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CZECHOSLOVAK–LATVIAN RELATIONS DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD: THE ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES

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Research interests: modern history of East-Central Europe with a focus on the history of the Baltic nations and the Czech relations with the Baltic nations in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The aim of the article is to analyse how the interests of political parties were reflected in interwar Czechoslovak–Latvian relations. The article focuses on the analysis of both objective and subjective reasons why the cleavage between the relevant Latvian political parties – the Farmers' Union and Social Democrats – was reflected in Czechoslovak policy. Both political parties maintained transnational contacts with ideologically related political parties in Czechoslovakia. The article examines if there were systemic or rather specific subjective reasons for the influence of the political parties on bilateral relations, resulting from the specifics of the interwar Czechoslovak–Latvian relations.

Key words: Czechoslovakia, Latvia, interwar period, bilateral relations, agrarian parties, Social Democracy, transnational cooperation, inter-party conflicts.

Taking into account certain general aspects of position in European politics and internal development not only historians can find general affinity between Czechoslovakia and Latvia in the interwar period.

These were more or less industrial societies with a developed system of political parties, and the over-politicisation of the life of society that came with it. Before the war, both the Czechs and Latvians were non-state, non-dominant ethnic groups that underwent a successful process of modernisation during the 19th century, evolving from peasant ethnicity to a modern, national, socially heterogeneous society with a developed multi-layered culture. Their cultural eman-

cipation was largely influenced by the German culture, both positively and negatively. The concept of closeness between the Slavs and the Baltic peoples and the concept of a "perpetual struggle" against German hegemony helped to create positive awareness of the image of the other.

The geographical location largely determined the interests and priorities of foreign policy. The two countries, Czechoslovakia in Central Europe and Latvia in the Baltic, had different geopolitical focal points. The Baltic states lay aside from the main Czechoslovak political and economic interests, which were concentrated on the Central European horizontal axis, or rather the curve leading to France in the west, with a regional branch – the Small Entente (together with Romania and Yugoslavia) – to the Balkans. Czechoslovak diplomacy saw Hungarian revisionism as the main threat to the Central European post-war system. After the Nazis seized power in 1933, Germany became the main threat. Interest in Russia declined from the beginning of the 1920s and revived only in connection with the negotiations on collective security in the mid-1930s, when the Czechoslovak–French–Soviet allied triangle was formed.

The research focus on relations with the main powers and regional actors explains why interwar relations between Latvia and Czechoslovakia have not been exactly of prime interest to either Latvian or Czech historiography. Latvian and Czech historiography has usually focused on crisis processes and milestones that had an impact on European or regional processes. The broader impact processes – Western Locarno, the Eastern Pact negotiations, and the Munich Agreement – have been of most interest to historians.[1]

Czechoslovakia was not one of the great powers, a neighbour, or one of those countries that had an influence in the Baltic States. On the Czech side, too, the topic of political, economic, and cultural

[1] Andersons, Edgars (1982). *Latvijas vēsture.* Ārpolītika, I. Stockholm: Daugava, pp. 647–650; Feldmanis, Inesis et al. (eds.) (2016). *Latvijas* ārpolitik*a un diplomātija 20. gadsimtā*. I. Rīga: Jumava, pp. 352–353; Feldmanis, Inesis (2013). Das Münchener Abkommen und der Molotov–Ribbentrop Pakt. Eine vergleichende Analyse. In: *Tragödie Europas 1939–1941*. München: Oldenbourg Verlag, pp. 57–68; Treijs, Rihards (2003). *Latvijas diplomātija un diplomāti (1918–1940).* Rīga; survey of Czech historical production in: Malý, Ivan (2015). Česká baltistika v 19. a první polovině 20. století: prameny – souvislosti – existující literatura. In: *Sborník Národního muzea v Praze*. Řada A – Historie. = Acta Musei Nationalis Pragae. Series A – Historia Praha: Národní museum, 69, Nr. 1–2, pp. 33–46.

relations with Latvia was only considered later on. Indeed, the topic of interwar relations with and the modern history of the Baltic region in general was a taboo against the backdrop of the Soviet occupation. It only started to come further to the fore when conditions allowed for the development of the relevant research in the 1990s.[2]

Although Czechoslovak interests in the Baltic were more economically motivated, seeing this region as a gate to the Russian market in the first half of the 1920s, the development of Czechoslovak–Latvian relations in the interwar period was marked by the competition among political parties and its reflection in the other country. No similar inter-party contacts, or indeed rivalry, can be found in Czechoslovak relations with Latvia's neighbours Lithuania and Estonia.

The question is whether and under what conditions the relevant political parties contributed to the convergence of the two countries or, conversely, served as the factor that divided and distanced them.

The general cause for the interference of the Agrarians and Social Democrats in the bilateral relations can be found in the hypertrophy of the political parties in the interwar political system and fragmentation of the political scene in both countries. The dividing line – cleavage – ran between the countryside and the city, between labour parties, on the one side, and centre and right-wing parties, on the other.[3] An analogy can therefore be discovered between countries where an analogy of the social structure of political partisanship is also found. Despite the differences in industrialisation, Latvia and Estonia were more in line with the Czechoslovak social and political structure,[4] and not the agrarian Lithuania. Estonia, however, was far too geographically distant, and contacts between Estonian and Czechoslovak political parties were rare.

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2 Švec, Luboš (2001). *Československo a pobaltské státy*. Praha: Nakladatelství Karolinum; Praha, National Museum; Dejmek, Jindřich (2010). *Lotyšsko*. Praha: Libri; Malý, Ivan (2011). *Československo-lotyšská společnost 1925–1940*; Štoll, Pavel (ed.) (2013). *Zkušenosti a vztahy. Lotyšská a česká společnost ve 20. století*. Praha: Univerzita Karlova.

3 Rokkan, Stein, Lipset, Seymour Martin (1990). Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments. In: Mair, Peter (ed.). *The West European Party Systems*. Oxford University Press.

4 Balík, Stanislav, Hloušek, Vít, Holzer, Jan, Šedo, Jakub (2011). *Politický systém českých zemí 1848–1989*. Brno: Masaryk University, pp. 44–82.

In light of the fact that the role of political parties in interwar relations between Czechoslovakia, on the one part, and Estonia and Lithuania, on the other, was not exactly significant, it can be concluded that the cause for interference of the parties in the bilateral relations did not lie on the Czechoslovak side. Czechoslovak foreign policy was consistent and its line was consistently determined by the centre of power of the so-called *Castle*, headed by President T. G. Masaryk (1850–1937) and Minister of Foreign Affairs (and president from the end of 1935) Edvard Beneš (1884–1948). The *Castle* was an influential informal group of collaborators and affiliated politicians across the political spectrum in relevant democratic political parties.[5] The vested interests of political parties could not significantly influence the main line of foreign policy. While they not rarely criticised government policy and the foreign minister Edvard Beneš, the *Castle* steered foreign policy until September 1938, when the Munich Agreement brought the First Republic to an end.[6]

In contrast to the polarity of the main political parties in Latvia, in Czechoslovak government the Social Democrats and the Agrarian parties worked together. The Social Democrats (the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Workers Party) were the state-forming party and a stable part of government coalitions, 1926–1929 aside. They were not the only leftist party.[7] The mechanism of dispute resolution and governance was based on the so-called Five, in which representatives of the originally-five government coalition parties dealt with government policy. Although the Agrarians represented different strata, they formed a coalition government with the Social Democrats in the spring of 1919. The Agrarians were involved in all parliamentary governments.[8]

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5 Hájková, Dagmar, Horák, Pavel (eds.) (2018). *Republika československá 1918–1939*. Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, pp. 235–244; Klimek, Antonín (1996, 1998). *Boj o Hrad*, I–II. Praha: Panevropa.

