisputably a small power, but perhaps not a small state (at least in Europe). The arguments that Czechoslovakia was a prosperous economy in the heart of Europe, with great resources, with a modernly equipped and trained army, with its production of state-of-the-art weapons, with well-defended borders (plus geographical terrain in their favor), in alliance with a state, seem indisputable. However, it ends for several reasons. Hence, all this goes in support of our main claim that the resources available to the state, the level of development, the economy, military capabilities, diplomacy, history, geostrategic position, and the importance at a given moment of the relations of forces in the international system are the combination of variables to create the degree of power of a particular state. Specifically, it is not the fact of possession of resources, but much more the way they are used and the decisions of the state leadership make the specific state to be powerful, whether it is a small or large state. In particular, the fact of having a strong army, an alliance with one of the most powerful countries in Europe, and so on meant little in practice and on the outcome due to political decisions and the use of these tools by the state leadership, normally by the geostrategic context and moment. We can conclude that Czechoslovakia still had potential problems at home. Therefore, it is a country with a rather inhomogeneous population, and the majorities were Czechs and Slovaks. However, although the Czechoslovak constitution referred to the Czechoslovaks, in practice there were clear distinctions (as in any other Slavic peoples) between the Czechs and the Slovaks. The projections for the creation (over time) of a Czechoslovak nation and the integration of all minorities, who would even be happy to be within the borders of this country due to its economic prosperity and wealth of resources, were not realized because all this took time. Czechoslovakia was simply never given a chance because it was not given enough time to begin the shift in the balance of power in Europe.

Externally, at first glance, Czechoslovakia had neutralized all possible threats to its security. In addition to the fact of the existence of a modern army, Czechoslovak foreign policy was in the hands of the alliance with France, which primarily had the task of deterring Germany from any intentions towards Czechoslovakia. Also, Czechoslovakia sided with the USSR, although in practice this alliance may have served more to deter Poland from possible interference. Finally, the possibility of Hungarian revanchism was to be offset by membership in the small Entente. However, it turned out that these alliances in many ways served to deter possible aggressors, but only for that. It seemed that there was never a serious intention on the part of France (nor the USSR without France) to go to war with Germany over Czechoslovakia. When the threat from Germany became real, France withdrew from its obligations under this alliance. One of the options for France was to enter the so-called "chicken game" with Germany. However, we can conclude that it did not happen to us at all because France retaliated from the beginning. This French policy was later reflected in the alliance of the small Entente, but also in general in the drawing of future moves by Hitler, the positioning of the USSR, etc. Ironically, after Hitler's occupation of Czechoslovakia, its factories, resources, and territory were used to attack France in World War II.

Hence, Czechoslovakia was in a classic situation of trying to balance, as explained by Waltz.<sup>28</sup> Thus, internally, it created economic and military capabilities and had its defense strategy. Externally, it had an alliance with France. However, over-reliance on external balancing has proved disastrous regardless of internal readiness. In all these turmoils, we can say that Czechoslovakia wanted to maintain the status quo unlike Germany, which we can freely say was a revisionist state and more. The analysis of the alliance with France seems to show that it is obvious. This is the fact that in asymmetric alliances, the small partner is not expected to have too much right to vote, and getting a security umbrella for that account can easily be just an illusion at the moment when the big ally thinks that there will be no more interest from that alliance, and the invocation of morality, law, justice, etc. by the small partner is unlikely to have any more serious effect on the final results. Czechoslovakia was a product of the balance of power created after the end of the First World War and the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. The guarantor of that order were, first of all, the UK and France, and also the international organization called the League of Nations. On the one hand,

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<sup>28</sup> Waltz, 1979/2010



Germany's membership in this international organization meant the reintegration of Germany into this Versailles order. But because of it, first this results to the great economic crisis as a consequence of the war, and also the reparations imposed by the victors. Secondly, its correction and growing power became clear that it would require certain revisions of the Treaty of Versailles. Due to all this, combined with a sense of guilt over Germany's severe punishment, and also looking for a way to retain the positions gained after World War I, the UK and France agreed to allow certain revisions of Versailles. Also, the UK considered that it might not be so bad for Germany to parry powerful France on the European mainland, as there would be no situation of just one overly powerful country in Europe. As their priorities shifted from maintaining the Versailles order to avoiding another major war in Europe, the balance of power gradually began to change. Thus, that process started with Locarno, when only the western border of Germany was concreted, but not the others, such as the one towards Czechoslovakia. Increasing pressure on Czechoslovakia and an increasingly obvious future change in the balance of power have made other Czechoslovakia's neighbors feel called upon to intervene in order not to be left out of the future deployment of Czechoslovakia. Although it is clear that they were encouraged by Germany, we still claim that whenever a new balance of power is in sight, the neighboring countries feel called to react because if they do not do it, someone else will do it and the balance of their damage is disturbed.

