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DIFFERENCES IN THE BRITISH PERCEPTIONS OF THE SLOVAKS AND CZECHS DURING THEIR STRUGGLE TO RE-ESTABLISH CZECHOSLOVAKIA IN EXILE BETWEEN 1939 AND 1941

Roman Ličko*

ABSTRACT

The political activities of the Czech and Slovak exiles who fled to Britain at the beginning of WWII to re-establish Czechoslovakia have been researched ever since the end of the war. The interest in the subject intensified after the fall of Communism in 1989, when Czech and Slovak historians in Central Europe gained access to archives in the West. Their work so far has focused on the challenges the exiled politicians faced when dealing with the British government and the differences the Czech and Slovak leaders had among themselves when it came to postwar constitutional settlement between the Czech lands and Slovakia. The aim of this study is to investigate the British government's perceptions of the two nations during the process of Britain's diplomatic recognition of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile between 1939 and 1941. It focuses on how the British Foreign Office and its diplomatic service perceived the Slovaks and their political culture, in contrast to their views of the Czechs. The main object of the author's analysis were the primary documents of the Foreign Office, deposited in the collections of the British National Archives at Kew, London. These included diplomatic dispatches, reports and minutes by the Foreign Office's political and legal advisers which informed British foreign policy towards the Czechs and Slovaks during and immediately after WWII. It argues that that the British view of the Czechoslovak political leadership on the eve of WWII was very negative. As the war progressed and the military situation in Western Europe worsened, the perceptions of the Czechs at the Foreign Office and among its diplomats improved, whereas the Slovaks continued to be treated with condescension as a politically immature people, lacking political leadership to run their political affairs on a par with the Czechs.

Key words: Slovak History 1938–1945, Czechs and Slovaks in WWII, The Czechoslovak Government-In-Exile, British Foreign Policy 1938–1945, The Foreign Office, Edvard Beneš, Milan Hodža

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As many as eight governments-in-exile resided in Britain during the Second World War. Early into the war, London became the place where émigré politicians from Nazi-occupied Europe rubbed shoulders with British politicians and government officials.¹ The task for the Foreign Office was not only to liaise with these governments, but also to survey and collect intelligence on their activities.² The British capital was also the refuge for the exiled leaders of the Czechs and Slovaks, who had been working abroad to re-establish their common state. In the process, they sought diplomatic recognition from the British government. The Foreign Office was pressed to assess their arguments and take a definitive diplomatic position towards their cause. As the British learnt more about the two nations' politics in exile, they began to discern the disagreements the Czechs and Slovaks had about Czechoslovak statehood, as well as to note what they perceived were two different political cultures.³ The former has been written about quite extensively by historians and political scientists alike, but the latter has not received adequate attention.⁴ This study focuses on the British perceptions of the

¹ In addition to that of Czechoslovakia, Britain also played host to other national governments and some of their monarchs. The first to go into British exile between May and June 1940 were the governments of the Netherlands, Norway and Luxembourg, led by Queen Wilhemina, King Haakon VII and the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg, respectively. They were followed by the Poles, whose émigré government headed by Prime Minister Sikorski was evacuated from Paris during the Battle of France. The Belgian cabinet arrived in the autumn of 1940. The Kings Peter II of Yugoslavia and George II of Greece went into British exile in the spring of 1941. From 1940, Britain was also a haven for the leader of the Free French movement Charles de Gaulle, although his government-in-exile was not recognised by the British until October 1944 (Foot, 2007).

² Never had the British government garnered so much intelligence on the internal politics of her allies during wartime as in London during WWII. British historian Martin Conway: "British surveillance, including the use of intelligence agents among the exiles, remains a murky subject, but it was clearly substantial." (Conway, 2001, p. 257).

³ In this study the terms 'Czechs' and 'Slovaks' are used complementarily, but in two different meanings. The first meaning of the two words refers to those politicians who emigrated from the Czech lands and Slovakia after the Munich Agreement – as they were viewed by the Foreign Office and its diplomatic service. The second meaning denotes a broader concept: a contemporary British view of two Central European nations as separate entities with an emphasis on their political cultures. Although these are both stereotypical generalizations, they are useful insofar as they help us understand the mindset of the British foreign policy makers of the period. Political culture in this study is conceived as "political attitudes, values, beliefs, and ideologies that are associated with and help explain the behaviour of certain individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions, and to study how the latter in turn contribute to the development of the former" (Swedlow, 2013, p. 625).

⁴ The most recent exploration of the British foreign policy towards Czechoslovakia in this period was published by Czech historian Vít Smetana (Smetana, 2008). Britain's dealings with Czechoslovak exiles in London has also been examined in British historiography, most notably in the work of Martin

Slovaks, as contrasted with the Czechs, in the documentation of the Foreign Office between 1939 and 1941.⁵ Diplomatic dispatches, government reports and minutes by Foreign Office legal advisers help us understand how the contrasting ways the two nations were perceived shaped British foreign policy towards their common government-in-exile and their post-war state in Central Europe. The memoranda of conversations with **Edvard Beneš** and **Milan Hodža**, the most prominent leaders of the Czech and Slovak emigrants in London, are as much a testimony of the troubled relations between the rivals as they are telling evidence of the uneasy relations between the nations themselves.

The British political establishment knew little about the Czechs and Slovaks before 1918. Although there had been some interest in the peoples of Austria-Hungary by British scholars and journalists, their expertise had been largely ignored by their country's foreign policy makers during WWI (Rychlík, 1998).⁶ Thus, the creation of the First Czechoslovak Republic, endorsed by other Allies at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, was hailed with suspicion and scepticism in London. From the British point of view, self-determination for the small nations of Europe – an idea promulgated by the idealist president of the United States,

Brown. His book focused on the larger European context of British relations with the Polish government-in-exile, Soviet Union and anti-fascist Sudeten Germans (Brown, 2006). Detlef Brandes is the most prominent of German historians who have written about the Czech lands, including the exiled government of Edvard Beneš (Brandes, 2003). A 2013 conference in Prague, bringing together scholars from nine countries – the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Poland, former Yugoslavia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, resulted in a book of studies dealing with life in exile as experienced by the governments of Czechoslovakia and other occupied nations in London (Smetana, Geaney, 2017). A team of international scholars involved in a similar collaborative project saw their research published in 2001, in which they considered exile groups from Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Poland and Norway. The chapter on Czechoslovaks focused on their armed forces in Britain between 1940 and 1945 (Conway, Gotovitch, 2001). The political activities of Czech and Slovak exiles in their quest to achieve British diplomatic recognition have been described by both Czech and Slovak historians, but their research has concentrated mostly on political opposition to Beneš and debates on the constitutional status of Slovakia in post-war Czechoslovakia. The most prolific among them have been Czech historians Jan Kuklík and Jan Nemeček. Some British perceptions of the Slovaks are mentioned by these authors as a backdrop to their exploration of leadership challenges posed to Beneš by Slovak leaders Štefan Osuský and Milan Hodža (Kuklík, Nemeček, 2004). The British perspective of the war-time Slovak State, its foreign policy and diplomatic relations with Britain has also been reflected in some of the works of Slovak historian Edita Ivaničková (see Ivaničková, 1996 and 2012).

⁵ The author's archival research draws on the collections of primary documents pertaining to British foreign policy in the period, deposited at the National Archives at Kew, London.

⁶ The most knowledgeable of these was the British historian of Scottish descent Robert Seton-Watson. In 1914 he offered his services to the British government, but the offer was declined.