6 Dejmek, Jindřich (2006). *Edvard Beneš*, I–II. Praha: Nakladatelství Karolinum; Klimek, Antonín, Kubů, Eduard (1995). *Československá zahraniční politika 1918–1938*. Praha: Institut pro středoevropskou kulturu a politiku, pp. 9–14.

7 In addition to Social Democracy, there were other two leftist parties in Czechoslovakia in the interwar period: the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party (which supported Masaryk's and Beneš's policy) and the opposition non-systemic Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.

8 Hájková, Dagmar, Horák, Pavel (eds.) (2018). *Republika československá 1918–1939*, pp. 133–139, 236–239.

Conversely, Latvian foreign policy after the premature death of the talented Minister of Foreign Affairs Z. A. Meierovics in the summer of 1925 was characterised by greater inconstancy and by foreign ministers coming and going with regularity.[9] It might have been more sensitive to interference and been the object of the struggle for political direction and power in the republic. There were differences of opinion and competition between Latvia's Social Democrats and the Farmers' Union which were later reflected in foreign policy. The big problem was the weak integration of the largest Social Democratic political party (LSDSP), its dogmatism and unwillingness to take government responsibility. The Social Democratic Party was also the largest political party rejecting authoritarianism in the 1930s. The Farmers' Union had the greatest influence on the formation of governments, but in 1934 its top representative Kārlis Ulmanis preferred the authoritarian way of governing Latvia.[10]

It was important that the cleavage between the interests of the countryside and the working class was solved in Czechoslovakia by integration cooperation similarly to the Nordic model, while in Latvia the cleavage escalated to a direct confrontation and authoritarianism. The question is: was this escalating cleavage in Latvia reflected in Czechoslovak politics and did it affect interwar relations between the two countries?

We can verify this hypothesis by studying the specific development of interwar Czechoslovak–Latvian relations, focusing on the relevant protagonists.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS AND THE RECOGNITION OF LATVIA *DE IURE*

The specific conditions for establishing diplomatic relations and the representation of the Republic of Latvia in Czechoslovakia in the 1920s reflected this dimension of the interference of two main

[9] Feldmanis, Inesis et al. (eds.) (2016). *Latvijas* ārpolitika *un diplomātija 20. gadsimtā*. Rīga: Jumava, pp. 28–38.

[10] Stranga, Aivars (1998). *LSDSP un 1934. gada 15. maija valsts apvērsums: demokrātijas likteņi Latvijā*. Rīga: Poligrāfists; *History of Latvia the 20th Century*. Rīga: Jumava, pp. 159–160; 170–172.

political streams, which influenced the development of interwar Latvia. Both representatives of Social Democracy and the Latvian Farmers' Union were involved in establishing diplomatic relations with Czechoslovakia and in negotiations on the recognition of Latvia *de iure*. Both parties had an international dimension to their policy and foreign contacts with affiliated political parties. There was no significant sharp competition in the first half of the 1920s: state-building brought the Latvian parties closer together.

Politicians on both sides jointly sought international recognition of the young republic *de iure*; this was also a matter of breaking the reserved attitude of the Czechoslovak government toward the young Latvian state. They used their contacts to lobby for the ideological affiliation of the political party. Both the Agrarians and the Social Democrats established contacts with their counterparts in the other country as early as the beginning of the 1920s, when Czechoslovakia seemed to be a successful model of parliamentary democracy associated with the sovereign emancipation of a previously non-dominant nation.

THE ROLE OF A SUBJECTIVE FACTOR: EDUARDS KRASTS AND SOCIAL DEMOCRACY IN ESTABLISHING RELATIONSHIPS

Contacts between Social Democrats of the two countries were the most distinctive and intense, Eduards Krasts (1879–1941) being responsible for their development. This member of Latvian Social Democracy contributed significantly to the development of Czechoslovak–Latvian relations. He was the Latvian consul in Czechoslovakia during the 1920s and can take much of the credit for promoting Latvia among the Czechoslovak public.

Krasts emigrated to and lived in Austria after the 1905 revolution.[11] He studied at the University of Agriculture in Vienna before the First World War, before marrying Czech Valerie Melicharová on 19 August 1919. It was this marriage that predestined his career after the First World War. The couple moved to Bratislava, where Krasts

[11] Jēkabsons, Ēriks, Ščerbinskis, Valters (eds.) (2003). *Latvijas ārlietu dienesta darbinieki.* Rīga: Zinātne, pp. 165–166.

took up the defence of Latvian interests, in particular the repatriation of prisoners of war. At the end of the spring of 1920, he acted as an interim representative in protecting the interests of prisoners of war, soldiers, and Latvian civilians. Minister of Foreign Affairs Z. A. Meierovics (1887–1925) then appointed him consul on 20 October 1920.[12] As far as Latvian prisoners of war were concerned, Krasts and Latvian delegate Alexander Kacens intervened at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Prague in June 1920.[13]

Krasts learned Czech and soon after taking up the post he, together with his brother-in-law Alois Melichar, whom he employed as a Secretary at the Consulate, began publishing articles in Czech newspapers aimed at arousing interest in Latvia. He concentrated his work on establishing economic relations and entered into negotiations with industrialists, banks, and bureaucrats from the responsible ministries.

Krasts moved to Prague at the end of autumn 1920 and regularly reported to the Riga headquarters on his dealings with Czechoslovak political and economic players. The war-ravaged Latvia was a suitable market for the products of Czechoslovak industry and was considered a gateway to the Soviet Russian market after the announcement of the New Economic Policy (NEP). Pressure by economic players was designed to support the recognition of Latvia by the Czechoslovak government.[14] These were probably rather polite assurances and promises by the state bureaucracy with which he negotiated than actual interest in picking the fruit of his activity as soon as possible, or an effort to underline the success of his work on bringing the two states together, which led him to see the prospect of recognition far more optimistically than was in fact the case. Krasts was not a professional diplomat; indeed, hardly anyone involved in the diplomacy of the emerging new states after the First World War could have had any diplomatic experience.

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[12] Latvijas Valsts vēstures arhīvs (hereinafter *LVVA*), 2570–14–798, p. 29.

