Czechoslovakia’s Velvet Divorce:

A Tale of Ethnicity, Geography, and Leadership

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The period following the culmination of the Cold War was marked with internal turmoil in numerous ethnically-diverse countries, with the onset of civil wars, state secessions, ethnic cleansing, and even genocide. But in this tumultuous era, one particular state ceased to exist and two were born—and, remarkably, no blood was shed, no ethnic cleansing was committed, and the international community kept its distance. As the world rang in the New Year of 1993, the nation of Czechoslovakia disintegrated into the Czech Republic and Slovakia, which are both now UN, EU, and NATO members that enjoy especially close relations with one another. This phenomenon is peculiar, particularly in the context of the violent dissolutions of other formerly socialist federations, and it is thus important to determine which conditions induced such vastly varying outcomes. The simplicity of the division was doubtless aided by the ethnicities’ geographical separation and their absence of hatred towards one another. But while the dissolution of Czechoslovakia was largely a result of its leaders’ lack of commitment to a common state, its non-violent nature can above all be attributed to the same leaders’ commitment to ensuring peace throughout the process.

The History of the Czech and Slovak Lands

To understand why Czechoslovakia perished, it is first essential to understand how the state came to exist. Historically, the Czechs and Slovaks were not fellow nationals. From the 10th to the 17th century, the Czechs populated the Kingdom of Bohemia, while the Slovaks never attained a state of their own. Instead, the Slovaks were subjected to Hungarian rule for 1000 years, often referred to as mere “Slavs of Hungary.” The map of Central Europe was

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transformed, however, with the Thirty Years’ War of 1618-48, which saw the Czechs incorporated into the Habsburg Empire—an empire of which the Hungarians, and therefore the Slovaks, were also subjects. The Czechs made up one of the largest ethnic populations of the empire and were under the direct control of the Austrians, who permitted a considerable degree of cultural freedom and autonomy in their lands. The Hungarians, on the other hand, increasingly aimed to “Magyarize” their part of the empire, suppressing its minorities and preventing the development of a Slovak national identity.

Consequently, while the Czechs had a sense of nationality dating back to the Middle Ages that continued to grow under the Habsburgs, the situation was immensely different for the Slovaks. They did not possess their own national tradition or a literary language, both of which are often essential in forming a national identity. Then, during the National Revivals that took place in both lands in the late 1700s to early 1800s, the perception of the Czech and Slovak peoples as “twin aspects of a single nation” began to emerge. Yet, the two groups were substantially dissimilar: while their languages were linguistically close, the Czech lands were far more industrialized, with social classes, high literacy rates, and religious skepticism. In contrast, the Slovaks lived in a heavily Catholic, agrarian society described as “economically and politically primitive,” with limited conceptions of patriotism. Because of these disparities, the

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3 Ulc, “Czechoslovakia’s Velvet Divorce,” 332.
4 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid., 247.
Czechs began to view the Slovaks as their “poor relatives,” an “appendix” of the Czech ethnicity—a perception that would persist far into the 20th century.\textsuperscript{11}

**The Invention of Czechoslovakia**

The implications of the two peoples’ supposed “close affinity” were profound when the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed in the wake of World War One.\textsuperscript{12} From the ashes of war emanated the glimmering hope of self-determination, on the basis of US President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points. When it came time to decide the Czech and Slovak people’s fate, this principle surfaced to justify the dissolution of the multi-ethnic empire.\textsuperscript{13} However, the leaders representing the Czech and Slovak populations resolved that a union of the two ethnically-distinct lands would be strategically wise.\textsuperscript{14} It was thought that a united Czechoslovak state would serve to strengthen the lands against the still- looming threats of Austria and Germany, while increasing the Slav population in both nations relative to the significant German and Magyar minorities.\textsuperscript{15} Therefore, the Czech and Slovak peoples amalgamated not for reasons of national unity, but insecurity, and thus from the start, the marriage was destined to be one of great adversity.