Woodrow Wilson, was seen as an attempt to “Balkanise” Europe (Adams, 1993). The Czechoslovaks – a single constituent nation made up of two nationalities, were thought of as a construct, invented by a handful of Czech and Slovak founding fathers (Parker, 2002). Created as a unitary state, Czechoslovakia was expected to become vulnerable to its malcontent minorities, their large mother countries flanking the small Central European republic from all sides (Parker, 2002). To the west, there was a humiliated Germany, a nation of more than sixty million people. The Germans were also the largest ethnic minority in the new republic, outnumbering the Slovaks (Bouverie, 2019).⁷ To the south, Czechoslovakia was faced by an openly revisionist Hungary. In the north, the areas inhabited by ethnic Poles were coveted by a nascent Poland (Faber, 2009).⁸ The easternmost part of the country – Subcarpathian Rus, was inhabited by an amalgam of nationalities, including Ruthenians, Ukrainians and Hungarians. Despite all the achievements of the young democratic republic in the two decades following the war, Czechoslovakia never inspired trust among the British political establishment of the interwar period.

As Czechoslovakia became the focus of international attention in May 1938, the British Minister to Czechoslovakia in Prague reflected on how relations between the Czechs and Slovaks might develop in the future. His report was compiled amidst fears in London that the rise of Slovak nationalism, spearheaded by the Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party, was as dangerous to the stability of Prague’s government as was the nationalism of the Sudeten Germans.⁹ At that

⁷ According to British historian Tim Bouverie, who re-examined Britain’s policy of appeasement in 2019, the German-speaking population of Bohemia and Moravia before WWI had not thought of itself as being an integral part of Germany, a country created after the unification in 1871.

⁸ In his book about the crisis of appeasement policy, British historian David Faber reminds his readers that it was the profitable coalfields of the Teschen area that Poland desired the most.

⁹ British historians today interpret the developments in Mainland Europe in the late 1930s through the lens of rising nationalism. It was this that was the driving engine of politics in both totalitarian Germany as well as democratic Czechoslovakia. Because of its large and restive German minority, Czechoslovakia had become vulnerable to the aggressive foreign policy of Hitler’s Nazis. The country’s other minorities, with their centrifugal tendencies, and the unresolved constitutional status of Slovakia were the burning issues in Czechoslovak politics of the time. The uneasy Czech–Slovak relations are also well documented in Czech and Slovak historiography (e.g. Rychlík, 1997). The results of the last parliamentary elections in 1935 were symptomatic of the problem. Slovak nationalists had joined forces with other minorities in their drive for constitutional changes. The strongest nationalist party in Slovakia – Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party – had campaigned in alliance with the Slovak National Party. Both parties advocated autonomy for Slovakia within the Czechoslovak Republic. They were backed by the parties of the Ruthenian and Polish minorities,

time, the Foreign Office collected its intelligence on Slovakia through the British diplomats in Prague, who in turn relied on their networks of informants, journalists, and occasional visitors to Slovakia. **Basil Newton** identified three areas of Slovak grievances likely to cause problems for the government in Prague.¹⁰ First, Slovaks felt underemployed in both local administration as well as in the central government. According to the author of the report, this was partly because the Czechs were “more industrious” in contrast to the Slovaks. Second, the Slovaks found the Czechs “unaccommodating”, when it came to their attitudes to Slovakia. They either failed to supply Slovakia with the goods demanded there or ignored Slovak products if they lived in Slovakia as civil servants. Finally, the British diplomat noted that the Czechs had not succeeded in “making themselves beloved” by the Slovak population. Twenty years after the establishment of the common republic, the Czechs still regarded themselves as “the State Nation”. Since they continued to speak Czech in Slovakia, they had not become “part of the Slovak land”. In their role as national integrators, the Czechs had been failing, wrote Newton, because they were “notoriously unskilled in the art of managing men”. The report warned that if the Prague government failed to respond to Slovak grievances, the Slovaks “may be drawn into a position whence the only exit will be complete separation from the Czechs”.¹¹

The British perception of Czechoslovakia in September 1938 was that of an incompetent state, being destroyed by its own internal problems. The Foreign Office had failed to realise that the issue of Czechoslovakia’s nationalities was being exploited by **Hitler**, whose goal was to destroy the Czechoslovak state. The British Prime Minister had put his faith in the German Chancellor, and the British diplomacy exerted enormous pressure on the Czechoslovak leadership to comply with **Hitler’s** demands. Eventually, **Neville Chamberlain** proposed and spearheaded a meeting of four powers at Munich on September the 30th. It provided for a German annexation of the Sudetenland lands in western Czechoslovakia. Britain’s policy of appeasement reflected the country’s historical experience as well as its popular sentiment. Maintaining a balance of power on the Continent had been a traditional cornerstone of British foreign policy for

demanding autonomy for their own regions. Collectively, the Autonomist Bloc secured 30.1% of the Slovak vote. The coalition of Magyar parties in Slovakia gained 14.2% (Bartlová, 2012).

¹⁰ The National Archives, London, Foreign Office (henceforth TNA, FO) 371 21567, C4632, Basil Newton to Viscount Halifax, British Legation, Prague, 16 May 1938.

¹¹ TNA, FO 371 21567, C4632, 16 May 1938.

centuries (Evans, Newnhan, 1998).¹² The nation's overwhelming desire to avoid another European war stemmed from the trauma of WWI (Arnstein, Smith, 1992).¹³ Appeasement was also supported by the influential forces within the British establishment, the upper class – including some members of the Royal Family, conservative media and big business (Roberts, 2019). There were few dissenting voices among the public figures of note at that time.¹⁴ The negative attitude towards Czechoslovakia and its people contrasted starkly with the way the British viewed the Germans. When the leader of the Sudeten Germans visited London in 1935, he was invited to give a lecture at the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Rychlík, 1995).¹⁵ A 1937 dispatch from a high-ranking diplomat at the British Embassy in Berlin informed the Foreign Office that the Sudeten Germans had been discriminated against by the chauvinistic Czechoslovak authorities (Parker, 2002).¹⁶ Disparaging statements by the leading British politicians about Czechoslovakia proliferated in 1938.¹⁷ The most infamous was made by **Chamberlain** himself, in a radio broadcast, just three days before Munich. In it, he referred to Czechoslovakia as a “faraway country” about whose people the British “knew nothing” (Neville Chamberlain..., 2016).¹⁸

The break-up of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 resulted in a change of British foreign policy, leaving a question mark over the future of the Czechs and Slovaks in Central Europe. The German occupation of the Czech lands on the 15th was met with shocked surprise in London. **Hitler's** move spelt a definitive end to the

¹² Appeasement then did not have the negative connotations it has today, according to British international relations scholars Graham Evans and Jeffrey Newnham. Part of a realist foreign policy, they argue, it used to be regarded as “an integral part of the balance of power process, the purpose of which was to maintain order and reduce the incident of great power conflict”.

¹³ British historians Walter Arnstein and Lacey Smith describe British casualties in WWI as “enormous”: 750,000 killed and 1,700,000 wounded.

¹⁴ There is general agreement among British historians that the two most notable exceptions were Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden.

¹⁵ As Czech historian Jan Rychlík explains, Konrad Henlein then came across as a democratic politician, making a favourable impression on several public figures, including scholar Seton-Watson.

¹⁶ This was Robert Hadow, who was in charge of the British Legation in Prague between 1934-1937. Afterwards, he served as the First Secretary in the Foreign Office.

¹⁷ Such statements included “Not out of the top drawer – or even the middle” – a reference to the Czechoslovak leadership by Neville Chamberlain, noted by British historian Adrian Phillips (Phillips, 2019, Chapter 12). Parker, in his study of Chamberlain's role in the appeasement, gives another example, quoting Nevile Henderson, British Ambassador to Germany: “The Czechs are a pig-headed race and Beneš not the least pig-headed among them”, writes Parker (Parker, 2002, p. 151).