[13] Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic (AMZV ČR), Czechoslovakia 1918-1939, Diplomatic Protocol, Latvia, Krasts to the Ministry of National Defence of 04.06.1920.; *LVVA*, 2570–2–64, correspondence with the Latvian consulate in Austria on the opening of the consulate in Czechoslovakia. 1920; ibidem, 2570–10–60, p. 5, questions of the repatriation of Latvian refugees.

[14] *LVVA*, 2574–4–98 correspondence with headquarters.

Krasts tried to use his party ties through the Czechoslovak Social Democrats, the governing party, supporting the policy of President Masaryk.[15] This was the Czechoslovak political party, which could be brought on his side the quickest for the establishment of relations and diplomatic recognition of Latvian statehood. The reasons for this can be found in the party's internationalism, support for the self-determination of nations, and in personal contacts. In September 1921, the consul arranged a meeting between poet Rainis (Jānis Pliekšāns), a leading member of the Social Democrats, and leading figures in Czechoslovak Social Democracy in an effort to win support for the recognition of Latvia *de iure*.[16] Later, Krasts helped Rainis with the staging of his plays in Prague theatres.

In May 1921, however, the Latvian government entrusted Wilhelm Schreiner (1864–1936) with the negotiations for the recognition.[17] It was important to find support among the political parties, leading Schreiner to introduce himself to Czechoslovak ambassador Vlastimil Tusar in Berlin even before visiting Prague. He also received recommendations from former German Social Democratic Chancellor Hermann Müller. Tusar was also a leading representative of Social Democracy, having led a coalition government involving the Social Democrats and the Agrarian Party before taking charge of the embassy in Berlin. Tusar provided Schreiner with a letter of recommendation to present to the leadership of the Czechoslovak Social Democrats in Prague and promised to help him in achieving *de iure* recognition of Latvia. The Social Democrats were the largest governing party in Czechoslovakia in 1919 and, in spite of the rupture the party experienced and the separation of the radical communist left, it had major influence. President of the Republic T. G. Masaryk did not publicly express which party he voted for, but it was known that he gave his vote to the Social Democrats.

Both Schreiner and Krasts sought partisan levers to gain access to the leading men in Czechoslovak politics and to lobby for the

[15] Eichler, Patrik (ed.) (2016). *Za svobodu, spravedlnost a solidaritu: Dějiny sociální demokracie v českých zemích*. Praha: Masarykova demokratická akademie, pp. 31–38.

[16] *LVVA*, Report by W. Schreiner to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 14.08.1921., pp. 43–46.

[17] Nonācs, Oto, Šreiners, Vilhelms (1933). *Pēc 18. novembra. Tautas Padomes locekļu memuāri*. Rīga, p. 190.

recognition of Latvia. Alongside economic reasons, both argued for the establishment of relations using the analogy of Czech and Latvian status and democratic values. It was precisely such belief in (in today's terms) "shared values" that was to win Czechoslovak politicians over. They emphasised ideological affinity of the new democratic countries, particularly when establishing contacts with the politicians of the left-centre socialist and democratic parties. At the meeting of the Foreign Committee of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czechoslovak Parliament on 9 November 1920, Slovak National Socialist MP Igor Hrušovský complained that the Minister's speech had not mentioned the Baltic States and drew attention to the importance of contact with them.[18] Social Democratic MP Jaroslav Marek asked Minister Beneš about the recognition of Latvia at the 20th meeting of the Foreign Committee of the Chamber of Deputies on 1 July 1921. Beneš, however, said that *de facto* recognition was sufficient.[19]

Being received by President T. G. Masaryk on 17 November 1921 was of great importance to the advancement of the recognition of Latvia *de iure*. The Latvian government's delegate W. Schreiner explained to him the priority values of the Latvian state and its foreign orientation, including relations with Russia, and this was an important milestone. The Latvian diplomat earned an audience with the President of the Republic through František Tomášek, a member of leadership in the Social Democrats, and Chancellor of the President Přemysl Šámal. It can be assumed that consul Krasts also played a part in the meeting. Masaryk promised his support for the recognition.[20] The *de iure* recognition of all three Baltic States was accepted by the government on 29 December 1921. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs then sent out the announcement of recognition on 5 January 1922.[21]

[18] Archive of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, National Assembly 1920–1939, Foreign Committee of the Chamber of Deputies I, meeting of 09.11.1920.

[19] Ibidem, meeting 01.07.1921.

[20] Archive of the Office of the President of the Republic (AKPR), T. G. Masaryk, Foreign 4/8, Latvia.

[21] Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, 1918–1939, PZ-Riga 1922.

CONSUL EDUARDS KRASTS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS

In spite of initial reservations, Krasts proved himself in the office and contributed greatly to the development of Czechoslovak–Latvian economic exchanges and cultural relations. Together with linguist Josef Zubatý, Krasts founded the Czechoslovak–Latvian Society in 1925, and then became its vice-chairman. The society quickly built up a solid membership base taken from Czechoslovak political, intellectual, and cultural elites, journalists, and economic circles, in connection with their business with Latvia. It integrated Latvians living in Czechoslovakia soon after its foundation. In terms of the size of its membership and its range of activities, it was truly representative and was the most prominent of the Baltic interwar societies that devoted themselves to developing relations with the Baltic nations.[22] In 1925 and 1930, it published two informative brochures about Latvia, the first ever such publications written in Czech, familiarising the Czechoslovak public with the history of the country and its current situation. The books were published by left-wing publishing houses.[23]

Krasts added to his diplomatic education in Prague, graduating from a two-year diplomatic consular school at Charles University in October 1923.[24] Krasts' ambitions were at least partially fulfilled in 1927, when the Latvian government promoted the consulate to consulate-general. It was also in that year that the Latvian Social Democrats left the opposition and entered a coalition government from December 1926 to January 1928. It was therefore no accident that Minister Feliks Cielēns, one of the leading figures of Social

[22] The scope of the activities and development of the membership and correspondence is shown by the well-preserved and extensive property of the society and by the visual material from its activities, kept in the archives of the National Museum. Archive of the National Museum, Czechoslovak–Latvian society. Švec, Luboš (1992). Kulturní styky ČSR s pobaltskými republikami mezi dvěma světovými válkami. *Slovanský přehled,* 78, No. 4, pp. 427–435; Malý, Ivan (2011). *Československo-lotyšská společnost 1925–1940*. Praha: Národní muzeum.

[23] Krasts, Eduard (1925). *Lotyšský národ a republika Lotyšská*. Praha: Lidová tiskárna; Krasts, Eduard (1930). *Latvia*. Praha: Vesmír.

[24] *LVVA*, 2570–14–798, pp. 49–50, Krasts' announcement to the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 20.10.1923.

Democracy, decided in favour of the promotion.[25] Formally, however, Krasts' office was subordinated to the Latvian Legation in Warsaw.