Finally, about the elections that Czechoslovakia had at its disposal, we can state the following. Czechoslovakia chose maximum cooperation with its allies (who in turn cooperated and negotiated with the aggressor). Some of Czechoslovakia's options allowed for a little more reliance on the USSR and a combination of a stronger involvement of the League of Nations as a world body in charge of collective defense with all its weaknesses and strengths. Of course, one option was to reject the unprincipled blackmail from Germany and to make it clear to the allies that it would provide maximum (according to its capabilities) resistance to Germany. Undoubtedly, such a bold option would cause great sacrifices, but also a *de facto* new possible alternative history of the events that followed and led to World War II. In any case, it is indisputable that Czechoslovakia considered itself in a balance - an alliance with France versus Germany, which is why it refused to enter into a "bandwagon" alliance with Germany. For the elections in Czechoslovakia, the results obtained from the prisoner's dilemma mentioned above are illustrative enough.

This whole analysis was made in a multipolar system in the presence of several great powers, and also the existence of a permanent international universal organization known as the League of Nations. Theoretically, this is a situation of structural realism (with the small exception of the existence of the idealistic realization of a kind of central international organization that was still composed of states and was not functional), where states behaved selfishly looking at their interest and not subordinating it to the interest of others.<sup>29</sup> However, previous behavior was characteristic of Germany, the allies of Czechoslovakia, but not so much of Czechoslovakia. Thus Germany acted by the contours of offensive realism by developing or nurturing capacities for external interventionism. On the other hand, Czechoslovakia aimed at survival and security, i.e., behaved by the contours of defensive realism. We believe that the debate between the defensive realists and the offensive realists is largely superfluous. Thus, the state, above all, wanted to survive, but when that is already provided, it will likely want to have as much power as possible. If in the meantime her survival is called into question again, survival will be the main goal again. For example, Czechoslovakia behaved according to the offensive realism during its creation, trying to seize neighboring territories within its future state borders, which is evident from its mixed population. However, when Germany showed its ambitions for Czechoslovak territory, it found itself in a situation of struggle for survival. Regarding the debate of both directions for the creation of the security dilemma, it seems that the representatives of the offensive realism won, who claimed that it is inevitable, unlike the defensive realists who thought that sometimes it can be avoided.<sup>30</sup> Czechoslovakia seemed safe in this situation, but this was not the case at all, primarily due to the non-functioning of the alliance with France and the non-use of its security capabilities. As we explained in detail earlier, the Czechoslovak defense relied on the principle of "deterrence". They thought that the modern army and the border fortifications would deter German intentions to attack. Also, they thought that in case of an attack, France would offer them help. Previously it meant that they had a strategy of "preventing armed attack" on their territory. It seems

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<sup>29</sup> Mearsheimer, 2014

<sup>30</sup> Baylis, Smith & Owens, 2017; Walt, 1998

that France preferred "back passing" here.<sup>31</sup> So instead of balancing, it hoped that, on the one hand, this will satisfy Germany and, on the other hand, the USSR will be its balancer. Undoubtedly, the two countries were in a situation of the security dilemma, but certainly not in that classical theoretical framework. Thus, to some extent, one of the essential elements in determining its existence is the lack of a real desire to start a war, but circumstances and tensions have led to that. However, our analysis showed that the German Führer wanted war.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, Czechoslovakia did not want war at all. Also, the part of the security dilemma that says that "one of the reasons for its creation is the lack of communication or misunderstood communication between stakeholders" is not fully provided in this case because certain communication still existed, and we do not have a misinterpretation of signals. For example, Germany's intentions regarding parts of the Czechoslovak territory were quite clear and there are no possibilities for different interpretations except as a real threat.

Regarding the intensity of the security dilemma, it seems that in our case he was in the third of the four options proposed by Jervis, i.e., offensive and defensive behavior can be practically distinguished, but offensive has a slight advantage. It is a situation of not so intense security dilemma, where the environment is safe but may result in aggression in the future.<sup>33</sup> Although theoretically many of these elements were the case in this particular analysis, we can hardly say that the security dilemma was of low intensity in this crisis which shows us that practice often knows how to deviate from theory.

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<sup>31</sup> Waltz, 1979/2010, p. 165

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