¹⁸ In full: “How horrible, fantastic, incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas-masks here because of a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing”.

policy of appeasement (MacDonald, 1981). In his declaration in the House of Commons on 20 March, **Neville Chamberlain** condemned **Hitler's** action as a "repudiation of the Munich Agreement" on the part of Germany (Beneš, 1942, p. 226-227). In contrast, the declaration of Slovak independence the day before had felt more like a relief. It did not elicit any statement from the British government, nor was it publicly mentioned in any official document (Považan, 2014). In fact, this development had been anticipated as one of the more advantageous outcomes of the Czechoslovak crisis. In a Foreign Office memorandum on the future of Slovakia and Ruthenia, compiled shortly after the Munich Agreement, the Foreign Office contemplated what then appeared to be the best scenario for Britain:

"But assuming that Slovakia and Ruthenia are, as a result of the present intrigues, peaceably detached from Czechoslovakia and become for the time being independent countries, the guarantee which we have given Czechoslovakia would not presumably extend to an independent Slovakia or Ruthenia."¹⁹

The guarantee referred to was stipulated in the Annex to the Munich Agreement (Munich Pact, Annex..., 2008). The United Kingdom, alongside with France, were to safeguard Czechoslovakia's new boundaries against unprovoked aggression. This 'moral obligation', as it became known during the debates in the House of Commons, ceased to exist on 15 March. Thus, Slovakia's decision to secede was taken at face value.²⁰ Czechoslovakia had disintegrated because of its own nationalist strife and Britain was rid of its obligation to come to its aid (Gillard, 2007).²¹ Within six weeks, the British government appointed its Consul for Slovakia, a diplomatic move akin to a de facto recognition of the breakaway

¹⁹ TNA, FO 371/21570, C12133/2319/12, The Future of Slovakia and Ruthenia, 11 October 1938.

²⁰ For a detailed treatment of British diplomatic coverage of the events see TNA, FO documents 371/22897 C 3036/7/12, C 3058/7/12 and C 3243/712. The consensus in current Slovak historiography is that Slovakia's secession from Czechoslovakia in 1939 would have not happened had it not been for the enormous pressure exerted on it by the German Chancellor Adolf Hitler. This view is held, for example, by Valerián Bystrický (Bystrický, 2011). Edita Ivaničková agrees, referencing Foreign Office minutes by Robert Speaight, which portray the role of the Slovak leadership, with the benefit of hindsight, in a less negative light than previous British reports (Ivaničková, 1996).

²¹ The British decision not to help Czechoslovakia was also confirmed to the French government on 16 March 1939 (Michálek, 1999).

country²². This action did not mean a reversal of British foreign policy towards Czechoslovak statehood. The occupation of the Czech lands and Slovak independence were accepted as *faits accomplis*, but neither the incorporation of the Protectorate into the German Reich nor the Slovak State were recognised by the British government *de jure*. In London, the Foreign Office made sure that the German diplomats were prevented from taking over the Czecho-Slovak Legation.²³

The complexity of the British position vis-à-vis the future of the two Central European nations was examined in a Foreign Office memorandum of 1 September 1939. Britain was just about to enter the war and the former British Chargé D’Affaires to Czechoslovakia was considering a course of action his government might want to take, should it be approached by Czech and Slovak émigrés with a request to form a common government in exile. **John M. Troutbeck** believed the British government should exercise caution, not to make any commitments to a Czechoslovak movement in exile.²⁴ In his opinion, a restored Czechoslovakia made little sense, neither within its pre-Munich frontiers, nor in its truncated form following the First Vienna Award.²⁵ As for the former possibility, the British were not able to “bring the Sudeten Germans back to the Czech yoke”. Such a re-union would be doomed to failure from the start. The latter option was equally unviable, according to the British diplomat, as no “state with such boundaries could expect any lasting prosperity or even existence”. The greatest obstacle to a re-establishment of Czechoslovakia, however, were the Slovaks. Even if the defection of Slovakia in March 1939 was the result of German machinations, Troutbeck opined, “the union of Czechs and Slovaks was not a success”. Therefore, it would be wrong for the Foreign Office to presume that “the Slovaks were now anxious to restore it”. The author of the report did not harbour

²² Previously, the consulate in Bratislava had been part of the British diplomatic mission to Czechoslovakia. On 4 May 1939, Peter Pares asked the Slovak government for his exequatur (Ivaničková, 1996).

²³ TNA, FO 371/22897, C 3548/7/12, Conversation with J. Gerke of the Czechoslovak Legation, 17 March 1939. Karel Lisický refused to hand over the Legation to German diplomats on 16 May (Smetana, 2008).

²⁴ TNA, FO 371/22897, C 13304/7/12, Attitudes to Czechs and Slovaks in time of war, J. M. Troutbeck, 1 September 1939.

²⁵ Vienna Awards were part of the Axis powers’ geopolitical rearrangement of southeastern Europe after the Munich Agreement. The first one of these, concluded in November 1938, provided for a forceful transfer of the southern areas of Slovakia from Czechoslovakia to Hungary. At the same time, Ruthenia had to cede its southern district, including the capital of Užhorod (Dear, Foot, 2007).

any illusions about the loyalty of the Slovak leadership to the Second Czechoslovak Republic. In his view, the autonomous government in Bratislava had played but a treacherous role between Munich and the break-up of Czechoslovakia in 1939. The Slovaks, he wrote, “were always ready to sell themselves and their country to any neighbouring power that was prepared to pay them attentions”. Moreover, they “did not hesitate to stab the Czechs in the back at the hight of their difficulties”. Unless there were sufficient grounds to believe that they had repented their errors, British support for a re-created Czechoslovakia should not be part of the British war aims.

Britain's declaration of war on Germany on 3 September 1939 did not translate into a major policy shift towards the Czechoslovak cause in exile. It was, however, a long-awaited moment of political vindication for **Edvard Beneš**. At last, the former president felt entitled to provide his leadership to those émigré Czech and Slovak politicians who were willing to co-operate to re-establish the Czechoslovak state.²⁶ He thought his greatest asset were the thousands of Czechoslovak citizens abroad, who might be recruited to fight against Germany in a Czechoslovak army in Britain. On 18 September Beneš called in London on the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Lord **Halifax**.²⁷ Claiming to have been in touch with both the Protectorate government and the forces of the Czech resistance, the former president raised three questions. He wanted to know whether the restoration of Czechoslovakia was a British war aim and whether it was possible to form a Czechoslovak Army in Britain. Beneš also sounded the Foreign Secretary out about the possibility of a juridical recognition for a government in exile under his leadership. In this, he was hoping to build upon the success of **Štefan Osuský** in France. As the only representative of a de-facto extinct state, the Slovak-born diplomat in Paris had successfully negotiated a similar arrangement with the French government.²⁸ On 29 September, during his second visit to the Foreign Office, **Beneš** informed **Halifax** that “an agreement has been

²⁶ Contrary to his political opponents, Beneš believed that his resignation as Czechoslovak President on 5 October 1938 was invalid, because it was made under pressure from the Nazis. His supporters argued that Beneš was the only constitutional representative in exile embodying a legal continuity with the pre-Munich Czechoslovakia (Kuklík, 1998).

²⁷ TNA, FO 371/22897, C 14528, Interview between Lord Halifax and Dr. Beneš, 20 September 1939.

²⁸ Still recognised in his capacity as the Czechoslovak Minister in France, Osuský signed a military treaty with the French on 2 October 1938. It provided for a reconstitution of a Czechoslovak Army on French soil. Through this, the French government denied legality of the occupation of the Czech lands as well as Slovak independence and expressed its recognition of the continued existence of the Czechoslovak statehood (Michálek, 1999).

reached between the French Government and the Provisional Czechoslovak Government".²⁹ This was not the case, as the French government was very reluctant to recognize any such executive body.³⁰ The British government was equally sceptical on this issue. The Foreign Office did not have objections to the Czechs and Slovaks resident in Britain joining the army in France. It did oppose, however, the idea of a Czechoslovakia being re-created in exile.³¹ A serious British misgiving was the commitment of the Slovaks to a common state. In its December report, the Foreign Office doubted that "when the time comes Czechs and Slovaks will necessarily wish to be reunited in a single state on the former basis." For that reason, not even the word Czechoslovakia was recommended for future official usage. The Czechs and Slovaks were to be referred to in the plural as "Czechoslovak peoples", rather than as one people – the designation used by **Beneš**.³²

Co-operation between the Czechs and Slovaks was a British *sine qua non*, if any form of diplomatic recognition was to be extracted from the government in London. The condition included fair political representation, being reflective of the political spectrum in the pre-war Czecho-Slovak republic. In that respect, **Beneš's** claim to the Foreign Secretary in late September 1939 that "emigrant Czechs and Slovaks had agreed to sink their differences", was misleading.³³ The views of the former president were confronted at the Foreign Office with those of **Milan Hodža**, the leading political figure among the Slovak émigrés.³⁴ The British

²⁹ TNA, FO 371/22897, C 15436/7/12, To prove his words, Beneš provided the Foreign Office with a telegram he had received from Paris, dated 28 September 1939.