Contacts between Latvian and Czechoslovak and Czech–German Social Democrats intensified during the second half of the 1920s, not without Krasts' contribution. Such direct contacts took the form of visits by party delegations, mainly officials, party leaders and journalists, and journeys undertaken by ordinary members. From the mid-1920s, when contacts actually began to develop, the most frequent visits were made by workers' sports organisations. Athletes were invited over by partner organisations and took part in sports competitions and workers' "olympics". Unfortunately, this sporting dimension of socialist contacts remained in the shadow of political and cultural contacts. It was dependent on there being a developed industrial society; sport as a way of spending leisure time and entertainment was a manifestation of a developed urban culture at an advanced stage of societal development that made such entertainment available to the lower classes.

At the end of July 1925, the Speaker of the Latvian Parliament Pauls Kalniņš (1872–1945) embarked on an official visit to Prague. He was also the honorary chairman of the Latvian–Czechoslovak Society, and in the summer of 1925 visited President T. G. Masaryk, whom he presented with an extensive edition of Latvian *dainas* (folk songs). Shortly after that, Minister of Foreign Affairs Z. A. Meierovics met E. Beneš in Prague during a tour of European states.[26]

His son Bruno Kalniņš (1899–1990), who led the Socialist Workers' Sports movement (SSS), kept correspondence with German and Czech workers' sports organisations and was in regular contact with Rudolf Silaba, Secretary of the Socialist Sports International. He also visited Czechoslovakia with Latvian athletes several times. His contacts with German and Austrian workers' sporting organisations, however, were even more intense.[27] Bruno Kalniņš appeared several times at meetings and sporting competitions and celebrations held by Czech and German Social Democrats in Prague and Northern

[25] Ibidem, p. 369, Minister of Foreign Affairs F. Cielēns to Krasts of 07.04.1927 on the appointment by the general consul on 01.04.1927.
[26] Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PZ – Riga 1925, file no. 145/25.
[27] *LVVA*, 3017–4–32., 42., 47., 49., 58.

Bohemia.[28] B. Kalniņš also led a group of 22 Latvian athletes to the Second Czechoslovak Workers' Olympics in early July 1927.[29]

Krasts undoubtedly played a part in making Latvia visible to the Czechoslovak public, although reservations about him remained at the Latvian headquarters. This was not merely due to the internal political struggle in Latvia: Krasts' promotional and intermediary activities can be deemed the greatest contribution to the development of Czechoslovak–Latvian relations, but the Latvian headquarters did not rate the analytical level of Krasts' reports or activities too highly. Krasts placed too much value in negotiations and many diplomatic statements that were more likely vague promises or polite expressions.[30]

THE LATVIAN FARMERS' UNION AND ITS CONTACTS WITH THE CZECHOSLOVAK AGRARIANS

But not even the Czechoslovak Agrarian Party, which had its parallel in Latvia's most influential party, the Farmers' Union, put obstacles on the path of the recognition of Latvia, for pragmatic reasons, even though hopes of a Russian revival persisted among some of its politicians. Deputy Chairman of the party Ādolfs Klīve (1888–1974) was the first contact from the Union of Latvian Farmers. Klīve was primarily interested in learning about the party mechanism, about the way the Czechoslovak Agrarian Party asserted its influence. The Agrarian Party (in 1919 named Republican Party of Rural Czechoslovakia, renamed the Republican Party of Farmers and Peasants in 1922) was one of the largest political parties and evidently the most influential one. In addition to a developed cooperative movement, it largely built its dominant position in rural areas on land reform.[31] Prague became attractive to it after 1923 as the centre of the Agrarian

[28] *Právo lidu* 86, 1983, Nr. 2, p. 1.

[29] *LVVA*, 2570–14–798, p. 429, Krasts' letter of 17.05.1927 to Cielēns; also *LVVA*, 3017–4–58.

[30] *LVVA*, 2574. f., 2180, pp. 1–10.

[31] Uhlíř, Dušan (1988). *Republikánská strana zemědělského a malorolnického lidu 1918–1938: charakteristika agrárního hnutí a jeho organizační struktrura*. Praha: Ústav československých a světových dějin ČSAV; Dostál, V. (1998). *Agrární strana, Její rozmach a zánik*. Brno: Atlantis; Kubálek, Michal (1998). Postavení agrární strany v politickém systému první republiky. http://www.agris.cz/clanek/104986/postaveni-agrarni-strany-v-politickem-systemu-prvni-republiky.

International Bureau (so called Green International), bringing together various European agrarian parties.[32] In contrast to Ulmanis (1877–1942), who at one point studied in Switzerland and favoured Swiss agriculture as a model, in his memoirs, Klīve considered Czechoslovakia a more appropriate object of study, and perhaps even an inspiration for the Latvian agrarian movement and agriculture. He primarily recalled relations with Slovak Agrarian Milan Hodža (1878–1944). Hodža played a part in many governments and was the Minister of Agriculture in the first half of the 1920s, before taking on an even more important role when he became Prime Minister between 1935 and 1938. He was one of only a few Agrarians who had a clear vision of international cooperation between Central European countries and agricultural preferences.

During the 1920s, however, Chairman of the Agrarian Party, Antonín Švehla, was the most important figure in the party (1873–1933).[33] Antonín Švehla was a co-creator of the political system and the politics of the new state. He played a major part in stabilising the conditions after the war and was involved in the formulation of land reform. He was also appointed Prime Minister three times. Švehla led the Agrarian Party and the government until the end of the 1920s, when he resigned for health reasons.[34]

Klīve, who arrived at the Prague fair in the late summer of 1921, built on a prior visit by Czechoslovak entrepreneurs to Riga. The exchange of information and experience with Czechoslovak Agrarian

[32] The establishment of the Agrarian International Bureau was inspired by Bulgarian Prime Minister Aleksandar Stamboliyski, who won over A. Švehla to this idea during his visit to Prague in 1920. Švehla took up the implementation of the idea and founded the Bureau in Prague in 1923. It expressed the ideology of Agrarianism. The aim was to create a hub of political and parliamentary cooperation between agrarian parties and organisations in response to labour internationals and other ideologies. The bureau's activity intensified and broadened after overcoming the crisis at the end of 1927. The Green International brought together agrarian parties from Austria, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Poland, Yugoslavia, Estonia, France, Germany, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Netherlands, Romania, Spain, and Switzerland. The General Secretariat was seated in Prague. Uhlíř, D. (1988). *Republikánská strana*…, pp. 162–169.

[33] Klīve, Ādolfs (1976). *Latvijas neatkarības gadi*. [n. p.]: Grāmatu draugs, p. 84–85.

