

Research paper on dissolution of eastern european states - czechoslovakia vis-a- V...

[Politics](#), [Communism](#)



Why did Czechoslovakia dissolve peacefully while Yugoslavia did not?

Structural concerns and cultural differences account for the differences in the disintegration processes of both nations.

II. Czechoslovakia: A Two-State Federation

The two-state format of Czechoslovakia made it inherently unstable due to disparities over representation. The centralized nature of the nation and mutual interests pertaining to economic reforms made the dissolution peaceful.

III. Yugoslavia: A Harmonious Union Turned Hostile

Different predecessor states friendly with one another made possible the formation of Yugoslavia. Political insensitivities brought by the Communist rule of President Josip Broz Tito, alongside his preference for balanced representation, nurtured animosity between constituent states. The decentralized structure of the nation and its exposure to political and economic turmoil made it more susceptible for disintegration.

IV. Conclusion

Structural and ethnic differences contributed to the circumstances that surrounded the disintegration of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.

Introduction

Eastern Europe has become one of the key geographical areas during the Cold War. It is home to two former nations formed by different ethnic groups – Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. With both formed by different constituent

republics, both ended in disintegration at the end of the Cold War. Yet, both nations disintegrated under different circumstances. The split of Czechoslovakia into two nations – Czech Republic and Slovakia, happened under relatively peaceful terms compared to the disastrous breakup of Yugoslavia into its several successor states. As both former nations thrived within the same geopolitical circumstances, it is thus worthy to question the differences that affected their road to disintegration.

Why did Czechoslovakia dissolve peacefully while Yugoslavia did not? This study will seek to investigate upon that controversy and emphasize particular factors essential in understanding the concept of dissolution towards the concluding phases of the Cold War. An investigation of the socioeconomic and political conditions that affected both former nations provides crucial findings to the question posed by this study, taking into consideration factors of structural concerns and cultural differences.

Czechoslovakia: A Two-State Federation

Czechoslovakia shifted from a one-party Communist state to a democratic parliament through the “velvet revolution” of 1989. Resentment towards Communism proved pivotal to the successful transition to democracy; the standing of the nation as one with a history and memory of democratic government became beneficial to the victory of the revolution. However, the nation did not last long in its post-Communist era, as it was not able to develop a new constitution that would help keep the nation intact amidst the new democratic system. Since the new parliament allowed Communists to gain representation, their influence after the revolution did not lessen

dramatically. The hindrances provided by the 1968 constitution decelerated the reform process and contributed to the failure to enact a new constitution. Furthermore, constitutional framers were not able to focus on making a new constitution due to the coincidence of the upcoming elections that time. Thus, the aforementioned incidents contributed to the eventual dissolution of the two-state union on January 1, 1993 (Elster, 1995).

Explaining the Disintegration of Czechoslovakia

Several factors account for the dissolution of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Culturally, both the Czechs and the Slovaks have similarities in terms of language and standards of living. Yet, the exposure of the Slovaks to oppression by the Hungarian regime reduced them to a force weaker than the Czechs, as apparent in their first unification in 1918 (Stein, 2000). The traditional make-up of Slovakia contrasted to that of the Czechs, which have already gained exposure to modernization (Elster, 1995).

The divergent political experiences of the Czechs and the Slovaks have become a recurring theme of tensions between the two during their days under a unified nation. The nation briefly disintegrated during the pre-World War II period, when Nazi Germany took over and incorporated Czech territories, leaving the Slovaks to declare independence in 1939 as Slovakia. Yet, there is an understanding that Slovakia may have stood as a “ puppet nation” of Nazi Germany, (Elster, 1995), as their independence may have met a compromise in the form of assisting the Nazis during the war (Shepherd, 2000). Nevertheless, the Slovaks saw that event as a historical, albeit brief, legacy proving their capability in self-governance, one that

propelled further motivation for the Slovak nationalists to secede (Shepherd, 2000).

