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THE GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT OF EVENTS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA: HISTORICAL MEMORY AND NATIONAL SECURITY (Czechoslovakia in the year of the 75th anniversary of the Great Victory)¹

An attempt to analyze problem of transformation of historical memory is made in this article. Authors put emphasis on place and role of historical memory in modern world. Necessity to cancel out any falsification of history for support of effective security system in modern world is stressed

Keywords: *national security, threats, public authority, protests, historical memory, Nazism, coup d'état.*

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ГЕОПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЙ КОНТЕКСТ СОБЫТИЙ В ЧЕХОСЛОВАКИИ: ИСТОРИЧЕСКАЯ ПАМЯТЬ И НАЦИОНАЛЬНАЯ БЕЗОПАСНОСТЬ (Чехословакия в год 75-летия Великой Победы)

В статье актуализированы проблемы трансформации исторической памяти в контексте реализации геополитических интересов современными государствами. Авторы акцентируют внимание на месте и роли исторической памяти в современном мире. Подчеркивается необходимость недопущения фальсификации истории в целях обеспечения эффективной системы безопасности в информационном обществе.

Ключевые слова: национальная безопасность, угрозы, публичная власть, протесты, историческая память, нацизм, государственный переворот.

Every year, against the backdrop of incoming anniversary of the Great Victory diplomatic activity of NATO members aimed to ignore celebrations in Moscow under different pretenses enhances. At that “recruits” of these bloc from Eastern Europe are the most active on this issue. Systematic demarches of Polish diplomatic agency and Baltic states, which do not surprise anyone were followed by quite unexpected claims of politicians who had been leading balanced independent policy and not always shared foreign policy from overseas. This time it was surprising that Czech Republic claimed that Russia was responsible for technogenic catastrophe on its territory and its visit to Moscow would be inappropriate considering events of 1968 which had taken place more than 50 years ago. Coronavirus epidemic outbreak has given the pretense to politely deny the invitation but demonstrative demolition of monument to marshal I.S. Konev – the liberator of Prague – in the capital of Czechoslovakia in the year of 75th anniversary of Victory over fascism makes us to reconsider the situation.

Ask any European, liberal citizen or today even not so liberal but ordinary citizen of Europe, what so global happened in 1968. Well, everybody knows this. That year the “aggressive” USSR ravaged with fire and sword powerful and free Czechoslovakia that decided to choose liberty. More than a hundred of dead, thousands of wounded people. Casualties among Soviet servicemen.

Events which took place in Eastern Europe states in the late 90s, in Baltic states, Georgia, Ukraine, revolutions in southern republics of former Soviet Union, series of coup in the

framework of «Arab spring», reaction of global community on Crimea reunion and an attempt to overthrow government in Belarus republic make us to review sustained liberal cliches on the USSR aggression in respect to post-war unrest in GDR, events in Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968.

It seems like it is better to start a narration about «Prague spring» events with a statement that they were mostly caused by geopolitical reasons and it is not a question that policy is a concentrated expression of economy. In the second half of 60s project of main gas and oil pipeline (Urengoy – Pomari – Uzhgorod) to Eastern Europe (with an extension to Western Europe) began to embody. Collisions which still happen with part of this pipeline located on the territory of Ukraine and those attempts of Anglo-Saxon states to get Europe industry off Russian hydrocarbons (by substitution with their liquefied gas) allow to draw direct parallels between coup attempts in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and successful coup in Ukraine in 2014.

So, in the end of summer of 1968, USA, UK and Belgium dislocated their troops on the territory of GFR with a goal to support coup and impede their geopolitical enemy’s, the USSR, restoration of its status quo. In case of difficulties with the Warsaw Pact states’ troops Netherlands and France Armed Corps would join for support of mentioned NATO group and rebels.

Unfortunately by that time situation in CSR had already been destabilized significantly due to Western political strategists. In the beginning of 1968 Dubchek was appointed to the post of the first secretary of the presidium of communistic party of Czechoslovakia. Such

characters rose to power in many countries of Eastern Europe through revision of Stalin heritage in international policy as well as in recruitment. Not prepared for government administration, Dubcek used demagogy, methods of tricking with unsatisfied people and self-advertising, (familiar example of political figure being the head of state). Opposition financed by West activated immediately (different right protection groups and society movements). Czechoslovakia mass media started a campaign discrediting government administration bodies and structures. Being funded on western money, social movements started to declare political mottos fully complied with «color revolution» plot and calling for overthrow of constitutional system. Some club named «231» came into existence with up to 40 thousands members (including former Nazis, members of SS, traitors and people collaborated with occupants during war, criminals). Catholic Church also should be mentioned individually. Its channels were used for financing and supplement of “revolutionaries”. The club was headed by Yaroslav Brodsky – former Nazi who was sponsored by Western special services while attempting to organize the coup.

Dubcek protégé, Minister of Internal Affairs Pavel in fact opened border with FRG and ordered to deconstruct border barriers and simultaneously to withdraw all troops from border line. Apparently “clean-up” started in Ministry of Internal Affairs with dismissing and initiation of criminal prosecution regarding coworkers who showed loyalty to socialistic system as a whole and Soviet Union in particular.