[34] Broklová, Eva (2017). *Antonín Švehla: Tvůrce politického systému*. Praha: Academia; Miller, Daniel E. (2001). *Antonín Švehla – mistr politických kompromisů*. Praha: Argo; Dostál, Vladimír (1990). *Antonín Švehla*. Praha: Státní zemědělské nakladatelství.

counterparts, A. Švehla included, and negotiations with traders and factory owners were of economic importance; at the same time, they extended the circle of entrepreneurs and influential people involved in developing business relations with Latvia, and therefore also became a lobbying base to support the establishment of diplomatic relations. Klīve was interested in Czechoslovak land reform[35] and the organisation and activity of the Agrarian Party, since it was one of the leading pillars of the agrarian movement in Europe. Agrarian Party MPs were not united in their position on Russia, which is why Klīve's task was to get the party representatives on his side.[36] The Latvian delegation led by him was to conduct preliminary negotiations regarding an economic treaty and the establishment of trade relations, but a task of even greater importance was to seek support for Latvia's accession to the League of Nations and its recognition *de iure*.[37] Although there were visits and exchanges of information, economic interests never really resonated. Each agrarian party had an interest in protecting its own market and promoting exports. In 1926, Czechoslovak Agrarians pushed through an increase in customs duties on imports of grain, which led to a decrease in imports of cereal products from other countries to Czechoslovakia. This affected Latvian exports of grain to Czechoslovakia.

Contacts were revived at the end of the 1920s in connection with the activation of the "Green International" and the accession of Latvian Agrarians to this organisation. A delegation from the Latvian Farmers' Union travelled to Czechoslovakia for a congress in the summer of 1929 on the invitation of the Czechoslovak Agrarians. Kārlis Ulmanis, a leading figure in the Latvian Farmers' Union, never actually visited Czechoslovakia, but he showed an interest in it and kept up to date with the agrarian and cooperative movement in Czechoslovakia. He was appointed an honorary member of the Czechoslovak–Latvian Society in 1930. Ulmanis was even dubbed

[35] Czechoslovak land reform, implemented by laws in 1919–1921, set the limit for the occupation of arable land at 150 ha, all land at 250 ha, and up to 500 ha in special exceptions. Hájková, Dagmar, Horák, Pavel (eds.) (2018). *Československo.* Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, pp. 246–261; Dostál, V. (1998). *Agrární strana*, pp. 107–119.

[36] *LVVA*, 2574–4–137, p. 43, Krasts' report to the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 14.10.1921.

[37] *LVVA*, 2574–4–99, pp. 19–28, correspondence with E. Krasts regarding the establishment of contacts 1921.

the "Latvian Švehla" in the Czechoslovak press. Jūlijs Druva (1882–1950), Secretary-General of the Latvian Farmers' Union and editor-in-chief of its press agency, *Brīvā zeme*, visited Czechoslovakia and gathered information about the organisation of its agriculture.

The *Bulletin de Bureau international agricol*, published in Czech and French from 1923, regularly reported on agricultural issues in Latvia; other reports were provided by *Venkov*, the Agrarians' head office newspaper.

There was also a German Agrarian Party in Czechoslovakia – *Bund der Landwirte*. This representative of German rural areas was continuously involved in running the state as part of government coalitions from 1926 to 1938; we do not, however, have any evidence of its contacts with the Latvian Farmers' Union.

CLASH ON THE STAFFING OF THE LATVIAN LEGATION IN PRAGUE

Krasts was awarded the Latvian Order of the Three Stars and later the Czechoslovak White Lion, but despite the decorations Krasts became an object of the struggle between the Latvian Social Democrats and Farmers' Union at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s.

The journalistic controversy surrounding Krasts began in connection with talks on filling the post of envoy in Prague. The establishment of a legation had been under consideration since the mid-1920s; Warsaw, however, remained the residence of the envoy accredited in Prague. In the middle of 1930, the Latvian government definitively decided to establish a Latvian legation in Prague. The consulate-general was closed. Krasts tried to stay in Prague, pointing to his experience and worth. When the Latvian government entrusted him with the running of the consulate-general in Leningrad, in Soviet Russia, Krasts personally wrote a letter to Prime Minister Hugo Celmiņš in mid-July 1930. He strongly urged not to be moved from Prague to Leningrad.[38] Although he made desperate efforts to remain in Prague, he eventually had to resign and toe the line. It took him a long time to say goodbye to Prague; he was simply too connected to the Czech environment by professional, party, and family ties. He felt his removal to be an injustice and took his personal dispute up at party level. Latvian Social Democrats saw his re-

[38] *LVVA*, 2570–14–798, pp. 269–270, E. Krasts to H. Celmiņš 17.07.1930.

moval in mid-1930 as part of a right-wing offensive against it. Czech and German Social Democrats were dragged into the domestic political conflict in Latvia by the Latvian Social Democrats.[39]

The attacks in the Czechoslovak Social Democratic press concentrated on the new Latvian envoy Kārlis Ducmanis (1881–1943). Ducmanis was aware that these attacks were not an expression of the government's own unfavourable stance or the mood of Czech society, but were only attacks by the Social Democratic press encouraged by E. Krasts. When the attacks continued into the following year, Ducmanis finally protested in a verbal démarche of 21 April 1931 to the head of the Intelligence Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Jan Hájek. He was particularly outraged by the attacks made by the German *Sozialdemokrat* newspaper, and *Právo Lidu*, on the reactionary government in Latvia, and characterised the hostile campaign as "perpetum mobile". In his report to the central office in Latvia, he complained about the socialist campaign, but made a point of distinguishing the government's attitude toward the nation as friendly. Chief of the Intelligence Department J. Hájek had an understanding for him: "I don't understand how Mr Krasts does not comprehend that he is harming himself a hundred times more than you!" Ducmanis asked Hájek to inform Minister Beneš that he did not want to intervene in writing and protest to the minister directly, but the attacks in *Právo lidu* continued. Hájek, however, could not intervene directly in writing, referring to freedom of the press.[40]

As shown by the article "Lotyšská reakce při práci" ("The Latvian reaction at work"), for example, published in *Právo lidu* on 25 July 1930, the editorial staff received information critical to the Latvian government directly from the leadership of the Latvian Social Democrats, MP Roberts Bīlmanis (1880–1964), when he visited Prague.[41]

[39] National Archives, Czech Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí – výstřižkový archiv – VA, Reakce v Lotyšsku při práci. *Právo lidu* 25.07.1930. Krasts served as a Consul General in Leningrad only briefly after leaving Prague, and he was back in Riga before Ulmanis' coup; the establishment of an authoritarian regime definitely removed him from diplomacy.

[40] *LVVA*, 2575–4–48, Reports of the Latvian legation from Prague May 1931–1939, pp. 17–31, extensive report by Ducmanis to the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on attacks by the Latvian and Czechoslovak social democratic press against the legation and his person, 08.05.1931.

[41] *LVVA*, 2575–4–48, Reports of the Latvian Legation from Prague May 1931–1939, pp. 17–31, K. Ducmanis to headquarters, 08.05.1931.