With the signing of the Pittsburgh Agreement in 1918 by émigrés in the US, the Czechoslovak state was envisioned as a federation that afforded a degree of self-rule to Slovakia.\textsuperscript{16} But almost immediately, troubles arose as Czech leaders promoted a sense of unified Czechoslovakism, hoping that “political unity would lead to national unity,” whilst the Slovaks

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\textsuperscript{11} Bakke, “Czechoslovakism in Slovak History,” 248, 255.
\textsuperscript{12} Ulc, “Czechoslovakia’s Velvet Divorce,” 332.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Bakke, “Czechoslovakism in Slovak History,” 263.
sought greater autonomy with their own administrative system, courts, and parliament.\textsuperscript{17} In the end, not only was a unitary system established, but many of its official positions were filled by Czechs even in the Slovak lands, generating further grievance.\textsuperscript{18} These tensions mounted throughout the interwar period, until the German invasion of Czechoslovakia’s Sudetenland completely transformed the state’s landscape.\textsuperscript{19} When the Nazis gained full control of the Czech lands in March 1939, the Slovaks took the opportunity to declare their independence in collaboration with Germany, becoming a Nazi puppet state and engendering a profound sense of betrayal in the eyes of the Czechs.\textsuperscript{20}

Following its liberation by the Soviets, a united Czechoslovakia was re-established in April 1945 with the Košice Government Programme, which outlined measures designed to ensure self-determination.\textsuperscript{21} The postwar nation’s structure was negotiated by the Czechoslovak government-in-exile, the Slovak National Council, and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, the latter of which fared extremely well in the 1946 elections in the Czech lands, but not in Slovakia.\textsuperscript{22} The Communists were only able to gain power, however, through a coup d’état in February 1948, after the government had fallen into crisis.\textsuperscript{23} A new constitution was promulgated by the Communist Party, which centralized power and began with the phrase “We, the Czechoslovak people,” in contrast to the previous “We, the Czechoslovak nation.”\textsuperscript{24}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[19] Ulc, “Czechoslovakia’s Velvet Divorce,” 333.
\item[20] Ibid, 334.
\item[21] Bakke, “Czechoslovakism in Slovak History,” 265.
\item[22] Ibid; Ulc, “Czechoslovakia’s Velvet Divorce,” 334.
\item[24] Bakke, “Czechoslovakism in Slovak History,” 266.
\end{footnotes}
Czechoslovakia soon fell under the influence of the Soviets, who were partial to the Czechs but promoted proletarian internationalism and thus the suppression of nationalism.\textsuperscript{25}National power was vested in Prague in what would be known as an “asymmetrical federal system”: while the Slovaks had a National Council and Communist Party for their republic only, no equivalent existed for the Czechs, who instead dominated at the much more authoritative federal level.\textsuperscript{26} This power imbalance further enflamed frustration among Slovaks, who in 1968 made up just 3.7% of the central Communist bureaucracy.\textsuperscript{27}

Reform came in 1968 under Party Secretary Alexander Dubček, who worked to grant Slovaks greater independence as a part of his “socialism with a human face” effort that would culminate in the Prague Spring uprising.\textsuperscript{28} The seeds of dissolution began to truly materialize at this time, as while the two ethnicities demanded reform, their visions were markedly different: the Czechs advocated for political and civil liberties, while the Slovak campaign predominantly pressed for reform to the federal structure.\textsuperscript{29} The latter began to covet equal, not proportional, representation, despite having half the Czechs’ population.\textsuperscript{30} Though the revolution was crushed by Soviet intervention, the subsequently-imposed system saw a far greater degree of federalism, with separate parliaments and governments that briefly satisfied Slovak aspirations.\textsuperscript{31}


\textsuperscript{26} Cox and Frankland, “The Federal State and the Breakup of Czechoslovakia,” 77-78.

\textsuperscript{27} Janos, \textit{Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia}, 12.

\textsuperscript{28} Cox and Frankland, “The Federal State and the Breakup of Czechoslovakia,” 79.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.

autonomy was short-lived, however, as the nation quickly reverted to centralism in the 1970s under a system that would only unravel in 1989, as the rest of the Eastern bloc did.\textsuperscript{32}

**The Fall of Communist Czechoslovakia**

After years of increasing economic and political hardships, the Communist regime collapsed in November 1989 in what is referred to as the “Velvet Revolution,” signifying its peaceful nature.\textsuperscript{33} While there were only a small number of Slovak signatories to Charter 77, a revolutionary petition demanding human rights that originated in the Czech lands, a growing dissident movement had emerged among members of both ethnicities.\textsuperscript{34} The Czechs’ Civic Forum and the Slovaks’ Public Against Violence parties together orchestrated the transfer of power, eventually forming a new government led by Marián Čalfa with Václav Havel as President.\textsuperscript{35} The Western world looked upon the developments with great hope for the future of the nation as a strong and stable democratic force in the East.\textsuperscript{36}