NATO Joined Council developed operation “Zephyr” regarding alliance forces to obtain territory of Czechoslovakia impeding overthrows suppression from the part of the Warsaw Pact members. After that «legitimate power» should have announced its withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, change of government system and entering Czechoslovakia into NATO. Taking this, NATO advance to the east could become a reality back in 1968. USSR administration decided to act proactively and on 21st of August operation “Dunay” started being total surprise for western curators of “Prague spring”. Enter of allied forces to the territory of CSR was directly prescribed by Art. 5 of the Warsaw Pact which says ” ...Contracting Parties

have agreed to establish a Jointed Command of the armed forces that by agreement among the Parties shall be assigned to the Command, which shall function on the basis of jointly established principles. They shall likewise adopt other agreed measures necessary to strengthen their defensive power in order to protect the peaceful labors of their peoples, guarantee their inviolability of their frontiers and territories, and provide defense against possible aggression” [1]. Quantity of the Warsaw Pact group which entered Czechoslovakia in August of 1968 was 240 thousand people (with 170 thousand being Soviet servicemen) [2]. By the time operation “Dunay” started there had been one of the biggest armies training on the territory of FRG with all participating NATO forces ready to help rebels in Prague. The situation was so threatening that Carpathian and Central fronts were formed and Southern front was deployed on the territory of Hungary to protect the group entered Czechoslovakia from strikes of NATO forces.

Stabilization of situation in Czechoslovakia could not avoid combat actions and casualties (105 Soviet servicemen and 200 citizens of Czechoslovakia) [3]. Did victims of city raiders against whom Czech habitants organized self-protection squads enter this number? Could local army gone into field camps and demonstratively avoiding participation in the events protect these habitants when anarchy in fact established in the country?

Defeated rebels were struggling their way to the territory of FRG through battle and a lot of “fighters for bright democratic future” unfortunately managed to escape. Finally, NATO headquarters was sorry to conclude that “Soviet operation had been conducted smoothly, rapidly, accurately and effectively “[4]. The conduct of the only strategic military operation in the history of the Warsaw Pact resulted in maintaining and further inclination of economic potential of CSR and other Baltic states in the during following 22 years. FRG and other states of «old Europe» became stable consumers of Soviet and then Russian carbohydrates.

Soviet presence in Czechoslovakia ended in June of 1991. Central force group with 100 thousand people left Czechoslovakia. Following events with NATO expansion to the east, destabilization of states with Russian carbohydrate arteries, demolition of monuments

dedicated to Soviet warriors-liberators – it is logical follow-up of opposition which took place more than 50 years ago. And as facts show us, the ones interested in this are the same.

Czech politicians, hiding behind arbitrariness of the Head of district administration (Prague 6) O. Kolář, not only made themselves look bad by claiming that monument to liberator of Prague from fascists marshal I.S. Konev was not classified as government property and was under municipal jurisdiction (which violate array of articles of Czech Republic criminal code, namely: Art.207 “unlawful usage of private property”; Art.228 “damaging of private property”; Art.329 “abuse of power”; Art.330 “negligent discharge of duty”; Art.358 “hooliganism”; Art.221 “unlawful spending of budget money” (monument deconstruction works) [5], but also violated Art.21 of «On friendly relationship and cooperation between Russian Federation and Czech Republic» treaty dated 26th of August 1993. According which the monument was classified as «military monument» и was under government jurisdiction [6].

It needs to be mentioned that in the list of military burial places and points of memories of Ministry of Defense of Czech Republic monument of marshal

I.S. Konev was accounted under number cze0006-41722 (place of memory for veteran meetings) [7]. This record was deleted on the 6th of April the day before monument demolition and that also proves involvement of Ministry of Defense, therefore, state authorities to the fate of monument.

It is obvious that demolition of the monument was conducted by forces closely connected to USA embassy in Czech Republic. Primary goal of all this was to bring tension to relations between Prague and Moscow. This is also proved by the fact that legal realm of monument demolition was completed by American consulting company with P. Kolář – former ambassador of Czech Republic in USA, father of the head of City Council Prague-6 O. Kolář - being adviser of it. Direct executers of this act were openly humiliating on memories of war hoping on impunity and support of overseas “patron”. After monument demolition Kolář made a joke saying «this way Konev was punished for being out in open air without wearing a mask [8]. The second person to be

protected was the head of Prague district Rzheporiye Pavel Novotni. This man did not participate in monument demolition but was remarked for his humiliating claims. For example when he was talking about Konev, he could openly use such words as “monster”, “psychopath”, “mass killer” etc.[9]. Moreover, in present time exalted authority builds monument to general Vlasov in district under his management.

Russian reaction was not surprising. Firstly Czech authorities were offered to send monument to Russia, then to sell it. But interested forces needed escalation of relations and public demolition was conducted and shots from this event spread across social media. In response Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defense S. Shoigu one after another made a statement claiming that initiators and executers of that provocation “must endure punishment” for demolition of monument of Konev [10].

