

S I T U A T I O N R E P O R T

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1. End of German Resettlement from Czechoslovakia?

On July 27, Czechoslovak Television responded to a complaint by Herbert Hupka, a West German Bundestag deputy of the CDU, that the number of German resettlers from Czechoslovakia was declining, because Germans in the CSSR were "under considerable pressure." The station countered that the truth about the resettlement was no secret, and added the significant statement that "every citizen of German ethnic origin who has wanted to emigrate has been given the opportunity to do so." The broadcast spoke of a low interest in resettlement, attributing it to the alleged fact that the FRG is a country where "one does not know what tomorrow will bring." If the Czechoslovak TV actually meant what it said, and if this was a true expression of the official Czechoslovak attitude, then the resettlement of ethnic Germans from Czechoslovakia will be coming to an end for all practical purposes.

According to the most recent West German estimates, there are still in Czechoslovakia some 4,200 applicants for resettlement to the FRG. The Czechoslovak authorities have been claiming that this number is "greatly exaggerated," and that economic uncertainty in the FRG has induced many prospective resettlers to withdraw their applications. On the other hand, it was argued, some of those willing to emigrate were refused permission by the FRG authorities (Rude Pravo, 7 July 1977), an allegation never confirmed by the West Germans.

The 4,200 figure is at variance with the number of 3,500 prospective resettlers divulged by FRG Red Cross Secretary-General Schilling upon his return from Prague early this year (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 25 January 1977). Moreover, the Czechoslovak side had reportedly named a "substantially smaller figure" at that time (dpa, 20 January 1977). Indeed, in April 1976, the Czechoslovak authorities were quoted as having claimed that they had only about 1,000 applications on file (Frankfurter Rundschau, 24 April 1976). Nevertheless, if one takes the inevitable additional unknown quantity into account, there is no doubt that there are still many hundreds of Germans in the CSSR waiting for resettlement.

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Despite the promise of "sympathetic consideration" of resettlement applications contained in the "humanitarian letter" which accompanied the Czechoslovak-West German agreement of 1973, and despite the promises to ease resettlement which Gustav Husak made to Chancellor Schmidt in Helsinki and Foreign Minister Chnoupek to Genscher in Prague in 1975, the resettlement has been moving at a slow pace. While 15,306 ethnic Germans were allowed to leave in 1969, a year later it was only 4,249; in 1971, the number declined further to 1,773; in 1972 to 580; in 1973 to 525; in 1974 to a mere 387, to climb again in 1975 to 518, and in 1976 to 848 (Annual Report of the West German Red Cross, 25 April 1972; RFE Special/Munich, 27 December 1972; dpa, 30 November 1974 and 8 January 1975; and Rude Pravo, 7 July 1977). In the first six months of this year, only 143 ethnic Germans arrived in the FRG from Czechoslovakia, as compared to 235 in the corresponding period of 1976. (dpa, 22 July 1977).

The Czechoslovak attitude to the problem of resettling ethnic Germans was perhaps best expressed by Miloslav Ruzek. At that time a deputy foreign minister, he told Western journalists in 1975 that he did not attach "exaggerated importance" to this issue, which he considered as "largely settled" in the 1960s, when "the majority of the applications -- some 80,000 cases --" had been processed. Asked about the causes of the bottleneck in the resettlement scheme, he replied that in many cases "local or family difficulties" such as mixed marriages were responsible for rejections or delays in the processing of applications. Furthermore, Ruzek said that understanding the other side's internal situation was important. "One has to understand how far one's partner could or could not go," he reportedly argued (AFP, dpa, Reuter, 25 March 1975). Since West Germany was, and is, prepared to go a long way in this respect, it follows that Czechoslovakia is the reluctant partner.