However, the dilemma of what shape the newly free country would take immediately distressed the political realm, first manifesting in the struggle over what the nation would be named. The Slovak National Council resisted the title “Czechoslovak Republic” suggested by Havel, instead calling for “The Federation of Czecho-Slovakia”—and thus, the so-called “hyphen war” began.\textsuperscript{37} Demonstrations against the “Czechoslovak” notion arose in Slovakia,

\textsuperscript{32} Cox and Frankland, “The Federal State and the Breakup of Czechoslovakia,” 81.
\textsuperscript{33} Janos, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, 18.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, 364.
which saw the materialization of the first slogans in favour of an independent Slovakia.\textsuperscript{38} On April 20, 1990, the Czechs yielded, and the “Czech and Slovak Federative Republic” was proclaimed.\textsuperscript{39} This skirmish set the stage for what would be a difficult, and ultimately unsuccessful, nation-building process.

Further disagreements over economic, defense, and foreign policies surfaced, exposing distinct differences in the Czech and Slovak leaders’ visions for the nation.\textsuperscript{40} The extent of these differences was considered so vast that the decision to dissolve was jointly made in October 1992 and approved by the Federal Assembly on November 11.\textsuperscript{41} On January 1, 1993, the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic disappeared from the map of Europe, replaced by the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The split was then definitively finalized when the two states quickly achieved international recognition and were admitted to the United Nations on January 19, 1993.\textsuperscript{42}

\textbf{The Causes of the Dissolution}

The reasons for the dissolution were multiple and mutually-reinforcing. Whereas perceptions of economic, cultural, and political inequalities as well as the international context provided the underlying conditions for the separation, the divorce itself was made possible by the leaders’ manipulation of these forces and unwillingness to compromise short of an outright break-up. To begin, the economic antecedents of the disintegration began long before 1992. The Slovak lands were historically far less developed than the Czechs’, whose highly industrialized society had formed the “most productive region of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire.”\textsuperscript{43} This

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{39} Ibid, 29.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Cox and Frankland, “The Federal State and the Breakup of Czechoslovakia,” 85.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Ibid, 86.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Paul, The Cultural Limits of Revolutionary Politics, 184.
\end{itemize}
disparity persisted throughout the 20th century, when the Slovak economy was largely centered around the production of “material and components” that would then be assembled in the more advanced Czech lands.\textsuperscript{44}

Prague did make efforts to lessen the economic gap between the republics, allocating a disproportionate 31% of its total investment to Slovakia from 1949-65.\textsuperscript{45} Referred to as the “\textit{penezovod},” or money pipeline, 7% of the Czechoslovak state’s national budget at the time of dissolution went to subsidizing Slovakia.\textsuperscript{46} Despite this, 64% of Slovaks in 1991 thought resources were not equally distributed, in comparison to only 34% of Czechs.\textsuperscript{47} Further indicative of this misalignment was the fact that 67% of Slovaks agreed that “the present system favours Czechs,” while 70% of Czechs polled \textit{disagreed}.\textsuperscript{48} Thus, there was a palpable divergence in perceptions of the ethnic economic equality within the Czechoslovak state, which was only worsened upon democratization in 1989.

In 1990, the new Czech and Slovak Republic government implemented economic reforms that consisted of “the elimination of subsidies, the full liberalization of wholesale and retail prices, the liberalization of foreign trade as well as privatization of the largest portion of public enterprises.”\textsuperscript{49} The Czech President, Václav Klaus, was an advocate of rapid capitalist reform, but his dramatic “shock therapy” shift to a market economy had disruptive effects on the Slovak economy.\textsuperscript{50} Demonstrations erupted in Slovakia in response to the reforms, calling upon