³⁰ Bruegel argues that Quai D'Orsay wanted neither Beneš, nor Osuský as members of a provisional government. The French government simply wished to avoid official references to an 'Osuský army', so it had to use designation 'Tchechoslovaque army' instead (Bruegel, 1983).

³¹ To underscore this point, Halifax reminded Beneš that the British government had never ceased to recognise the Czechoslovak Legation in London.

³² In addition to that, Beneš, in his communication with the Foreign Office, systematically avoided the hyphenated spelling 'Czecho-Slovakia', the name his country adopted through a constitutional law in November 1938. See The Memorandum Concerning the Czechoslovak Army in Great Britain, TNA, FO 371/22897, C 15436/7/12, 29 September 1939.

³³ TNA, FO 371/22897, C 17299/G, Czechoslovak Provisional Government, F. K. Roberts, 23 October 1939.

³⁴ In December 1938, Milan Hodža, Slovak politician and last prime minister of the pre-Munich Czechoslovak Republic, went into political exile in Switzerland. In the autumn of 1939, along with Štefan Osuský, another prominent Slovak political figure and Czechoslovak diplomat, he became the leading figure among the Slovak democratic exiles in France. In stark opposition to Edward Beneš, Hodža advocated a thoroughly decentralized model of the Czecho-Slovak constitutional arrangement, with a self-governing status for Slovakia. He was also a proponent of a Central

perceptions of the two leaders and their politics were primarily informed by the reports of **Robert Bruce Lockhart**, a former British diplomat whose job was to liaise with **Beneš** and other Czechoslovak exiles in London.³⁵ He would frequently interview both **Beneš** and **Hodža** about their activities in France in the autumn of 1939.³⁶ Since the idea of a government in exile was rejected by the French, **Beneš** decided to change tack and pushed for recognition of a Czechoslovak National Committee. **Hodža** did not agree, advocating an establishment of a non-political executive of technocrats instead.³⁷ At that time, he was also opposed to the setting up of a National Committee. His main reservations stemmed from **Beneš's** refusal to consider autonomy for Slovakia as well as his opposition to the appointment of émigré Slovak nationalists as members of the Committee (Kuklík, Nemeček, 2004). On 17 October, without **Hodža's** backing, the former president proceeded to create the Czechoslovak National Committee. British foreign policy makers watched these developments across the Channel with scepticism. Their uneasiness was aggravated by the fact that **Osuský**, recognised by London as the Czechoslovak Minister in France, had refused to join the Committee.³⁸ **Beneš's** advantage over his Slovak political

European Federation. After failing to find common ground on this issue with Beneš, who consistently refused to allow any political representation of Slovak decentralists in his government-to-be in exile, Hodža settled for a brief period in Britain. Although he formally co-operated with Beneš throughout 1941, Hodža eventually decided to leave for the United States in November of that year. He died in Florida in 1944, after an exhausting political campaign among Slovak Americans. For more about the political disagreements between Hodža and Beneš in exile, see *Hodža Versus Beneš* (Kuklík, 1999).

³⁵ Lockhart's appointment as a liaison officer was made on 19 September 1939 (Bruce-Lockhart, 1949/1950).

³⁶ Throughout the war, Lockhart remained the best-informed and one of the most-trusted experts at the Foreign Office on Czechoslovak politics in exile. His first close encounter with the Czechs and Slovaks dated back to 1919–1922, when he served as a junior diplomat in the British Embassy in Prague. After leaving the foreign service he worked in international banking, then as a journalist for the *Evening Standard* in London. In September 1939, he rejoined the Foreign Office in London (Hughes, 2004). There, he rose through the ranks of its staff, first as a member of the Political Intelligence Department, then as Director General of the Political Warfare Executive and Deputy Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs. Lockhart's overenthusiastic support for Beneš's leadership in British exile is obvious in both his postwar academic writings and his personal memoirs. For evidence see *The Second Exile of Eduard Beneš* (Lockhart, 1949/1950) and *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart, Volume 2, 1939 – 1965*, respectively (Young, 1980).

³⁷ This should consist only of four ministerial posts – war, finance, social welfare and refugees. TNA, FO 371/ 371/22897, C 17089, Lockhart's memorandum on his conversation with M. Hodža, 21 October 1939.

³⁸ TNA, FO 371/2817, C 17465/7/12, F. K. Roberts on the position of the French government, 29 October 1939.

rivals in exile was that he found a sympathetic ear in **Lockhart**.³⁹ Thus, the Foreign Office learnt not only what it needed to know about the Czecho-Slovak politics in exile, but also what the former president thought about the Slovaks and their leaders. "Slovak politicians", confided **Beneš** after his return from Paris on 24 October, are but "irresponsible intriguers who had never agreed among themselves and who only excelled in obstruction".⁴⁰

The British decision to recognise the Czechoslovak National Committee in 1939 was the result of war-time political pragmatism. By mid-November, the Foreign Office had realised that their demand for a representative and united Czech and Slovak front was unrealistic.⁴¹ Though **Osuský** eventually accepted a seat on the Committee on 9 November, **Hodža** had decided to walk a separate political path, in opposition to ex-president **Beneš**.⁴² The British government decided to turn a blind eye to the continuing Czecho-Slovak discord. Part of that decision was informed by what the Foreign Office had learnt about the Slovaks and their political culture. **Hodža** had the reputation of an old guard politician, tainted by his alleged scandalous past and luxurious lifestyle in exile. **Osuský**, though a respected diplomat, was thought to have been without a political backing in Slovakia.⁴³ In general, the analysts of Czechoslovak affairs at the Foreign Office took a critical view of the Slovaks, some of them commenting on Slovak national character with open condescension. **Lockhart**, the most frequent of these critics, thought the Slovaks were "a backward people" led by "immature and unreliable leaders".⁴⁴ Slovak peasants, in his opinion, were much more "slow-witted" than their Czech counterparts, and Slovak political principles were "like shifting sand".⁴⁵ **Frank Kenyon Roberts**, a veteran British diplomat and **Lockhart's** colleague, shared this view. For him Slovaks were "a thoughtless race, and discontent with whoever happens to be controlling them".⁴⁶ Thus,

³⁹ Lockhart's sympathy for the Czechoslovak cause under Beneš's leadership is evident from his diplomatic correspondence of the time as well as from his later writings after the war.

⁴⁰ TNA, FO 371/2817, C 17236/G, Lockhart on Benes' visit to Paris, 24 October 1939.

⁴¹ TNA, FO 371/2817, C 18016/7/12, Difficulties of the Czech and Slovak Politicians in Exile, 7 November 1939.

⁴² On 22 November 1939 Hodža established in Paris the Slovak National Council (Michálek, 1999).

⁴³ Personally, Lockhart characterized Osuský as a "pleasant, but vain and ambitious schemer". TNA, FO 371/22897, C 17089.

⁴⁴ TNA, FO 371/24288, C 6035/2/12, Memorandum by B. Lockhart, 12 May 1940.

⁴⁵ TNA, FO 371/22897, C 16390, 10 October 1939 and C10169/2/12, 20 September 1940.