Then perfectly following “the Skripal case” scenario, pro-western social media claimed that initiators of monument were given police security team because of “threats from Russia” and Czech special agencies also tracked arrival of Russian citizen to Prague who may pose a threat to authorities blamed for “vandalism” by Moscow. And to blame Russia for intervention into inner affairs press spooked Czech people with “Russian intelligence agent moving on the territory of Europe”. In 2020, on the 75th anniversary of Victory in Prague, as an eclipse of mocking at those who were killed in action during liberation of Czechoslovakia from fascism, someone installed 2 meter tall foamed plastic toilet on empty platform of monument. Words of marshal Georgy Zhukov about liberated Eastern Europe nations naturally come to the mouth: “We liberated them, and they will not forgive us this” [11].

In 2021 Czech authorities blamed Russia for being responsible for armament stockpiles explosions which had taken place in Czech Republic in 2014 without any proves. It is obvious that neither absence of ideological counterparts nor attempts “to confess for antidemocratic past” and “totalitarian regime crimes” nor omnipresent demolition of monuments of Soviet state authorities and wave of “renaming” which took place in Russia during “crazy 90s” and beginning of millennium do not

cancel out common vector of European anti-Russian policy. Opposition has geopolitical character and the way how united West deals with us does not change because of who leads the Russia – Emperor, General Secretary or President. It showed up even during global, as we thought, fight against pandemic (along with which united West does not forget to fight with Russia). Monument destruction in Europe which recalls Russian (in Soviet form of governance) geopolitical triumph is consequential follow-up. From one side, those forces which are preparing social opinion of Europe population to a new fight against “northern neighbor” (do we need to remind the results of the last raids on East?). From another side, this is an aftermath of близорукой policy of denial of Soviet past (they renamed streets and took down monuments themselves, so what do we want from Europeans who get rid of soldiers and marshals of “totalitarian regime”?).

We must agree on that neither calls to conscience nor threats to be claimed responsible (even more under Russian juridical system) won't help to make Western politicians be reasonable. How should have Russia reacted on this considering outgoing geopolitical situation? Of course to counter Czechs (and Polishes) boorishness flesh mob like ‘don't drink Czech beer’, “don't listen to Oginsky polonaise” or “don't buy Skoda” may be organized. But this will be wrong and moreover will have no effect on people who like to humiliate the past. We think that the response must be extremely correct but, nevertheless, reflecting

According to information from open sources, 58 monuments are expected to be built in Russia under “Legion 100” program dedicated to Czech legionnaires. During Civil war of 1917-1922 members of armed forces of Czechoslovakia supported white movement which one way or another was fighting against Russian people. That being said, lots of servicemen were remembered for their tortures, executions and pillages. But after collapse of USSR interpretation of that historical period changed a little (all they were called “fighters against Bolshevism” and heralds of “democratic values” in liberal way). So in current situation temporal stop (unless Czech authorities change their opinion up to restoration of monument) or cancel of these project would not be seen as “politically incorrect”. Besides, to start with, it is

necessary to do the same with Katin case with our Polish partners. It is even more important because judicial question regarding to responsible ones for execution of Polish officers was closed in Nuremburg (according to table of individual sentences Iodel and Gering were proven to be responsible for giving an order to eliminate Polish people). Opinions of particular political figures on this question (who were naively thinking that taking other responsible ones' blame on would lead to improvement of relationship between countries) must be considered wrong because sentence of Nuremburg tribune was not particularly or in whole questioned or cancelled up to these days.

Czech politicians try not to remember that USSR lost 27 million people during war and more than half of them were not even participating in hostilities. Among them were 12000 Soviet soldiers killed during liberation of Prague and 40000 wounded in May of 1945 (then whom were units of the Red Army liberating Prague from, if, according to opinion of modern Czech politicians, Prague was liberated by Vlasov's forces). A reminder may be given to free-minded ones that fights for Prague lasted whole the 9th of May.

As a result of Prague operation last large German forces group on Soviet-German front was eliminated and liberation of Czechoslovakia was over. Throughout the liberation Soviet forces took 25 thousands German soldiers and officers prisoners of war, disarmed more that 119 thousands members of foe military groups, captured 265 tanks and 265 armed personnel carriers, 80 airplanes and other types of vehicles [12]. All the groceries taken from German forces was given out to citizens of Prague.

At that, thanks to hard work of Czechs during their participation in Third Reich almost quarter of Soviet people was smashed by tanks made in Czechoslovakia, killed with machine guns which had been produced in Czechoslovakia and loaded with Czech ammo.

We forgave that; after all, we were allies during the war. But we did not forget that. That is what 1968 and ongoing events in capital city of Czech Republic connected to demolition of military monuments and blames without prove that Russia is responsible for industrial catastrophes showed us. It would be great if our former allies but ongoing enemies remembered this while talking about “Prague spring”.

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