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} Ulc, “Czechoslovakia’s Velvet Divorce,” 346.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} Roesler, “Nationalism and Economic Disparities,” 346.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
greater economic autonomy and “compensation for the disparate impact of the transition on Slovakia.”\textsuperscript{51} The more technologically-advanced and innovative industries in the Czech lands were much better equipped for the transition, while Slovakia’s heavy industry, especially in arms, suffered in the Western markets.\textsuperscript{52}

Unemployment spiked, reaching 11.82\% in Slovakia in comparison to the 4.13\% of the Czech Republic by the end of 1991.\textsuperscript{53} In that year, a poll revealed that 43\% of Slovaks were concerned about the reforms damaging their national interests, and a further 57\% “expected the gap between the Czech and the Slovak economies to grow.”\textsuperscript{54} In contrast to the Czech leadership, the Slovak government envisioned a much more gradual transition to a market economy, alternatively preferring a continued interventionist role.\textsuperscript{55} These clashing economic outlooks, therefore, posed a fundamental problem for the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic’s leaders, one that proved impossible to reconcile.

Beyond economic considerations, the end of communism at last allowed recognition and expression of ethnicity, causing an eruption in nationalism. This was true particularly among the Slovaks, who were able to explore and assert a national identity of which they had previously been deprived.\textsuperscript{56} With their cultural freedom, the Slovaks increasingly viewed the Czechs as their “oppressors” and the unification as “almost a Czech invention and a Czech con game, aimed at limiting Slovak autonomy,” as written by Havel.\textsuperscript{57} The Czechs, on the other hand, embraced their national myths of “democracy, humanitarianism, egalitarianism, spiritual firmness, and

\textsuperscript{53} Batt, \textit{Czecho-Slovakia in Transition}, 16.
\textsuperscript{55} Ulc, “Czechoslovakia’s Velvet Divorce,” 339.
\textsuperscript{56} Cox and Frankland, “The Federal State and the Breakup of Czechoslovakia,” 84.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
intellectual innovativeness” as unique to them only.\textsuperscript{58} In their 70 years within a common state, a distinct, shared, Czechoslovak identity had failed to develop.

Instead, there emerged only increasing feelings of resentment, betrayal, and inequality. This was made evident in an October 1990 survey which found 61\% of Slovaks believed the “Czechs did not consider the Slovaks equal partners.”\textsuperscript{59} A 1968 poll displays that this was a persistent theme in the history of the Czechoslovak nation, finding that 91\% of Slovaks prioritized the two ethnicities’ equality as their main concern, in contrast to 5\% of Czechs.\textsuperscript{60} In the words of one Slovak, “show me a mother with three children who loves them all the same. There is always one which is favoured and the federation favours the Czechs. See where it has got us.”\textsuperscript{61} These heightened senses of ethnic difference and exasperation therefore made dissolution a viable option, which presented an opportunity to the Czech and Slovak leaders.

The final factor that contributed to the leaders’ decision to partition the Czechoslovak state was the international environment at the time. With the end of the Cold War, the world was in an era of transition, one in which “divergent internal trends could be expressed and carried through to their conclusion.”\textsuperscript{62} Republics of two fellow former communist federations, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, showed the possibility of achieving independence and may have inspired the Slovaks to do the same, while other nationalities, such as the Scots, were also fighting for more autonomy at the time.\textsuperscript{63} Furthermore, the main reason Czechoslovakia first came to exist—

\begin{itemize}
\item Paul, \textit{The Cultural Limits of Revolutionary Politics}, 186.
\item Bútorová, “A Deliberate ‘Yes’ to the Dissolution of the ČSFR?”, 62.
\item Ulc, “Czechoslovakia’s Velvet Divorce,” 336.
\end{itemize}
to protect the lands from a German threat—was no longer relevant, while the danger posed by Soviet intervention, too, had evaporated. Thus, the timing was vital in inspiring and allowing the Czech and Slovak peoples to successfully split.

But even in the context of these conditions, the dissolution was only made possible by the presence of political elites who lacked a commitment to the common state and a willingness to compromise. In the first post-communism Federal Assembly elections of 1990, the Czecho-Slovak people demonstrated their support for preserved unity, with federalist parties faring well. Meanwhile, the only party with a separatist platform, the Slovak National Party, won just 15 of the 300 total seats. Yet, a pattern of Czechs voting for Czech parties and Slovaks voting for Slovak ones appeared, with no parties gaining seats in both lands, exhibiting an unequivocal sense of ethnic division. The Slovak Prime Minister Vladimir Mečiar acknowledged this trend, stating “a system of isolation between Czechs and Slovaks has been created [so] that we in fact do not know each other.”