⁴⁶ TNA, FO 371/22897, C 17421/7/12, F. K. Roberts' handwritten remark responding to a Times report about conditions in Slovakia, 30 October 1939.

seeing no alternative to **Beneš's** leadership, the Slovak question took a back seat in British foreign policy. The British government changed its position on 20 December. In an exchange of letters with **Beneš**, the British Foreign Secretary, Lord **Halifax**, recognized the Czecho-Slovak National Committee in France.⁴⁷ The pragmatism behind the move was openly acknowledged in the Foreign Office minutes. The military assistance of the Czechs and Slovaks within the British Empire was expected to "prove of considerable value to the Allied cause".⁴⁸ It was also believed that the recognition would encourage actions of sabotage in the territory of former Czechoslovakia. The long-term diplomatic benefits for Britain were difficult to envisage, yet they were taken into consideration. The Sovietisation of Central and South-eastern Europe – a distant, but plausible threat, was the most important of them. The advantage of a re-created Czechoslovakia was aptly expressed by **Lockhart**: "No Central European settlement," he said, "which ignores the Czechs and Slovaks or condemns them to a status subordinate to the Germans and Magyars, can be durable".⁴⁹

Hodža's continued opposition to **Beneš's** leadership prompted the Foreign Office to become more actively involved in their reconciliation.⁵⁰ In the spring months of 1940 **Lockhart** would listen and reason with both men during their meetings in London. On 10 February the British diplomat informed the Foreign Office about Hodža's ultimatum to the Czecho-Slovak National Committee.⁵¹ The Slovak leader had conditioned his membership in **Beneš's** organisation on the co-option into it of several of his émigré associates.⁵² These men were emphatically objected to not only by the followers of **Beneš**, but also by London.⁵³

⁴⁷ TNA, FO 371/24287, C 20702/7/12, Exchange of Letters respecting the Formation of the Czecho-Slovak National Committee, 20 December 1939.

⁴⁸ TNA, FO 371/24287, Memorandum on the Recognition of the Czecho-Slovak National Committee, 6 December 1939.

⁴⁹ TNA, FO 371/22897, C18016/7/12, Difficulties of the Czech and Slovak politicians in Exile, 7 November 1939.

⁵⁰ On 14 January Hodža admitted to his council Beneš's Czech opponents, renaming the body the Czecho-Slovak National Council (Michálek, 1999).

⁵¹ This was a letter signed by Hodža and three other members of the Slovak National Committee. It was Jan Masaryk, who showed it to Lockhart.

⁵² These were Peter Prídavok (Slovak), František Schwarz (Czech) and Vladimír Ležák-Borin (Ruthenian).

⁵³ Prídavok was seen as "one of the most unreliable Slovaks dabbling in politics", being reproached for his links with Tiso and alleged contacts with the Germans. Schwarz was described as "a turbulent malcontent", Ležák-Borin "a former Communist". TNA, FO 371/24287, C 2331/2/12, Czechoslovak National Activities, 11 February 1940.

In a conversation at the Foreign Office, **Hodža** admitted that the members of his rival Czecho-Slovak Council “were not the first Garnitur”, but that he had had to start somewhere.⁵⁴ **Lockhart** thought that **Beneš’s** Committee was not ideal, but that **Hodža’s** rival organisation was even worse, being “surrealist in its oddity”. The British diplomat also believed that the continuing Czecho-Slovak disagreement had been aggravated by an ill-advised French foreign policy. Unlike Britain, he argued, France had chosen to interfere early in the Czecho-Slovak action. The hostility of the French government towards **Beneš** unduly strengthened the position of **Osuský**, who nearly succeeded in forming a provisional government in Paris.⁵⁵ Having repeatedly failed to get **Beneš** and **Hodža** to co-operate, **Lockhart** complained in mid-April: “Dr. **Beneš** is rigid and obstinate; **M. Hodža** unreliable and all-too-supple”.⁵⁶ In the end, the British liaison officer lost his patience with the Slovak leader:

“For nine months I have listened patiently to his arguments. I have appealed to his patriotism. My relations with him have been friendly, and on many occasions, he has expressed his gratitude to me for my efforts to reconcile him to Dr. **Beneš**. I have asked Dr. **Beneš** to make concessions. I have received promises from Mr. **Hodža**. Dr. **Beneš** has made considerable concessions. Mr. **Hodža** has never kept his promises.”⁵⁷

Lockhart’s failure to bring about reconciliation among the Czechs and Slovaks coincided with the rapidly deteriorating military situation on the western front. After the unsuccessful British campaign in Norway in April 1940, **Neville Chamberlain** resigned as British Prime Minister. His post was taken up by

⁵⁴ TNA, FO 371/24287, C 2655/2/12, Czechoslovak activities, minute Lockhart, 19 February 1940.

⁵⁵ TNA, FO 371/24287, C 2655/2/12, 19 February 1940.

⁵⁶ TNA, FO 371/24288, C 6035/2/12, Possibility of a reconciliation between Dr. Beneš and M. Hodža, Memorandum by B. Lockhart, 23 April 1940. This was an unusually harsh description of Beneš’s human qualities from the pen of Lockhart. Jaromír Smutný, Beneš’s personal secretary, remembered his superior as an excellent tactician and strategist, but also the greatest Machiavellian of his time. “Everyone who comes from their home country and says that the nation supports Beneš is systematically put in contact with the British to authentically confirm this.” (Otáhllová, 1966, p. 91-92).

⁵⁷ The last straw for Lockhart was the letter Hodža promised he would send to Beneš following their talks on 14 May. Lockhart was given an English translation of it, which, in his own words, “differed in many respects from the English text”. TNA, FO 371/24288, C 6035/2/12, Probable breakdown of the Hodža-Beneš negotiations, B. Lockhart, 2 June 1940.

Winston Churchill, a vocal critic of the Foreign Office.⁵⁸ Under his leadership, the British Expeditionary Force was evacuated from Dunkirk. Following the miraculous salvation of the British troops from the shore of France, **Lockhart** wrote impatiently: "The British are now fighting for their lives, and the Czechs and Slovaks know that if we go down, their future will be hopeless".⁵⁹ The author of the report saw the main obstacle to the much-needed Czecho-Slovak unity in **Hodža**. With the help of **Osuský**, he had exploited the situation in Paris to the limits of blackmail. **Lockhart** echoed **Beneš's** frustration with the Slovaks and urged the Foreign Office to act. Britain was fighting the battle of liberty and even a minor contribution could tip the scales in her favour. If the British government recognised a provisional government under **Beneš's** leadership, the Czechs and Slovaks at home would be encouraged to carry out sabotage at the arteries of the German Reich. Moreover, it would put an end to disunity among the Czechs and stop factionalism among the Slovaks. As far as **Hodža** was concerned, he was to be dealt with strictly: "We should decide now who are our friends on the basis of 'he who is not with us is against us.'"⁶⁰ If **Hodža** would not stop his anti-Beneš activities, which were harmful to the Allied war effort, he should be threatened with expulsion. If that was not feasible, reasoned **Lockhart**, he should be watched by competent British authorities. Other members of the Political Intelligence Department agreed.⁶¹ **William Strang** suggested going even further. He proposed organising interrogations of **Hodža's** associates in Britain, including his secretary **Anna Meyer**, to whom, it was believed, the former Czechoslovak Prime Minister was emotionally attached.⁶²

Beneš's diplomatic offensive that year had started in April. On the 26th, he met with the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, **Alexander**

⁵⁸ Churchill considered the department "cumbersome and equivocal on matters of policy" (Baxter, Hamilton, 2002).

⁵⁹ TNA, FO 371/24288, C 6035/2/12, 2 June 1940.

⁶⁰ TNA, FO 371/24288, C 6035/2/12, 2 June 1940.

⁶¹ See minutes by F. K. Roberts and R. M. Makins in reaction to Lockhart's memorandum. TNA, FO 371/24288, C 6035/2/12.

⁶² These rumours were supplied to the Foreign Office by Lockhart, who had collected them from various sources close to E. Beneš. According to those, Meyer was Hodža's mistress. As a Jewess, suspicion was raised as to the mysterious circumstances under which she was allowed to leave Czecho-Slovakia following the German occupation of the Czech lands on 15 March 1939. It was alleged that her journey to Switzerland had been arranged by the Gestapo. Lockhart never provided any evidence in his reports as to whether these allegations were true or not. TNA, FO 371/24288, C 6035/2/12, 2 June 1940.