For the Czechs, the growth of their economic interests has prevailed as among the strongest reasons that led to the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. Since the nation confronted a deadlock in reforms due to the failure of constitutional framers to work on replacing the 1968 constitution, the Czechs felt that the incorporation of the economically backward Slovaks has impeded the full potential of their economic prowess. Finance Minister Vaclav Klaus knew that Slovakia is struggling to grasp market reforms during the post-Communist period, leading him to think that disintegration is the most viable key to realizing the full extent of market reforms benefiting the Czechs (Elster, 1995). The exposure of the Czechs to influences from Western Europe further bolstered their aspirations to become economically prosperous (Shepherd, 2000). At the same time, the Slovaks emerged as people who highly disfavored market reforms. The Slovaks feared that market reforms would entrench on their nature as a traditional society. Slovak Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar, while being an advocate of economic reforms, used said contention as an excuse justifying the breakup of Slovakia from the two-state federation (Elster, 1995). Whereas Slovakia experienced modernization in the 1980s, it has gone through an employment decline that affected much of the population, with figures as large as three times compared to the Czechs. The main industry of Slovakia, consisting of arms sold to Eastern Europe, collapsed due to the failure of markets in said region and the order from the federal government to halt production (Stein, 2000). Structural problems ultimately led to the breakdown of Czechoslovakia and

its separation into the Czech Republic and Slovakia. A two-state federation proved difficult to sustain in the long term, largely because of the difficulty of sustaining parity between the two states. In a two-state federation, it is inevitable for one state to be larger than the other one. The concept of parity may not find favor from the larger state, which may demand more given its more prominent position, at the expense of the smaller state. If proportionality replaces parity in a two-state system, there is a greater tendency that the smaller state may find itself in a more disadvantaged state. Since proportionality considers the size of both states, the smaller state gets smaller representation while the larger state gains more seats for representation in parliament. Such has become the perennial problem of Czechoslovakian politics, which severely hampered progressive reforms to take place (Elster, 1995).

The division of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia has resulted to dramatic changes in the spheres of economics and international relations of the two states. In terms of regional security, the Visegrad allies of Czechoslovakia – Hungary and Poland, have experienced changes in relations with the separation of the two-state nation. The Czech Republic has gained greater influence from Western Europe through its proximity with Germany and Austria. Such has enabled the Czechs to foster economic partnerships with those nations that propelled their economic growth to higher levels compared to their time as part of Czechoslovakia. In return, the Czech Republic has reduced its borders with Poland and completely lost immediate proximity with Hungary due to the split. Slovakia, on the other hand, became more isolated with the rest of Eastern Europe, due to its loss

of borders with Germany and Austria. The economy of Slovakia proceeded at a laggard pace and it has failed to draw interest from Western European nations as a result. Due to that, it has strengthened its ties with the Visegrad alliance, which accounted for its economic and security needs (Simon, 1993).

A Peaceful Breakup

Generally, the separation of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia has gone through a peaceful process, although such peace was not without divergent premises. The centralized nature of Czechoslovakia has prevented both of its constituent states to consolidate their differences towards full-fledged conflicts, as it had its experience on decentralization only on its last years of existence. The dominance of the Czechs over the Slovaks did not translate to hostile consequences, as there were inadequate institutions specific for them to do so. Furthermore, the military of Czechoslovakia did not involve itself in matters pertaining to state dissolution – a factor that accounted for the nonviolent and consensual breakup of the nation into two states. The formation of the Czech Republic and Slovakia was borne out of interests specific to each nation, but their separation proved peaceful due to the lack decentralization and military involvement (Bunce, 1999).

Yugoslavia: A Harmonious Union Turned Hostile

The story of Yugoslavia resembles that of a pleasant relationship between friends of different backgrounds turned unpleasant due to their differences with one another. While the constituent states of Yugoslavia – consisting of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and

Slovenia, started their union peacefully in 1918, several experiences have triggered conflicts among those states, which eventually triggered the onset of violence towards the dissolution process (Ramet, 2002).

Explaining the Disintegration of Yugoslavia

The historical experiences and cultural differences of the constituent states that composed Yugoslavia have brought severe circumstances that led to its downfall. Attempts to unite all those states have not met optimum results, as circumstances throughout history have prevented such to transpire successful results. For one, Yugoslavia served as the pawn of different forces during World War II. Troops from Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Eastern European nations Bulgaria and Hungary were all involved in occupying portions of the nation, leading President Josip Broz Tito and the Communist party to call on for greater national solidarity (Rogel, 1998). Yet, insensitive of the growing conversion of cultural identity to political action, the call for “brotherhood and unity” emphasized by Tito failed to convince the consolidation of cultural preferences of each constituent state. The Communist party mobilized accordingly to protect Yugoslavia from emerging political parties after World War II, as it quelled foreign forces from occupying portions of its territory. The nation went out of path dependency fostered by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) following its removal by Joseph Stalin off the Soviet bloc. Going on an independent path, Yugoslavia introduced the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) to engage in reforms different to those that the USSR would have introduced to the nation (Stipe, 2004).