Mečiar himself, however, was the first to take advantage of this system. As Prime Minister, he began to insist on dramatic measures of autonomy for Slovakia, and did so on the grounds of fierce Slovak nationalism. The Slovak leader appealed to historic grievances about Czech cultural and political hegemony, referring to a “Prague intellectual ghetto” on which he blamed his republic’s problems. Mečiar used “social demagogy” and “emancipation rhetoric” to gain voters’ support by galvanizing their nationalist sentiments.

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66 Ibid, 82-83.
68 Ibid, 651.
69 Roesler, “Nationalism and Economic Disparities,” 348
71 Bútorová, “A Deliberate ‘Yes’ to the Dissolution of the ČSFR?”, 66.
progressively more drastic, including an ultimatum to the Czech National Council to accept an extensive power-sharing law or else he would “declare the supremacy of Slovak laws over the laws of the federation.” As a result of his refusal to follow the decisions of the ruling party, he was dismissed from the Council in April 1991.

Mečiar then formed his own party, Movement for a Democratic Slovakia, which professed a commitment to confederation and, failing that, a readiness to head the effort for full sovereignty. His party won the most seats in the 1992 elections, a result of extreme consequence for the Czech and Slovak Republic’s fate. As Prime Minister, Mečiar sought “a loose confederation that would permit Slovakia to issue its own currency, carry out its own economic reforms, and maintain an independent military.” He also insisted on attaining international recognition of Slovakia and the ability to conduct their own foreign policy. In effect, Mečiar envisioned a de facto sovereign Slovak nation, and indispensably made “ethnic issues politically salient” to achieve this end.

In the Czech lands, a growing sense of ethnic nationalism was apparent by the 1992 elections as well. Inclinations towards greater distance were present there too, with “increasing numbers of Czechs [coming] to believe that abandoning Slovakia was to their advantage because of its minority problems (especially the Hungarians), its decaying infrastructure, and its costly

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73 Ibid, 32.
projects.”

Czech Prime Minister Václav Klaus, however, was dedicated to rejecting a loose confederation along the lines of Mečiar’s proposals. Klaus, of the right-leaning Civic Democratic Party, entered negotiations willing to concede a considerable degree of federal power, “as long as it would not endanger economic reforms.”

It soon became clear, however, that this was not tolerable for Mečiar, and neither were prepared to budge. Klaus described the negotiations as “a cold shower,” detailing “I went to Brno with the idea of negotiating about the future of the federation. But it was all too evident that this was not what the Slovak team had in mind.” His efforts thwarted, Klaus asserted that “if Slovaks could not accept the sacrifices needed for the establishment of a capitalist market, they should be encouraged to quit the union.” For him, the only options were “a single, centralist state or disintegration,” the former of which was unacceptable to Mečiar and thus left only the latter.

When discussing the negotiations, the Speaker of the Slovak Parliament stated that “Mečiar was playing this game. He didn’t want to reach a deal, but he didn’t want to be the one who would break up the country. So in his wily way he was pushing for Klaus to take the initiative.” Others, however, place the onus on the Czech leadership; Paal Sigurd Hilde, for example, concluded that Czech ambitions for a “return to Europe” through economic and political reform prevailed over their desire to maintain the federation. Regardless of who is more at fault, the leaders of both republics stood to gain from the dissolution, increasing their

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82 Ibid.
83 Lazarová, “Twenty-Five Years After Divorce, Czechs and Slovaks Closer Than Ever.”
85 Ibid.
86 Lazarová, “Twenty-Five Years After Divorce, Czechs and Slovaks Closer Than Ever.”
own power as they stood to become the Prime Ministers of the emerging states.\textsuperscript{88} Klaus and Mečiar both were impatient, stubborn, and inexperienced, and by appealing to ethnic grievances, orchestrated the disintegration at their own behest.\textsuperscript{89}