There are at present, according to Czechoslovak statistics, some 78,000 ethnic Germans in Czechoslovakia. The official policy toward them has been shaped by the idea of gradual assimilation rather than resettlement. In view of the fact that ethnic Germans, though recognized as a minority, do not have schools in the German language, most of the younger generation speaks Czech as its first language in any case. Mixed marriages also play a role in the assimilation process. Even top German officials in Czechoslovakia harbor no illusions in this respect. In the words of Heribert Panster, chairman of the Cultural Association of CSSR Citizens of German Origin, "in 20 years, there will be no Cultural Association (in Czechoslovakia), for there will be no Germans here" (Die Presse, 5 January 1977). Few informed observers would contradict Panster in this respect.

2. Czechoslovak-Vietnamese Economic Relations

On 27 and 28 July 1977, Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh paid an official visit to Czechoslovakia in response to an

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invitation from his Czechoslovak counterpart, Bohuslav Chnoupek. According to the communiqué (Ceteka, 29 July 1977), both statesmen expressed their interest in a further expansion and deepening of the "traditional friendship and comradely co-operation" between the two countries. The discussions were marked by a full agreement of views on all issues on the agenda.

During his visit, the Vietnamese guest was received by Vasil Bilak, member of the Presidium and CPCS CC secretary, and had "cordial and comradely talks" with Czechoslovak First Deputy Foreign Minister Frantisek Krajcir. The communiqué pointed out that the visit of the Vietnamese Foreign Minister was an important new step on the road toward "stronger and deeper fraternal ties" between the two countries, based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism and socialist internationalism. It was also in harmony with the interests of both peoples, and to the benefit of the unity and cohesion of the socialist community.

Relations between Czechoslovakia and North Vietnam date back to 1950, when mutual diplomatic contacts were established. After the conclusion of the Geneva Agreement in 1954, Czechoslovakia began to render North Vietnam very considerable material, technical, and military assistance. This help took various forms. Czechoslovakia provided technical means, was sending experts to Vietnam to train scientists and technicians, and received thousands of Vietnamese for training in Czechoslovakia. This kind of assistance was intensified between 1974 and 1976, and will continue in the coming years. According to Radio Prague (27 July 1977), about 7,000 young Vietnamese have studied in Czechoslovakia up to the present and speak Czech or Slovak. In the past school year (1976-1977), there were almost 700 Vietnamese students at Czechoslovak universities and technical colleges (Tvorba No.14, 6 April 1977).

Within the framework of trade agreements, Czechoslovakia provided Vietnam with a wide range of products to counteract the consequences of war, among them medical supplies, hospital and engineering equipment which helped to keep factories in operation. Several factories, mostly those which had been destroyed during the war, were rebuilt with Czechoslovak assistance. In the past two years, the construction was completed of two more plants, one for the manufacture of ball bearings for bicycles, the other for making locks (Czechoslovak Foreign Trade No.2-3, February-March 1977, and Praca, 6 December 1976).

According to previous agreements on economic assistance, Czechoslovak deliveries were partly a gift and partly repayable on a long-term, interest-free credit basis (Radio Prague, 9 October 1967). Between 1955, when trade between the two countries began, and the end of 1975, Czechoslovakia registered a favorable trade balance of 931,000,000 Kcs. In 1975, Czechoslovak assistance without payment ended, "according to the wish of the Vietnamese." In October 1975, a general agreement on deepening and broadening economic relations between the two countries was signed for the years 1976-1980 (Tvorba No.14, 6 April 1977). Finally, in July 1976 the first long-term agreement on trade and payments for the 1976-1980 period was signed between Czechoslovakia and the Vietnamese Socialist Republic (Ceteka, 13 July 1976). Under that agreement, which envisages an increase in mutual trade

turnover of almost 50 per cent over the preceding five-year plan (1971-1975), Czechoslovakia granted to Vietnam a credit whose amount and conditions were not revealed. The agreement provides for Czechoslovak exports of ship and diesel engines, machine tools, footwear and textile machinery, tractors, excavators, spare parts, and consumer goods; and imports of jute, tea, tin, textiles, ready-made clothing, industrial and agricultural raw materials, as well as canned fruit and vegetables.