Cadogan. The goal of the former president was to enquire about the possibility of recognizing the Czecho-Slovak National Committee as a provisional government. Beneš argued that President **Hácha** and his government had lost their influence, power, and executive capacity. In Slovakia, only 10 per cent of the population supported **Tiso's** regime, the rest "wished to return to the Czechoslovak Republic."⁶³ **Cadogan** was specifically interested in the progress of reconciliation with the Slovaks in exile. This, according to **Beneš**, was hampered by the "difficult nature of that people" and "their political immaturity".⁶⁴ **Cadogan's** account of the meeting shows that neither the Undersecretary, nor anybody else dealing with Czechoslovak matters at the Foreign Office, were impressed by the argumentation.⁶⁵ As military events across the Channel unfolded, however, the strategic advantages of settling the Czechoslovak question were becoming more obvious. By 25 June, the Czechoslovak army in France had been evacuated to Britain.⁶⁶ **Troutbeck** believed with regard to this situation that Slovaks were "worthy of little consideration" and that the British should think of their own needs.⁶⁷ All the objections that hitherto had prevented the British government from recognising **Beneš** as head of the Czechoslovak government were outweighed by the necessity of defeating Germany. **Lockhart** stressed the importance of the trans-Atlantic aspect of the Czechoslovak question. In a letter to the Assistant Under-Secretary for Europe, **W. Strang**, he warned about the potential harm to the British cause in America. If the British hoped to "win the full support of the American people", they could not ignore the views of the Czech and Slovak Americans.⁶⁸ By this point, American entry into the war was a strategic goal of British foreign policy. Further support for the Czecho-Slovak National Council would strengthen the unity among the Czechs and Slovaks in exile and provide a boost for the pro-Allied propaganda in the

⁶³ "On the whole", Beneš continued, "there is not the faintest doubt of their complete agreement regarding the necessity for the uniting of Slovakia with the Czech lands under a Central government". The sentence underlined Beneš was annotated with a question mark by a reader at the Foreign Office. TNA, FO 371/24288, C 6494/2/12, 26 April 1940.

⁶⁴ TNA, FO 371/24288, C 6283/2/12, Cadogan's report of his conversation with Beneš, 29 April 1940.

⁶⁵ Cadogan's response to Beneš's answer was that without that reconciliation, "there were still many difficulties ahead". TNA, FO 371/24288, C 6283/2/12, 29 April 1940.

⁶⁶ Code-named Operation Aerial, the British-led evacuation took place between 15 to 25 June. By 14 August, a total of 4,938 of Czechoslovak troops and civilians had been evacuated from France (Ellis, 1953).

⁶⁷ TNA, FO 371/24289, 7646/2/12, J. M. Troutbeck, 21 June 1941.

⁶⁸ TNA, FO 371/24288 C7295, R. B. Lockhart to Assistant Under-Secretary Strang, 14 June 1940.

United States. The proposed recognition would also have the additional benefit of keeping the Czechs and Slovaks away from the Soviet sphere of influence. On 21 June **Beneš** met **Strang** and submitted to him a memorandum for the Secretary of State outlining the constitution of the Czechoslovak Provisional Government.⁶⁹ On 6 July the Assistant Under-Secretary replied to **Beneš** that His Majesty's Government was ready to recognize it along the lines proposed in the memorandum.⁷⁰

British recognition of the provisional government under **Beneš's** leadership was as inevitable as it was reluctant. It came on 21 July 1940, amidst increased aerial attacks by the Luftwaffe on the coastal targets in southern England, a preparatory phase for the invasion of Britain.⁷¹ Diplomatic concerns had subsided, and the Foreign Office admitted that the potential benefits for the country now outweighed the disadvantages.⁷² Still, however, political reservations about the future state of the Czechs and Slovaks remained, and this was expressed in the use of the word 'provisional'. First, the British government did not accept Beneš's argument that his government in exile represented a juridical continuation of the pre-Munich Czechoslovak Republic. The Assistant Under-Secretary thought the Foreign Office needed to be clear about this, and **Beneš** was to be told expressly that the accorded recognition of his government was not the same as those granted to the exiled governments of Poland, Norway, and the Netherlands.⁷³ Amongst other things it meant that the British government was not prepared to dismiss all the settlements negotiated at Munich. It remained uncommitted as to the future of Sudetenland, and had not opposed the loss of Czechoslovak territory in southern Slovakia. By the same token, London had not rejected Slovak autonomy, as enacted by the Czechoslovak parliament in

⁶⁹ Beneš reserved the presidency for himself, the position of the Prime Minister was to be taken up by Msgr. Šrámek. The Cabinet comprised state ministers, ministers without portfolio and undersecretaries of state (Kuklík, 1997).

⁷⁰ The Cabinet included eight Czechs and four Slovaks. Amongst the latter were Štefan Osuský and Ján Lichner without portfolio, Juraj Slávik – the Minister of the Interior, and Rudolf Viest – Undersecretary of State for Defence (Čapka, 1998).

⁷¹ Codenamed operation Sealion, Hitler's directive No 16 had the goal of preparing ground for a landing operation against England (Maier, 2007).

⁷² The reservations of the Foreign Office so far included: 1. The hostile attitude towards Beneš by the government of France, 2. Potential antagonisation of Hungary, 3. Possible objections by the Polish government-in-exile. TNA, FO 371/24289, C7646/2/12, Memorandum on the Recognition of a Czecho-Slovak Provisional Government, 1 July 1940.

⁷³ TNA, FO 371/24289, C 7646/2/12, Minute by W. Strang, 16 July 1940.

October 1938.⁷⁴ This was reflected in the insistence by the Foreign Office on the continued use of the hyphenated spelling 'Czecho-Slovakia' in official usage.⁷⁵ **Beneš** was also given the benefit of the doubt as to his promise to improve his co-operation with the Slovaks. On 10 July, **Frank K. Roberts** reminded his colleagues that **Beneš** had not, in fact, secured the collaboration of **Hodža**, as requested.⁷⁶ In his letter to **Beneš** on 18 July, the British Foreign Secretary expressed his hope that the proposed advisory organ of the provisional government – the National Council, would comprise recognised Czech and Slovak leaders who had not been included in that body so far.⁷⁷

In 1940, the British government saw the future of the Czechs and Slovaks as part of a wider geo-political problem of Central Europe. From its point of view, the system of small independent states created at Versailles had failed. The prevailing belief at the Foreign Office was that the solution to the Central-European problem lied in federalism. Ideally, there should be two confederations, spanning the area from the Baltic in the north, to the Adriatic in the south, and the Black Sea in the east. These would act as a barrier between Germany and the Soviet Union. Close political integration among the states was to safeguard their sovereignty against the threat of the totalitarian ideology being exported from Moscow. The British plan presumed that these confederations would consist of ethnically homogenous territories, a settlement that would require changes to the pre-war frontiers as well as the removal of large ethnic minorities.⁷⁸ Once **Beneš's** leadership in exile was officially established, the British government actively supported rapprochement between the Czechoslovak and Polish governments in exile. In 1940, this was also supported by the British press (Wandycz, 1956). Beneš's support for the Czechoslovak–Polish confederation,

⁷⁴ TNA, FO 371/24289, C 7646/2/12, Halifax's letter to Beneš, 18 July 1940.

⁷⁵ At the Foreign Office, the spelling 'Czechoslovakia' in Beneš's memorandum of 21 June was painstakingly corrected by hand to 'Czecho-Slovakia'. Thus reviewed, it was returned to its sender for approval. TNA, FO 371/24289 C7646/2/12.

⁷⁶ TNA, FO 371/C7646/2/12. Reacting to the British demands made at the Cabinet meeting on 3 July, Beneš reported back on his progress to the Foreign Office on 9 July. Roberts noted that Beneš did not mention Hodža, nor did he make any reference to the newly created National Council. Minute by J. K. Roberts, 10 July 1940.

⁷⁷ TNA, FO 371/24289, C 7646/2/12, Halifax to Beneš, 18 July 1940.