ULMANIS' COUP

The coup d'état and the establishment of an authoritarian regime in Latvia polarised the Czechoslovak press. The public and the press evaluated events in Latvia in line with their own political orientation. Most of the press reports emphasised the speed and peaceful takeover of power.[42]

The Czech and German Social Democratic press, receiving information from their Latvian counterparts, became the harshest critics of the new regime in Czechoslovakia.[43] Social Democratic members of the Czechoslovak–Latvian Society sent a protest to the Latvian envoy in connection with the trial of Social Democrat Bruno Kalniņš.[44]

Právo lidu and the German *Sozialdemokrat* made the public aware of the reprisals against Social Democracy by Ulmanis' regime. *Venkov* took the opposite stance, informing the public with sympathy (in the spirit of Ulmanis' arguments) that peace had not been violated in Latvia and that Ulmanis' government had prevented a coup d'état with his putsch.[45]

SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AND THE AUTHORITARIAN REGIME IN LATVIA

In Czechoslovakia the Social Democratic press – both Czech and German – retained negative and sharply critical position on the Latvian Farmers' Union and Ulmanis. It stood in clear opposition to Ulmanis' authoritarian regime established in Latvia in May 1934. When representative of the Czechoslovak Social Democrats and member of the executive committee of the Socialist Workers' Inter-

[42] Response to the coup in the clippings archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. National Archive, Ministry of Foreign Affairs – VA, sg. 515, Latvia 1933–1936.

[43] Pokus o novou diktaturu. *Večerník Práva lidu*, 16.05.1934.; Europäisches Ringen: Fascismus oder Demokratie. *Sozialdemokrat*, 17.05.1934.; Staatsstreich in Lettland. *Sozialdemokrat*, 17.05.1934.; Die Diktatur in Lettland. *Sozialdemokrat*, 19.05.1934.; Lotyšská reakce se bojí evropské veřejnosti. *Právo lidu*, 27.11.1934.

[44] *Právo lidu*, 27.11.1934.

[45] Lotyšská vláda předešla státnímu převratu. *Venkov*, 17.05.1934; V Lotyšsku nebyl klid porušen. *Venkov*, 18.05.1934.

national Lev Winter (1876–1935)[46] received information about the possibility of Bruno Kalniņš' release from prison, assuming the intervention by the Swedish Government, he wrote to Swedish colleague and then-Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson, on 17 September 1934, asking to grant asylum to released political prisoners.[47] He repeatedly, but discreetly, intervened on behalf of imprisoned colleagues with Latvian President Alberts Kviesis and President of the Czechoslovak Senate František Soukup again in September 1935. Such manoeuvres by the Czechoslovak Social Democrats in favour of their Latvian counterparts did not take place in isolation, but were part of a broader campaign of support by the Socialist Workers' International for the Latvian Social Democrats.[48]

According to historian Aivars Stranga, news of the situation in Latvia and complaints about the regime reached the Socialist Workers' International through Czechoslovak diplomatic channels.[49] No documents have yet been found in the Czech archives that would explain how far cooperation of Latvian Social Democrats went with Czechoslovak chargé d'affaires and from 1935 envoy Jaroslav Lípa, who took a very critical stance on the authoritarian regime. Socialist members of the Czechoslovak–Latvian Society, headed by R. Silaba and F. L. Hummelhans, sent a letter to envoy Mārtiņš Nukša (1878–1942) in support of the imprisoned Latvian Social Democrats,[50] which led the Latvian envoy to consider the need to reorganise the Society and eliminate the left-wing elements brought in by former consul Krasts.[51]

Was the harsh criticism of Ulmanis' regime by the Czechoslovak Social Democrats driven by an ideological concept, the socialist programme, and their struggle against authoritarian and totalitarian regimes and movements, or was it based on personal contacts with

[46] Lev Winter was the author of the Czechoslovak Constitution of 1920.

[47] Arbetarrörelsens arkiv och bibliotek, Stockholm, Bruno Kalnin's arkiv, Samlingar, 5:3:14.

[48] *LVVA*, 2575–4–48, p. 365, envoy Nukša to President Kviesis on 11.09.1935.; Kalniņš, Brūno (1956). *Latvijas sociāldemokrātijas 50 gadi*. Stockholm, p. 276.

[49] Stranga, Aivars (1998). *LSDSP un 1934. gada 15. maija valsts apvērsums*, p. 182.

[50] Social Democratic functionaries R. Silaba, F. V. Hummelhans, J. Charvát, and O. Stein.

[51] *LVVA*, 2575–4–48, p. 266, M. Nukša to the Director of the Administration and Legal Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Riga 04.01.1935.

Latvia's Social Democrats? The answer can be inferred from the attitude of Czechoslovak Social Democracy toward the authoritarian regime in Lithuania during the 1930s. Jaroslav Vozka, an expert on Social Democracy in the Baltic region (probably the author of the already mentioned article, published in *Právo lidu* in 1930, entitled *Reakce* v *Lotyšsku při práci* ("The Latvian reaction at work")), published "Litva klíč k situaci ve východní Evropě" ("Lithuania: the key to the situation in Eastern Europe") in 1933, taking a benevolent view of the Lithuanian authoritarian regime or downplaying it. In much the same way, *Právo lidu* reported on President Antanas Smetona's authoritarian regime with some restraint.[52] Czechoslovakia's Social Democrats lacked direct contacts with the Lithuanian Socialists, which would have provided a source of more detailed information and enabled them to adopt a solidarity-based position. Only an article in *Právo lidu* – "Diktatura *v* Litvě (původní dopis z Rigy") ("Dictatorship in Lithuania [an original letter from Riga]"), on 24 August 1934, deviated from this line, although it actually criticised Ulmanis' regime in Latvia.[53]

The security context was important, since in both Czechoslovak diplomacy and the press there was clear interest in supporting Lithuania against the pressure of Nazi Germany. The image of Lithuania as an object of brutal Nazi pressure was formed in the Czech mass media. On the other hand, the entire Czech press, including the Social Democratic one, concurred in their support for Lithuania, while the German press (apart from the leftist one) advocated the policy of their compatriots in Klaipėda.

The authoritarian regime in neighbouring Latvia did not inspire great sympathy in Czechoslovak diplomacy, as the assessment by diplomat Jaroslav Lípa confirms, but the priority was the regional security interests. Czechoslovak diplomacy intensified interest in Latvia after the creation of the Baltic Entente, which it considered a stabilising element of European policy. In 1935, the Latvian government made the Riga legation residential and then chargé d'affaires Lípa was assigned to the post of envoy for both Latvia and Estonia.

[52] Antanas Smetona. *Právo lidu*, 16.02.1933.

[53] Confusing Lithuania with Latvia was nothing exceptional in Czech journalism.

THE POSITION OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK AGRARIAN PARTY ON THE AUTHORITARIAN REGIME OF KĀRLIS ULMANIS

While Czechoslovak Social Democrats identified themselves with Latvia's Social Democracy and adopted a critical stance, the Agrarian press (in the same way as the press of the centre and right-wing parties) maintained a continually favourable line towards Latvia, even during Ulmanis' coup and his authoritarian regime. *Venkov*, the central newspaper in Czechoslovakia, highlighted the positive features of Ulmanis' regime, in the spirit of the concept of Agrarianism. On 26 July 1935, it printed an interview with the director of news agency *LETA*, A. Bērziņš, who was visiting Slovakia at the time, criticising previous political fragmentation and partisanship and emphasising Ulmanis' popular agrarianism: "Ulmanis was and is a farmer and Latvian peasants have always believed in him".[54] The Czech Agrarians were positive in their assessment of the authoritarian regime's intervention in agriculture, its organisation and state support, as well as the political "simplification" of the situation.