The development of mutual trade relations in the 1970s is shown in the following table (for previous years, see Czechoslovak Situation Report/4, Radio Free Europe Research, 26 January 1972, Item 3):

Czechoslovak-Vietnamese Trade 1970-1976

(in million Kcs)

Year	Turnover	Imports	Exports	Balance	Vietnam's position among CS trade partners
1970	131	41	90	+ 49	38
1971	168	47	121	+ 74	36
1972	139	20	119	+ 99	36
1973	164	18	146	+ 128	37
1974	171	45	126	+ 81	39
1975	155	45	110	+ 65	38
1976	195	61	134	+ 73	36

Sources: Statisticka Rocenka CSSR 1976 and Statisticke Prehledy No.6, June 1977.

The main job confronting Vietnam's foreign trade administrators in the future will be to eliminate the undesirable deficit in the balance of trade. This could be achieved gradually by raising the quality of exports. Present developments allegedly indicate that Vietnam possesses "all realistic possibilities" of achieving this aim (Czechoslovak Foreign Trade No.2-3, February-March 1977). Czechoslovakia will continue its deliveries of machinery and equipment for the Vietnamese engineering and building industries. In the sector of capital construction, Czechoslovakia will help Vietnam to build a major thermoelectric plant. The considerably higher volume of trade between the two countries in the present five-year period may create conditions conducive to a further gradual promotion of the mutual exchange of goods even after 1980, including economic and industrial co-operation.

3. East-West Highway: The Plan and Reality

A 53.5-km-long sector of the Mirosovice-Horice superhighway was opened to traffic, somewhat behind schedule, in the past few days. The newly built sector starts 21 km east of Prague and is a part of the main

superhighway on the territory of Czechoslovakia -- the route linking Prague, Brno, and Bratislava -- which has been under construction since 1967. The new sector, built at a cost of 1,800 million Kcs, traverses the Stredoceska Vysocina hill country and Sazava County, leading up to the Stredomoravska Mountain Range. A 462-m-long bridge, the longest superhighway bridge to date in Czechoslovakia, spanning the Sazava River at Hvezdonice, is a part of the Mirosovice-Sternov sector (Ceteka, Prague, 8 July 1977, and Rude Pravo, 14 July 1977).

The new Mirosovice-Horice superhighway sector connects with the first 21.3-km-long portion from Prague, which has been open to traffic since 1970. Ten years after the beginning of construction of the planned 1,700-km-long superhighway network, no more than 180.5 km have been completed, but not in one stretch. The longest continuous sector is now the 74.8-km-long Prague-Horice superhighway. Another 176.5 km are under construction and, including this stretch, an additional 228.5 km of superhighway are scheduled to be completed by 1980. First priority is given to the 330-km-long main superhighway route from Prague to Brno and Bratislava, which, as the Czechoslovak press has repeatedly stressed, should be definitely finished by the end of 1980. The master scheme for the construction of the complete superhighway network, which was approved in 1966, sets its completion for the year 2000 (Silnicny Obzor No.1, January 1977; Radio Hvezda, 16 March 1977).

Although for the time being the over-all length of the superhighway is modest by international standards, the date of the beginning of its construction goes back nearly 40 years, and the first design for resumption of the roadwork dates back 30 years. Originally, the construction started in 1938 and was discontinued one year later, as a consequence of the German occupation of Bohemia and Moravia. In the first year, a 60-km-long sector of superhighway was under construction. During the first 20 years after the end of World War II, the Czechoslovak regime several times deferred authorization for the resumption of construction, giving priority to other building projects. Those latter projects were facilities whose use or output were primarily designed to serve economic co-operation with the USSR and the other East European Comecon states.

In the 1960s, it became particularly apparent how shortsightedly the government agencies had acted when they refused to consider not only construction of the superhighways, but even a general substantial improvement of the whole road network. At that time, Czechoslovakia experienced a motorization boom. Although motorization was much smaller than in the Western states, the different conditions under which it took place became rather painfully evident for, unlike the West where the upsurge of road traffic was accompanied by speeded up construction of roads and superhighways, in Czechoslovakia the building of roads stagnated and the construction of superhighways was not even started. The poor condition of the roads became a subject of steadily increasing dissatisfaction among the quickly growing group of Czechoslovak car owners.