Yet, while these ethnic grievances undoubtedly existed, they were not at a level which caused widespread separatist aspirations amongst the public. In spite of the prominent economic and ethnic differences that had surfaced, it was still found in April 1992 that 77\% of Slovaks concurred that “the ties binding the Slovaks with Czechs should not be broken.”\textsuperscript{90} Leading up to the split, polls demonstrated the lack of public support for the divorce, with only 5\% of Czechs and 14\% of Slovak respondents backing complete independence in fall of 1991.\textsuperscript{91} In April 1992, this figure had increased to 17\% among Slovaks, but the majority still expressed a devotion to some form of federation.\textsuperscript{92} An exceptional 82\% of Czechs and 86\% of Slovaks polled wished for a referendum to decide the nation’s fate, and a petition calling for such a referendum gained over 2.5 million signatures.\textsuperscript{93}

Pro-federation President Havel insisted that this request be met, aware that the result would be in favour of unity, but Klaus and Mečiar blocked Havel and the people’s demands.\textsuperscript{94} In this regard, the dissolution was illegal, as the constitution necessitated a referendum, and though the Federal Assembly thrice rejected the bill, it was pushed through Parliament on November

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{88} Kraus and Stanger, “Contending Views of Czechoslovakia’s Demise,” 10.
\item \textsuperscript{89} Batt, \textit{Czechoslovakia in Transition}, 1.
\item \textsuperscript{90} Bútorová, “A Deliberate ‘Yes’ to the Dissolution of the ČSFR?”, 61.
\item \textsuperscript{91} Milan Zemko, “Domestic and International Aspects of the Czechoslovak State’s Crisis and
\item \textsuperscript{92} Cox and Frankland, “The Federal State and the Breakup of Czechoslovakia,” 84.
\item \textsuperscript{94} Roesler, “Nationalism and Economic Disparities,” 349.
\end{itemize}
In one remarkably cogent survey, 79% of Slovak civilians felt that “ordinary people would find a consensus if the politicians did not set people against each other.” In the years following the dissolution, public dissatisfaction with the break-up was discernible: 57% of Czech citizens “preferred to live in their own independent state,” and a mere 36% of Slovaks “felt happy” about their independence. Therefore, it is evident that the leadership played a decisive role in bringing about the divorce, first by taking advantage of internal and external conditions, and then by refusing to cooperate with the other party short of jointly eradicating the nation.

The Causes of the Dissolution’s Peacefulness

But while the discussed factors were essential in causing the split, they all were of immense importance in assuring its peaceful nature as well. This dimension of Czechoslovakia’s disintegration is the most intriguing: how did the two republics separate without any violence? The question is of particular gravity in light of the exceedingly disparate circumstances of nearby Yugoslavia as its federation simultaneously collapsed. Yugoslavia shared many similarities with Czechoslovakia: both were relatively small, ethnically-diverse, socialist federations which experienced economic disparities along ethnic lines. However, when republics within the Yugoslav federation began to declare independence after 1990, a series of devastating wars broke out, which compromised of brutal ethnic violence and genocide. In order to comprehend why Czechoslovakia’s break-up was so amicable, it is accordingly useful to determine which conditions existed there which did not exist in Yugoslavia. These factors relate to geography and

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96 Bútorová, “A Deliberate ‘Yes’ to the Dissolution of the ČSFR?”, 69.
97 Ulc, “Czechoslovakia’s Velvet Divorce,” 349.
98 Janos, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, 3.
99 Ibid, 44.
ethnic relations, but most of all to the role leaders played in ensuring the “velvet” quality of the divorce.

One condition that must be considered when discussing the ease with which Czechoslovakia dissolved is the geographic segregation of its ethnicities. Unlike Yugoslavia, which had a significant amount of Serbs, Croats, and Bosnians spread throughout the country, Czechoslovakia’s territory had very little ethnic coalescing. Just 4% of the Czech Republic’s residents were Slovak in 1993, while the figure was 1% for Czechs living in Slovakia. Moreover, those who did live in the other ethnicity’s republic tended to be scattered. The border’s overwhelming correspondence with ethnicity made the process much simpler in comparison to other ethnically-mixed states, with little cause for concern over individuals being assigned to the “wrong” nation. In addition, the borders had long been agreed upon, thus ruling out confrontations over contested territories.