Long-standing President of *Centrokooperativa* (the headquarters of agricultural cooperatives) Ferdinand Klindera, who undertook a study tour of the Baltic and Nordic States in July 1936, introduced the Czechoslovak public to Latvian agriculture in the publication "Český rolník severskými státy" ("A Czech Farmer in the Nordic States"). He was delighted by the well-organised visit, during which he was able to see exemplary farmsteads and become acquainted with the activities of the recently established Latvian Chamber of Agriculture. He was unexpectedly given an audience by President Ulmanis on 14 July 1936, and even decorated. He also described Ulmanis as the "Latvian Švehla". Klindera greatly appreciated the state support for agriculture and the simplification of domestic policy relations in the country. His approach was limited by his professional interests, agricultural and cooperative organisations being in the focus of his attention; he did not mention liquidation of parliamentarianism and restriction of civil society in Latvia. His visit was immediately followed by a reciprocal delegation of officials from Latvian cooperative unions to Czechoslovakia on 20–24 September

[54] Rozhovor o tom, jak je v Lotyšsku. *Venkov*, 26.07.1935.

1936. At the end of the visit, Klindera proposed a reciprocal exchange of one Latvian and one Czechoslovak farmer so as to learn about the agricultural situation in the partner country.[55]

Venkov, the Agrarian Party's central newspaper, regularly reported on Latvia during the second half of the 1930s, while the Agriculture Academy appointed Ulmanis an honorary member in 1937. The paper compared Ulmanis to Švehla on more than one occasion and later, on 17 November 1938, on the eve of the Latvian public holiday, in the spirit of post-Munich rhetoric, issued the call of "let's learn from Latvia."[56] Praise was forthcoming for the successful development of agriculture with state support as the nationalist policy of the regime, expressed in the motto "own farmer in own state"; national unity, idyllic to the outside, tight-knit under the uniform government of the *saimniek*s (farm-owner). Czechoslovak Agrarians also shifted their preferences of rural interests from the democratic values to authoritarianism, in which they saw a system that could find a way out of the economic crisis and stabilise the economy and society.

CONCLUSION

To answer the question of whether and under what conditions the relevant political parties contributed to the convergence of Czechoslovak–Latvian bilateral interwar relations or, conversely, became a factor that divided and separated the two countries, it is necessary to take into account the dynamics of the political cleavage in Latvia. The analysis showed the need to divide the period under discussion into two periods.

The relevant political parties – the agrarian parties and Social Democracy played an important role in the political system of Czechoslovakia and Latvia. Both parties had their own international dimension, based on the social principle: rural interests or class interests of the labour movement. The international dimension of

[55] Klindera congratulated Ulmanis as a leader "who, even in the turbulent times of the past, had intervened with a firm hand to maintain order and peace, and who was able with his colleagues to build organisations and institutes to secure advancement and economic prosperity for the Latvian nation, with a breath of fresh air for the future". Klindera, Ferdinand (1936). Český *rolník severskými státy*. Praha: Centrokooperativ, pp. 79–125.

[56] Červín, A. Šťastné Lotyšsko. *Venkov,* 17.11.1938.

the Social Democratic parties associated within the Socialist Workers' International was particularly pronounced. This international and class character made it possible for the party to find contacts in a politically and socially related environment. Representatives of Latvian Social Democracy played an important role in establishing contacts with Czechoslovakia. However, the agrarian parties, too, had a not-insignificant international dimension.

The competition between the two parties was not evident in the Czechoslovak press during the 1920s. On the contrary, representatives of the Latvian Social Democracy and agrarians jointly sought through related political parties in Czechoslovakia to achieve the recognition of Latvia *de iure* during 1921.The relationship between Czechoslovak and Latvian agrarians did not essentially go beyond the boundaries of agrarian ideological solidarity and information exchange. The Czech Social Democrats, with their criticism of and commitment to the support of the persecuted Latvian Social Democrats, engaged in the broader context of the struggle against the authoritarian regime.

In addition to transnational objective factors, the subjective factor played an important role. The Latvian consul (since 1927 general consul) Eduards Krasts, who was an exponent of Latvian Social Democracy, played an important role in the establishment of diplomatic and cultural relations between the two countries. Having been called out to Riga after ten years of service in Prague, he considered his recall a personal consequence of agrarian intrigues in Latvia. His transfer from Prague to Leningrad in 1930 was politicised and presented by the Social Democrats as part of a right-wing offensive. He initiated attacks in the Czech Social Democratic press against new Latvian envoy to Prague Kārlis Ducmanis.

During the 1920s, both main streams of Latvian politics were united by the common objective of establishing relations and having the young Latvian state recognised *de iure*. The cleavage between them became sharp when they polarised during the 1930s in relation to the establishment of K. Ulmanis' authoritarian regime. This was clearly reflected, above all, in the Czechoslovak Social Democratic press, which came out in favour of Latvian Social Democracy. The analysis thus confirmed the thesis of the priority role of internal political conflict and competition in Latvia and its transfer through party contacts to the Czech leftist press.

Sharp criticism of Ulmanis' regime by the left-wing press did not apply to the newspapers of other political parties. Most Czechoslovak newspapers reported the coup in Latvia and the authoritarian regime in a neutral manner. It should be noted that the agrarian press sympathised with Ulmanis' regime. It appreciated the measures introduced in favour of agriculture. In the late 1930s, it considered Ulmanis' regime as an inspiring example.

However, it must be said that neither the differences in political systems nor the conflicts of political parties played a dominant role in Czechoslovak– Latvian relations. Security issues in the form of collective security efforts played a priority role, which was also reflected in the Czechoslovak effort to get closer to the Baltic States during the negotiations on the Eastern Pact in the mid-1930s.

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ČEHOSLOVĀKIJAS–LATVIJAS ATTIECĪBAS STARPKARU PERIODĀ: POLITISKO PARTIJU LOMA

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Raksta mērķis ir izanalizēt, kā Čehoslovākijas–Latvijas attiecībās starpkaru periodā atspoguļojās politisko partiju intereses. Pētījuma uzmanības centrā ir gan objektīvie, gan subjektīvie iemesli, kāpēc šķelšanās starp attiecīgajām Latvijas politiskajām partijām – Zemnieku savienību un Sociāldemokrātiem – atbalsojās Čehoslovākijas politikā. Abas politiskās partijas uzturēja starptautiskus kontaktus ar ideoloģiski radniecīgām Čehoslovākijas partijām. Rakstā pētīts, vai attiecībām starp šīm partijām bija sistēmiski vai drīzāk konkrēti subjektīvi iemesli, kas izrietēja no Čehoslovākijas–Latvijas attiecību specifikas starpkaru periodā.