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The backwardness of the road network and the complete neglect of superhighway construction in the 1960s has also adversely affected the Czechoslovak economy from the aspect of international road transport as well. As the importance of trade between East and West increased year after year, and tourist traffic substantially grew, the possibility that international road traffic might detour around Czechoslovakia because of its poor road network, despite the country's central geographical location, gave rise to concern. It was only in these circumstances that the government finally approved a long-term superhighway construction scheme in 1966, which envisaged the completion of a 1700-km-long superhighway system by the end of this century.

The construction of the superhighways began in September 1967. The first superhighway sector, 21.3 km long and leading from Prague in the direction of Brno, was opened to traffic in 1970 (for details, see Czechoslovak SR/10, RFER, 17 March 1976, Item 3). From the very beginning of the construction of the Czechoslovak superhighway network, however, the project was beset by problems arising from insufficient organization and poor technical equipment. Although the domestic press devotes great attention to its progress, the total figure for kilometers of superhighway built to date has not been mentioned. In admitting this omission, Rude Pravo (14 May 1977) states that this figure is not impressive. In this information gap, the monthly Silnicny Obzor (No.6, June 1977) is the sole exception, reporting that, after the opening of the 53.5-km-long Mirosovice-Horice sector, traffic will flow on a total of 221 km of superhighways. This figure probably comprises two additional sectors scheduled for completion this year.

Among the things impeding a more rapid construction rate, insufficient utilization of the available technical equipment is said to hamper speed of progress. Increased labor productivity, in the form of the introduction of two work shifts, is recommended as a remedy. A shortage of spare parts for essential machinery is another factor which slows down the work. Negligent treatment of high-quality largely foreign, machinery, which causes frequent breakdowns, is criticized. A chronic failure to fulfill the plan is reported from the Slovak sector of the superhighway (Praca, 3 December 1976).

Nor have sectors of the superhighway already opened to traffic escaped criticism. Insufficient lighting on the Bratislava-Malacky route (the 30-km-long sector in the direction of Brno), which seriously impairs road traffic safety, has, for example, been the subject of complaints. The road signs on the superhighways and its feeders, which cannot be easily read, have also been criticized. The trade union daily Praca (4 September 1976) left open the question why these long-known faults have not yet been corrected.

There are plans to step up the rate of progress of the superhighway network construction substantially. While the fifth five-year

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plan (1971-1975) saw a total of 110 km of superhighway opened to traffic, with additional stretches being constructed -- at a cost of 4,830 million Kcs, it is intended to invest nearly twice as much in the 1976-1980 period, that is, 9,200 million Kcs worth, as part of "a dynamic development program." If this is done, roughly 400 km, including the 330-km main route from Prague to Brno and Bratislava, ought to be open to traffic in 1980, with about 100 km of superhighway under construction as well. To guarantee attainment of these goals labor productivity and rationalization are to be greatly increased. The directives for the officials responsible for the work state that the further development of socialist competition and encouragement of the workers' initiative must be sought to the greatest possible degree (Investicni Vystavba No.7, July 1976).

Nevertheless, these measures still leave open the question whether the goals set for 1980 can really be reached, unless several specific problems are solved. Among these problems is the question of the construction of the railroad-cum-superhighway bridge over the Danube at Bratislava, which is intended to provide a superhighway link from Prague to Austria. The construction of the bridge is scheduled for 1977. However, the supplier of 11 tons of steel construction required for its building could not guarantee delivery prior to 1980 (Praca, 3 December 1976). It also seems that the question of service areas, e.g., gas stations, restaurants, and motels, along the main superhighway has not yet been satisfactorily settled and that delays may easily occur in this respect as well. As can be seen from what has been set forth above, the construction of the East-West superhighway is not without problems on the 10th anniversary of the start of its construction (September 1967).

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