Furthermore, while ethnic differences were pronounced at this time, the Czech and Slovak peoples did not hold views of each other that were conducive to hatred or violence. Frustrations and resentments were undoubtedly felt, but the ethnicities still shared close contacts, including a high degree of intermarriage, intellectual exchanges, and tourism. In 1991, for example, 31% of Slovaks polled had family and 57% had friends within the Czech lands. Their shared religion and similar languages were also imperative in cultivating a sense of

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100 Kraus and Allison Stanger, “Lessons from the Breakup of Czechoslovakia,” 300.
101 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
commonality that contributed to an aversion to conflict, in juxtaposition to Yugoslavia.\textsuperscript{107} Additionally, the Czechs and Slovaks lacked a history of violence in their relations, having never fought a war against one another.\textsuperscript{108} Michael Kraus and Allison Stanger suggest that this amity may be “a trait embedded in the Czech and Slovak national characters by years of domination from without” or “a hallmark of an already democratic political culture.”\textsuperscript{109} Therefore, despite the presence of ethnic discord that partially led to the dissolution, there was not the history of deep animosity or violence necessary to induce civil war.

Beyond these factors, there is one dimension that is almost always of utmost magnitude in the unfolding of internal conflicts: the state’s leadership. The leaders of the Czech and Slovak Republic, especially Havel, exist in sharp contrariety to Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević. Though Klaus and Mečiar did stir nationalism for the benefit of their political causes, they critically did not do so in a way which incited violence and terror as Milošević did. From 1990-92, “no organized political grouping and no influential voice was heard advocating the use of violent means,” while Havel publicly proclaimed that the military had no place in the dispute.\textsuperscript{110} Unlike Yugoslavia’s highly politicized militaries, the Czechoslovak army indeed remained far-removed from the process.\textsuperscript{111} The leaders of both factions were firmly devoted to this end; during the negotiations, Klaus announced “we want the process to be peaceful, cultivated, and smooth. Both the Czech and Slovak side feel very strongly that this process must be legitimate.”\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{107} Štefansky, “The Fall of Communism and the Establishment of an Independence Slovakia,” 368.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{109} Kraus and Allison Stanger, “Lessons from the Breakup of Czechoslovakia,” 300.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid, 300-01.
\textsuperscript{112} Lazarová, “Twenty-Five Years After Divorce, Czechs and Slovaks Closer Than Ever.”
Throughout the negotiations, Havel served as a patient mediator between the Slovak and Czech leaders, displaying a genuine commitment to maintaining order.\textsuperscript{113}

This dedication to ensuring tranquility can help to explain the government’s failure to allow a referendum, as they may have feared popular violence in response to its outcome. The Head of the Federal Parliament, Jan Strásky, said “the worst thing that could have happened at the time was for one part of the country to say it wanted divorce and for the other to say the opposite…I dare say the danger was so great it would not have stopped short of civil war.”\textsuperscript{114} Instead, the Federal Assembly took specific steps to assure the division was well-governed from the top, with Mečiar and Klaus establishing a “good working relationship” and a “framework for settling disputes.”\textsuperscript{115} As a result, some 60 agreements were made between the two republics, outlining aspects of the separation such as the establishment of customs and currency unions, free movement of people and goods, and a common border control.\textsuperscript{116} Federal assets were divided on a 2:1 basis that roughly matched population, and the small number of Czechs living in Slovakia and Slovaks living in the Czech Republic were permitted to choose their citizenship.\textsuperscript{117}

The politicians’ motivation for this cooperative approach was no doubt intensified by the horrifying examples set by Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. Unlike the Serbs, the Czech leaders relinquished their desire to remain unified, and recognized their counterpart’s right to self-

\textsuperscript{113} Kraus and Allison Stanger, “Lessons from the Breakup of Czechoslovakia,” 301.
\textsuperscript{114} Lazarová, “Twenty-Five Years After Divorce, Czechs and Slovaks Closer Than Ever.”
\textsuperscript{115} Štefansky, “The Fall of Communism and the Establishment of an Independence Slovakia,” 368; Batt, Czechoslovakia in Transition, 25.
determination.\textsuperscript{118} They also crucially lacked the expansionist ambitions of the Serbs, instead only wishing to pursue their own capitalist path.\textsuperscript{119} The Czech newspaper \textit{Respekt’s} headline “alone to Europe, or together to the Balkans” succinctly encapsulates the sentiment.\textsuperscript{120} In sum, had the men in power in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and the Federation not been so committed to a violence-free dissolution, it may well not have happened as such.