Atslēgas vārdi: Čehoslovākija, Latvija, starpkaru periods, divpusējās attiecības, lauksaimnieku partijas, sociāldemokrāti, starptautiskā sadarbība, iekšpolitiskie konflikti.

Kopsavilkums

Ņemot vērā zināmus vispārējus aspektus attiecībā uz stāvokli Eiropas politikā un iekšējo attīstību, vispārēja līdzība starp Čehoslovākiju un Latviju starpkaru periodā ir saskatāma ne tikai vēsturniekiem.

Tās bija vairāk vai mazāk industriālas sabiedrības ar attīstītu politisko partiju sistēmu un no tās izrietošu pārlieku politizētu sabiedrības dzīvi. Pirms Pirmā pasaules kara gan čehi, gan latvieši bija etniskās grupas bez savas valsts, kuras nebija valdošās attiecīgajā teritorijā un kuras 19. gadsimtā piedzīvoja sekmīgu modernizācijas procesu, no zemnieku etniskās grupas izveidojoties par mūsdienīgu, nacionālu, sociāli neviendabīgu sabiedrību ar attīstītu daudzslāņainu kultūru.

Abu valstu politiskajai sistēmai starpkaru periodā bija raksturīga politisko partiju hipertrofija un sašķelta politiskā aina. Dalījuma līnija bija novilkta – šķelšanās notika – starp laukiem un pilsētām, starp darba partijām no vienas puses un centra un labā spārna partijām no otras puses. Čehoslovākijā šķelšanās starp lauksaimnieku kustību un sociāldemokrātiem nebija izteikta. Tomēr atšķirībā no Latvijas Čehoslovākijas sociāldemokrāti piedalījās vairumā starpkaru perioda valdību darbā.

Lai gan Čehoslovākijas intereses Baltijā vairāk vadīja ekonomiski motīvi, Čehoslovākijas–Latvijas attiecību attīstību starpkaru periodā raksturoja politisko partiju konkurence un tās atbalsošanās otrā valstī. Čehoslovākijas attiecībās ar Latvijas kaimiņiem Lietuvu un Igauniju līdzīgi starppartiju kontakti vai pat konkurence nav vērojami.

Jautājums ir, vai un kādos apstākļos politiskās partijas veicināja abu valstu tuvošanos vai, gluži pretēji, bija faktors, kas tās šķēla un attālināja.

Galvenie iemesli konfrontatīvai attieksmei neveidojās vis Čehoslovākijas politiskajā arēnā, bet gan izauga no šķelšanās starp abām galvenajām Latvijas politiskajām partijām – Zemnieku savienību un Sociāldemokrātiem. Čehoslovākijas ārpolitikā valdīja konsekvence, un tās stratēģiju noteica par "Pili" (*Hrad*) dēvētais politiskais grupējums ar prezidentu Tomāšu Gariku Masariku (*Thomáš Garrigue Masaryk*) un ārlietu ministru Edvardu Benešu (*Edvard Beneš*) vadībā, un politisko partiju intereses nevarēja to būtiski ietekmēt. Čehoslovākijas sociāldemokrātu un lauksaimnieku partijas, kurām bija plaši starptautiskie kontakti, starpkaru periodā komunicēja ar saviem partneriem Latvijā.

20. gadsimta 20. gados šo abu Latvijas partiju konkurence Čehoslovākijas presē nebija manāma. Gluži pretēji – 1921. gadā Latvijas Sociāldemokrātiskās partijas un Zemnieku savienības pārstāvji ar sev radniecīgo Čehoslovākijas partiju starpniecību kopīgi mēģināja panākt Latvijas *de iure* atzīšanu.

20. gadsimta 30. gadu sākumā attiecības starp abām partijām ievērojami pasliktinājās. Konflikts starp Latvijas Sociāldemokrātisko partiju un Zemnieku savienību atspoguļojās Čehoslovākijas sociāldemokrātiskajā presē.

Līdzās objektīviem starptautiskiem faktoriem liela nozīme bija arī subjektīvajam faktoram. Svarīga loma abu valstu diplomātisko un kultūras attiecību dibināšanā bija Latvijas konsulam (kopš 1927. gada ģenerālkonsulam) Eduardam Krastam, kurš bija Latvijas sociāldemokrātu pārstāvis. Pēc desmit dienesta gadiem Prāgā viņš tika atsaukts atpakaļ uz Rīgu, un viņš to uzskatīja par Latviešu zemnieku savienības intrigu rezultātu. Krasts Čehoslovākijas sociāldemokrātiskajā presē organizēja asus uzbrukumus jaunajam Latvijas vēstniekam Prāgā Kārlim Ducmanim. Čehoslovākijas Ārlietu ministrija oficiāli uz to nereaģēja. Tā noraidīja Krasta

pārmetumus un vienīgi norobežojās no viņa privātajās sarunās ar Ducmani.

Pēc autoritārā režīma nodibināšanas Latvijā 1934. gadā Čehoslovākijas sociāldemokrāti pauda atbalstu ieslodzītajiem Latvijas sociāldemokrātiem. Sociāldemokrātu laikraksts kritizēja Ulmaņa autoritāro režīmu.

Citu Čehoslovākijas politisko partiju laikrakstos nebija atrodama asa, pret Ulmaņa partiju vērsta kritika, kādu pauda kreisā spārna prese. Vairums Čehoslovākijas laikrakstu par apvērsumu un autoritāro režīmu Latvijā ziņoja neitrālā tonī. Jāatzīmē, ka lauksaimnieku prese simpatizēja Ulmaņa režīmam. Tā pozitīvi vērtēja lauksaimniecības atbalstam ieviestos pasākumus un 20. gadsimta 30. gadu nogalē uzlūkoja Ulmaņa režīmu kā iedvesmojošu piemēru.

Ņemot vērā Čehoslovākijas vēstnieka Latvijā Jaroslava Lipas (*Jaroslav Lípa*) kritisko attieksmi pret autoritāro režīmu, šie pretrunīgie aspekti veicināja zināmu distancēšanos starp Čehoslovākiju un Latviju. Tomēr atšķirībām politiskajās sistēmās nebija izšķirīgas lomas. Čehoslovākijas diplomātijas interese par Latviju pastiprinājās pēc Baltijas Antantes dibināšanas, uzlūkojot to kā stabilizējošu elementu Eiropas politikā. Ieinteresētība kolektīvās drošības stiprināšanā rezultējās Čehoslovākijas diplomātiskās misijas ar rezidējošu vēstnieku izveidē Rīgā 1935. gadā.

Prioritāra loma abu valstu attiecībās bija drošības jautājumiem, kas izpaudās kolektīvajos drošības centienos un atspoguļojās arī Čehoslovākijas mēģinājumos 20. gadsimta 30. gadu vidū sarunu laikā par Austrumu Lokarno tuvoties Baltijas valstīm un iegūt to atbalstu šai idejai.