⁷⁸ The plans were developed in the Royal Institute of International Affairs as early as 1939. The East-Central federation was to include Poland, Czechoslovakia and possibly Hungary. The South-Central federation should comprise Greece and the whole of Yugoslavia (Brandes, 2003).

however, was lukewarm and hardly genuine.⁷⁹ In his memorandum for the American Under Secretary of State, who was visiting London in March 1940, the former Czechoslovak president was surprisingly elusive about the issue. As it turned out, he used the negotiations with the Polish government in London mainly to strengthen his bargaining position with the Foreign Office (Brandes, 2003). A federation of small states in Central Europe was even less viable a solution, according to **Beneš**.⁸⁰ For that, he maintained, the Czechs and Slovaks would not only need the approval of Britain, but also the Soviet Union. On this, **Beneš** radically differed from **Hodža**, his chief ideological opponent in exile, whose ideas about a post-war settlement were more in tune with the British foreign policy planning of the time.⁸¹ Although his comprehensive plan for a federation in Central Europe had been in the making from the beginning of the war, it was little known to the British at the time.⁸²

Beneš also felt uncomfortable discussing the future of Slovakia. To **Hodža** and **Osuský**, he would repeatedly reply that the constitutional arrangement between the Czechs and Slovaks could only be resolved by the people of the republic, after the war. Yet, when asked about the subject at the Foreign Office, he invariably talked about his plans to decentralise or even federate the post-war republic.⁸³ During one of his extended conversations with **Lockhart** in October, he tried to persuade his British interlocutor that the Slovaks would be allowed to decide their own future after the war. If they desired to come

⁷⁹ The Czech historian Josef Kalvoda maintains that Beneš co-operated with the Poles at the instigation of the British and because he believed it would help in him secure recognition for his exiled government (Kalvoda, 1998). Dušan Segeš points out that one of the reasons why Beneš was reluctant to negotiate with the Poles in this period was that the Polish government-in-exile maintained friendly relations with Hodža (Segeš, 2006).

⁸⁰ On 28 April 1942 Beneš spoke to journalists in London on the future of small nations and the idea of federation. He advocated a loose association of strong and equal partners, each of them being concerned with their own regional problems. He said: "One of the many merits of the British Commonwealth is its refusal to make a fetish of federalism" (Beneš, 1942, p. 8).

⁸¹ From a long-term perspective British support for Hodža's plan may be described as inconsistent, at best (Brandes, 2017).

⁸² Hodža's book *Federation in Central Europe* came out in London in as late as 1942. Only one memorandum was delivered by Hodža to the Foreign Office before that time – in November 1939. It discussed, in general terms, the importance of economic cooperation among Poland and the Danubian countries, including Bulgaria (Brandes, 2003).

⁸³ Brandes argues that one of the weaknesses of the exiled governments in London was their inability to get rid of the great Serbian, Polish and Czech nationalism, which had the potential to sour post-war relations among the many nationalities of Central Europe. He believes that the Czechoslovak government-in-exile did exactly this (Brandes, 2003).

into the new republic, they would be able to do so on their own terms. Federation, if desired by Slovakia, would not be a problem. **Lockhart** related to the Foreign Office that **Beneš** was not only content with such a constitutional arrangement, but that he would “insist that it was a real federation”.⁸⁴ Overall, however, the October report of the British Representative with the provisional government struck an unusually critical note. “President **Beneš’s** aim is to re-create a state which will be as homogenous as possible”, writes **Lockhart** in his introduction. He envisages a large post-war exchange of populations supplemented by frontier changes.⁸⁵ Ruthenians, read the report, are expected to fall into **Beneš’s** lap like a ripe plum. Slovaks – “the spoilt children of the former Republic”, should join of their own accord, not to be coaxed in any way by the Czechs. The frustration of the president described in the report was deep-felt: “The Czechs tried to run Czechoslovakia for Slovaks and they had to pay blackmail to all the Slovak political parties.” **Beneš** was adamant that the Slovaks should not be allowed to sway events in Prague again. To illustrate his point, he likened the power of the Slovak politicians in interwar Czechoslovakia to the influence of the Irish nationalists in the British Parliament before the establishment of the Irish Free State.⁸⁶

In April 1941 an opportunity presented itself for **Beneš** to overcome the remaining British reservations about his provisional government. Although he had been working tirelessly to achieve full recognition, the Czechoslovak leader had no further arguments with which to persuade the legal pundits at the Foreign Office. When the U.S. government appointed **Anthony J. Drexel Biddle** in February as special envoy to the Allied governments in London, Czechoslovakia was not included.⁸⁷ **Beneš** decided to air his grievances directly to Winston Churchill. The chance to do so arose during the official visit of the British Prime

⁸⁴ TNA, FO 371/24289, C 10776. Report on President Beneš’s scheme for the Restoration of Czechoslovakia and for the Reconstruction of Central Europe after the war, 7 October 1940.

⁸⁵ “He has borrowed it from Hitler”, commented Lockhart. The “Czech Lebensraum” would be in Central Bohemia, the Germans would be confined to the West. TNA, FO 371/24289, C 10776, 7 October 1940.

⁸⁶ TNA, FO 371/24289, C 10776. Allusion was made to the Irish nationalists in the British Parliament, who, before the creation of the Irish Free State in 1921, had fought for Irish Home Rule within the British Empire. These Irish MPs in London often held the balance of power between the two parties of the British politics of the time – the Liberal Party and the Conservatives (Arstein, Smith, 1992).

⁸⁷ Anthony Drexel Biddle, Jr, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, was appointed to the exiled governments of Belgium, Norway and the Netherlands. TNA, FO /371 26394 C1320, Minutes of the Foreign Office, 12 February 1941.

Minister to the military facility outside Leamington Spa in Warwickshire.⁸⁸ Accompanied by **Beneš** and his wife, **Churchill** inspected the Czechoslovak troops that had been training there. To mark their respect for their distinguished visitor the Czech and Slovak soldiers sang 'Rule Britannia' (Zeman, 1976). The short memorandum **Beneš** handed to the British statesman on that day intimated that the process of full recognition of the Czechoslovak government was being hampered by the Foreign Office. Because of the "legal difficulties", **Beneš** complained, "the Foreign Office considers us 'Provisional', without the full rights of a fully recognised Government."⁸⁹ From the juridical point of view, the memorandum read, Czechoslovakia has been treated differently to Poland. To strengthen his case against his opponents at the Foreign Office, **Beneš** referred to his communication with the Foreign Secretary. According to the Czechoslovak president, **Anthony Eden** "agreed" with him, "seeking a way to settle the whole process as thoroughly and as soon as possible". The Prime Minister's response to **Beneš's** plea was swift and unequivocal. In his personal minute to **Eden** two days after the visit, **Churchill** wrote in his typical resolute style: "I see no reason why we should not give the Czechs the same recognition as we have given the Poles and encourage the Americans to follow our example."⁹⁰

The intervention of the Prime Minister in April 1941 opened the way for full recognition. Although the Foreign Office did not relent in its opposition, its legal and political team came under pressure to explain themselves. In his response to **Beneš's** memorandum of 18 April, **Eden** summarised the remaining British reservations.⁹¹ A de jure recognition would prejudice the position of the **Hácha** government in Prague. The British government needed **Beneš's** continued co-operation with his compatriots at home, because it valued the military intelligence from the Protectorate just as much as it appreciated the ongoing sabotage being carried out there by the Czech resistance.⁹² Internal reactions within the Foreign Office to both memorandums by the Czechoslovak leader were far less diplomatic in their language. **Beneš's** suggestion that the Foreign Office had hindered the

⁸⁸ Lockhart claims that it was him who suggested to Beneš to invite Churchill to the Czechoslovak training camp (Bruce-Lockhart, 1949/1950).

⁸⁹ TNA, FO 371/1320, M 456/1. Churchill's personal minute to Foreign Secretary Eden. 20 April 1941.

⁹⁰ By the "Czechs", Churchill was referring to both Czechs and Slovaks and possibly other nationalities of the republic.