\textbf{International Response and Recognition}

There existed genuine concerns globally over the potential for conflict in Czechoslovakia, specifically in regards to the Hungarian minority that then made up 10\% of Slovakia’s population.\textsuperscript{121} An International Institute for Strategic Studies paper produced in 1992 outlined these anxieties, expressing a fear that “the actual division of the country may take years of uncertainty and conflicts, with serious security consequences for all of Central Europe.”\textsuperscript{122} For this reason, many Western leaders firmly advised against the split, warning of “negative repercussions for the country as a whole as well as for the international position of both newly emerging states.”\textsuperscript{123}

Western countries were particularly concerned about how the break-up could potentially further destabilize the region and disrupt the republics’ incorporation into the world economy and international organizations.\textsuperscript{124} The European Community’s stance on the dissolution has been recounted as one of “non-interference mixed with disappointment,” with spokesman M.

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{119} Batt, \textit{Czecho-Slovakia in Transition}, 25.
\bibitem{120} Rupnik, “The International Context,” 274.
\bibitem{121} Zielonka, \textit{Security in Central Europe}, 12.
\bibitem{122} Ibid, 10.
\bibitem{124} Štefansky, “The Fall of Communism and the Establishment of an Independence Slovakia,” 369.
\end{thebibliography}
Pinheiro conveying “the aim should be integration rather than disintegration.” United States President George H.W. Bush expressed his desire to see the federation survive, telling Havel in July 1992 “I would hate not to ask whether there’s anything we can do to help preserve a federal state within the bounds of proper international behaviour.” British Prime Minister John Major had similar hopes, having stated in June 1992 “it seems to me it’s very much in the interest of Czechoslovakia that there should be a federal government.” The British and American leaders both appeared certain that the state would remain intact, with Major professing “if I were not optimistic about the future of Czechoslovakia I wouldn’t have been part of the United Kingdom Government that pressed so strongly, and first, for an Association Agreement with Czechoslovakia.”

Despite their disappointment in the negotiations’ outcome, the issue was seemingly not of enough international importance to justify interference or objection. This was especially the case given the other events concurrently transpiring in places such as Yugoslavia and Somalia. President William Clinton informed the new Slovak President Michal Kováč in 1993 that he was “impressed by the way the Czechs and Slovaks peacefully separated,” advising him that “as long as you make progress toward democracy, we will support you.” The US was among many to extend diplomatic recognition to both nations on their first day of existence. A statement by

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130 “Statement by Press Secretary Fitzwater on Recognition of the Czech and Slovak Republics,”
Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater on January 1, 1993 announced “we commend both Republics for the peaceful means by which their separation was carried out.” Under Resolutions 800 and 801, the United Nations Security Council recommended the General Assembly admit the Czech Republic and Slovakia to the organization, which it did on January 19, 1993. The ease with which the nations gained access to the UN, and subsequently the EU and NATO, was undeniably a result of the mutual and peaceful nature of their dissolution.

**Conclusion**

With their welcomed admittance to the international community, the Czech Republic and Slovakia accomplished something so few others have: a state disintegration with no civil war, no ethnic cleansing, and no international interference. Some have suggested the Czecho-Slovak divorce be used as a model for other separatist movements, such as those in Canada and Spain. Indeed, there are many lessons to be learned from the 1993 dissolution, but above all, the paramount role played by the Czech and Slovak leaders in both engendering the division and ensuring its peacefulness must be recognized. While a variety of conditions, namely economic, cultural, and political disparities and the international context, set the stage for the federation’s termination, it was the work of Klaus, Mečiar, and Havel that allowed the Czech Republic and Slovakia to gracefully emerge as distinct democratic nations. The ordeal’s greatest implication, therefore, is the utmost importance that needs to be assigned to the rhetoric and visions of leaders in ethnically-diverse nations when they arrive at a crossroads as Czechoslovakia did in 1992.

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131 “Statement by Press Secretary Fitzwater on Recognition of the Czech and Slovak Republics.”
133 Kraus, “Czechoslovakia’s Dissolution Twenty Years After,” 53.
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