The collective system imposed by Tito over Yugoslavia throughout much of his life until his death in 1980 proved detrimental to the survival of the federation. A leadership vacuum characterized Yugoslavian politics due to the rotation system preferred by Tito led to the failure to institute a solid set of objectives that would otherwise influence commanding reforms to transpire (Udovicki & Ridgeway, 2000). What Tito saw as an effort to balance the leadership in the nation through rotation among the constituent states (Rogel, 1998) backfired due to the instability it brought. Decentralization further weakened the sustainability of the rotation scheme preferred by Tito (Bunce, 1999) - one that proved crucial towards the dissolution of the federation as political and economic problems flourished throughout the years past the death of Tito in 1980 (Udovicki & Ridgeway, 2000).

A Disastrous Fragmentation

The concept of fostering goodwill for unity imposed by Tito and the Communist party on Yugoslavia triggered a stronger response for disintegration from the constituent states. In exerting the value of unity among the constituent states, implementers found themselves promoting hatred across different ethnicities cloistered within Yugoslavian borders. Fear and insecurity characterized ethnic relations between constituent states due to the reverse consequences brought by the principle sought by Tito for keeping Yugoslavia intact for the long term. Ethnic groups within the nation also shared histories of ethnic conflicts became the subject of threats between them, which escalated towards highly public realms such as the elections and mass media. The rise of nationalists to power proceeded as a

process that involved violence against moderates and non-supporters of their cause among innocent people (Oberschall, 2000). The decentralized nature of Yugoslavia prompted ethnic groups to involve themselves in a political and arms race. Ethnic conflict drew from the increasing insecurity among different ethnicities and institutions within constituent states composed of specific ethnic groups, such as the Serbs, led those states to dominate against one another (Bunce, 1999). Those opposed to the idea of disintegration due to concerns over ethnic discrimination further raised animosity between different ethnicities – an arena in which the Yugoslav armed forces gained involvement, in turn having served as a threatening force to the conflict (Bunce, 1999; Oberschall, 2000). Overall, ethnic conflicts, institutional disparity and military involvement all accounted for the destructive circumstances surrounding the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

Conclusion

Structural and ethnic concerns all accounted for the divergent cases of disintegration of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Both nations thrived under a similar political system – Communism, although ethnic characteristics, structural elements, decision-making and political support for those decisions all accounted for the dissimilar directions taken by the two nations – Czechoslovakia being the peaceful one and Yugoslavia being the devastating one.

Czechoslovakia has found an inherent handicap in the form of its two-state system, which has made parity and proportional representation between the Czechs and Slovaks difficult. The presence of a stronger force – the Czechs,

have helped realized the aforementioned theoretical premises. The Slovaks, entrenched in tradition as they were politically and economically laggard compared to the more modernized Czechs, found themselves in difficult positions during both the pre and post-dissolution eras. The Czechs, on the other hand, saw economic problems as their main contention with their union with the Slovaks. Nevertheless, the centralized manner of politics within Czechoslovakia did not trigger any further ethnic insensitivity that infuriated either the Czechs or Slovaks, with decentralization being a late concept for the nation that briefly proliferated moments before its disintegration.

Yugoslavia, for its case, started out as a union of ethnically diverse nations that shared mutual understanding with one another. The Communist rule of Tito, who ruled under the mantra of unity and balanced representation, overlooked the ethnic differences each constituent state has, thus starting the flame of resentment that characterized events leading to disintegration. The occurrence of an arms race between ethnicities and the disparate growth of institutions within constituent states in a decentralized system has made Yugoslavia unstable and insecure towards dissolution. At the same time, fears over ethnic discrimination and its implications in a post-disintegration Yugoslavia has driven calls to reject the separation of constituent states, leading to the involvement of the national armed forces. Furthermore, political and economic chaos throughout the 1980s propelled the violent discourse that led to the breakdown of Yugoslavia.

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