⁹¹ Beneš's memorandum for Eden was delivered to the Foreign Office through Lockhart the day after Churchill's visit to Leamington.

⁹² TNA, FO 371/1320, C 5553/4078/8. A. Eden to Beneš, 26 May 1941.

process of Czechoslovak recognition was met with a barrage of criticism. The harshest response came from **Roger M. Makins**: “The two communications from Dr. **Beneš** show him in his worst light, and they are in fact replete with over-optimism and untruths.”⁹³ **Lockhart**, in turn, proposed to “take a strong exception in private conversation with Dr. **Beneš** to the unfortunate phraseology” in his memorandums.⁹⁴ **Roberts** reiterated that the case of the Czechoslovak government was “entirely different” to that of Poland, because **Beneš** had resigned his office voluntarily in October 1938. He was succeeded by **Hácha**, whose government was fully recognised by London until March 1939. Moreover, it was pointed out, Slovakia had enjoyed de facto British recognition even after that period, until the outbreak of war.⁹⁵ **Strang** did not believe in the legality of **Beneš’s** government either. His closing remarks summarised pithily the predicament faced by the Foreign Office: “We have only Dr. **Beneš’s** word for it that he and his administration are now in law the Head and Government of the Czechoslovak State. To recognise him in that capacity is a matter not so much of law as of faith”.⁹⁶

The attack on the Soviet Union by Germany on 22 June set into motion a train of events which forced the British government to take a definitive stance. On 26 June the British Representative to the Provisional Czechoslovak government wrote to **Eden**, briefing him on the meeting he had had with **Beneš** the day before. The Czechoslovak leader appeared “perturbed” by the possibility that the Soviet Union might recognise the Czechoslovak government in London before Britain and the United States did.⁹⁷ The British diplomat admitted that this might have been “The President’s method of exerting additional pressure” on the Foreign Office. Yet, the author of the report had little doubt that the Soviets had “dangled the bait of Russian recognition” before the Czechoslovaks in London.⁹⁸ **Lockhart**

⁹³ TNA, FO 371/1320, C 4078/1320/12. Minute by R. M. Makins, 23 April 1941.

⁹⁴ TNA, FO 371/1320, C 4078/13020/12. Status of the Czechoslovak Government in England, 20 April 1941.

⁹⁵ This fact, according to Roberts, was acknowledged by the presence of Peter Pares, the British consul in Bratislava. TNA, FO 371/1320, C 5339. Minute by J. K. Roberts, 4 May 1941.

⁹⁶ TNA, FO 371/1320, C 5339. Minute by W. Strang, 25 April 1941.

⁹⁷ TNA, FO 371/26394, C4078/1320/12. B. Lockhart to A. Eden, 26 June 1941.

⁹⁸ Lockhart reported that two days before that the Soviet military attaché approached Colonel Moravec, the head of the Czechoslovak Military Intelligence, to discuss an exchange of military intelligence and possibilities for combined sabotage in Eastern Slovakia and Subcarpathian Russia.

urged full recognition.⁹⁹ He warned that Soviet Union's entry into the war might unduly incite many Czechs, who would find it much easier to forget the Russo-German Pact of 1939 than the Munich dismemberment of 1938. Slovaks, due to their geographical position and emotional temperament, were less likely to be affected, as "they had always been more Russophile than the Czechs".¹⁰⁰ Soviet recognition, anticipated by **Lockhart**, materialised on 6 July.¹⁰¹ Eight days after that **Eden** wrote to the British Ambassador in Washington in an attempt to limit the diplomatic damage cause by the Moscow initiative. The British Foreign Secretary felt that the Americans should offer **Beneš** "some encouragement" to prevent "unfavourable comparisons being drawn in Czechoslovakia between the Soviet attitude and that of His Majesty's Governments and the United State of America".¹⁰² Since the United States had no intention of changing its negative position towards **Beneš**, **Eden** concluded that the British had to act on their own. On 16 July he wrote to **Halifax** to inform the American government that the compromise solution he had suggested two days ago was no longer adequate.¹⁰³ On 18 July **Jan Masaryk** was notified in a letter by the Foreign Office of the British government's decision to grant full recognition. An Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary was to be accredited by the King to the 'Czechoslovak government' – a title containing neither the word 'provisional' nor the hyphen in the nationality adjective. **Beneš** was to be addressed 'President of the Czechoslovak Republic'.¹⁰⁴

To the historian, the Foreign Office discussions relating to the re-establishment of Czechoslovakia between 1939 and 1941 offer a fascinating glimpse into how the British perceptions of the Czechs and Slovaks during this period were informed and shaped. Drawing on the dispatches of the British diplomatic service, governmental pundits at the Foreign Office in London painted a critical, but sometimes quite insightful portrait of these two Central European

⁹⁹ What Lockhart did not know was that Beneš had been co-ordinating his diplomatic steps with Moscow since as early as 1940 (Kalvoda, 1998).

¹⁰⁰ TNA, FO 371/26394, C4078/1320/12. B. Lockhart to A. Eden, 26 June 1941.

¹⁰¹ TNA, FO 371/26394, C 7680/7140/12. R. Lockhart to A. Eden, 9 July 1941.

¹⁰² This was to take the form of appointing A. Biddle as the United States representative with the Provisional Czechoslovak Government in London. TNA, FO 371/26394, C 7511/216/12. A. Eden to the British representatives in Washington and Moscow, 14 July 1941.

¹⁰³ The Foreign Office acted on its most recent intelligence which suggested that Moscow was making appeals to the population of Czechoslovakia to rise against their German oppressors. TNA, FO 371/26394, C 7992/1320/12. A. Eden to Viscount Halifax, 16 July 1941.

¹⁰⁴ TNA, FO 371/26394, C 7992/1320/12, 16 July 1941.

nations and their political cultures. Research shows that the British attitude towards the Czechoslovak political leadership very negative on the eve of the war. As the conflict progressed, the perceptions of the Czechs slightly improved, whereas the Slovaks continued to be treated with condescension as a politically backward people, led by immature leaders. The predominantly negative attitude towards Czechoslovakia during the Munich crisis was a consequence of the policy of appeasement towards Nazi Germany in the 1930s. At the beginning of the war, post-war re-creation of the Czechoslovak state was not seen as a viable option by British foreign policy planners, as it was believed that most of the Slovaks at home were against the idea. As a nation, they were perceived as an emotional, politically inexperienced and treacherous people, ready to pledge their allegiance to any power promising to advance their nationalistic aspirations. These critical and often disparaging views expressed by the Foreign Office and its diplomats reveal some of the political mindset of the British political establishment of the time. They tended to judge Slovaks and their political leaders against the established norms of British parliamentary democracy, and they often contrasted their notion of Slovakness with the Czechs, whom they knew better. Though not without their faults, the latter were perceived as more industrious, democratically minded and politically trustworthy. Former president **Beneš**, who frequently spoke unflatteringly about the Slovaks during his meetings with British diplomats, contributed to the Foreign Office's negative perception of Slovak political culture. He and his most serious political rival from among the Slovaks in exile – **Milan Hodža** – spent hours being interviewed by British diplomat **Robert B. Lockhart**, the Foreign Office's chief liaison officer. The way the two men were perceived by this diplomat had a great deal of impact on what the Foreign Office thought about the Czechs and Slovaks and their mutual political relations. **Beneš**, though far from ideal from the British point of view, was gradually accepted at the Foreign Office as the only viable candidate to head a provisional government in exile. He came across as overly ambitious, tiresome, but otherwise a hard-working and principled democrat. **Hodža**, in contrast, was perceived as an old-guard politician of the Austro-Hungarian type – charming, but intransigent, with a capacity for political intrigue. In the end, he had completely lost **Lockhart's** trust. Following the deterioration of the military situation in Western Europe and the subsequent British retreat from Dunkirk in mid-1940, **Hodža's** demands for broader political representation of the Slovaks in **Beneš's** government-in-exile came to be ignored by the British government.

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