



***Remembering 1948 and 1968: Reflections on Two Pivotal Years in Czech and Slovak History***

University of Glasgow, 3 – 4 April 2008

**3 April 2008**

Wolfson Medical School: Seminar Room 1 (Yudowitz Room)

**8.30 – 9.00 Registration**

**9.00 – 9.30 Welcome Address**

**Dr Paul Millar**, Hon. Consul-General of the Czech Republic

**9.30 – 11.00 Session 1: 1948**

**Chair: Dr Kevin McDermott**

**Eva Cermanová**, Indiana University Bloomington USA  
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***The powerful myth of the Communist Takeover in Czechoslovakia***

This paper revisits the powerful myth of the Communist Takeover in Czechoslovakia and presents arguments for its inaccuracy. In the case of Czechoslovakia, 1948 was not an imposition of Soviet rule, but a legitimate victory of a Communist Party in popular elections. In other words, the “passive takeover” by the Communists needs to be seen in the light of the millions of members of the Czechoslovak Communist Party who participated in its enormous success. The main argument of the paper critiques the periodization of the Communist era in Czechoslovakia and contrasts it with recent historiography of the region by post-Cold War historians as well as the newly opened archives of the Ministry of the Interior. This re-interpretation is crucially missing from the history textbooks and contemporary political culture. This myth, moreover, has a direct impact on the absence of individual political responsibility during the Communist period and presents an attractive anti-Communist narrative that comes in handy in a post-1989 reality.

**Marta Filipová**, University of Glasgow  
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***From social to socialist art: 1948 and after***

The political changes that happened in Czechoslovakia as a result of the events of 1948 had a substantial impact on visual art and its theoretical reflections in texts and artists' manifestos. The Congress of National Culture of April 1948 officially invited artists to

participate in the construction of the new cultural politics that would lead to “popularisation” of arts. The participants made a clear statement against interwar avant-garde and modernist art, associated with the bourgeoisie, and turned towards the proletarian aspects of art. The proponents of the new policy, however, did not appear out of nowhere. Tendencies to include social and socialist issues into art and theory had been appearing since the 1920s in the texts of for example Karel Teige, a representative of the Czech avant-garde whose theories were reinterpreted after 1948 according to the new ideology. Some keen pre-war supporters of Czech modernism, like the theorist of cubism Vincenc Kramář, accepted the call for popularisation of art and its disassociation with capitalism. In my paper, I address the contrast between the thinking of art theorists before 1948 and after, questioning the potential motives that led them to the change of opinion. Apart from official text-based documents, I also examine visual material from the period to illustrate how artists, like Emil Filla, once promoting modernism, likewise changed their style after 1948. At the heart of my talk are the issues of the popularisation of arts and the nature of the distinction between social and socialistic visual art in the post-war period.

**Prof. Martin Myant**, University of Paisley  
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### ***Is there anything new on February 1948?***

Political changes since 1989 have opened up scope for reinterpreting the events of February 1948 and their place in Czechoslovak history. Reinterpretation can follow from access to information that was previously not available and from a new social and political climate encouraging the posing of different questions or pointing towards different interpretations. These influences are followed in a survey of contributions by historians on the strategies of political parties, the role of state organs, the fate of national minorities, the nature of pressure from the Soviet Union, everyday life, thinking in the period on economic and social policies and the events of February 1948 itself. The conclusion is that far more information is available and more points of view can be heard in debate, albeit with some obvious bias coming from the political climate of the time. This is itself changing with a newer generation less exclusively interested in political-power issues and looking to more diverse aspects of social life. New information has helped clarify many points that were regarded before as ‘blank places’ in the historical account. However, new information has also posed new questions and points to a further blank places, particularly over issues beyond questions of political power. Major open questions remain over the place of 1948, and the whole subsequent communist period, within Czechoslovak (and Czech) history as a whole.

**Štěpán Strnad**, The College of European and Regional Studies, České Budějovice,  
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### ***“Invisible Coup” Communist Coup in Czechoslovakia: 1945 or 1948?***

The year 1948 did not mean only the end of the democratic system in Czechoslovakia, but also led to economic and intellectual degeneration of the Czechoslovak society, and was the cause of the moral devastation of its inhabitants. There was written a lot about the process of communist power seizing on 25 February 1948. But one question could be still interesting, that, if the establishing of communist dictatorship in Czechoslovakia was unavoidable? In the early years after February 1948, Czechoslovak exiles tried to find an offender to blame. Edvard Beneš was identified as the man who accepted the resignation of the non-communist ministers, and consequently nominated the “regenerate” government of the National Front. According to exile representatives, due to this decision, Beneš not only legalized but also enabled the existence of the communist regime.

In later years, especially by the non-leftwing authors, the opinion prevailed, that the fault for the later communist coup was the conclusion of a Czechoslovak-Soviet agreement in the year 1943 and the consequent convergence of Czechoslovakia and Soviet Union. In respect

of this attitude, we could say, that communist revolution did not run in the year 1948, but in fact three years earlier in the year 1945.

Thereby we are getting to crucial question of this article: was the February 1948 unavoidable? Was it possible to prevent this event? Did there exist alternative ways? This article will try to answer on these questions by focusing on the internal and international situation of Czechoslovakia in the years 1945 – 1948 and above all by focusing on the “silent coup” of the Communist Party in 1945 and its gradual “catlike” control of the state and the society, which culminated in February 1948.

### **11.00 – 11.30 Coffee**

### **11.30 – 1.00 Session 2: 1968 (1)**

**Chair: Dr Maud Bracke**

**Dr Stefan Auer**, La Trobe University Melbourne  
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#### ***Jan Patočka and the significance of 1968 in Czech history***

The events of 1968/69 in Czechoslovakia seem to have anticipated the non-violent revolutions of 1989. According to Václav Havel, communism was ultimately defeated 'by life, by thought, by human dignity.' Presented in this way, the Velvet Revolutions in Central Europe marked the logical culmination of Czech history. Both 1968/69 and 1989 showed that Czechs were willing and able to settle political conflicts without resorting to violence. Yet this interpretation of the Prague Spring and its defeat is problematic. Patočka's revisionist view of Czech history is more skeptical.

For Patočka, 1968/1969 echoes the trauma of 1938/39. In both crucial periods of European history, Czechs failed to live up to their historic mission; they failed to fight for democracy. Patočka sees the failure of the Czech nation also as marking a crucial episode in the decline of Europe. Although Patočka's ideas developed in the specific context of Czech history immediately after 1968, my paper will demonstrate their relevance to contemporary problems of liberty and security in Europe at large. Just as the Czechs lost confidence in confrontation with Nazi Germany in 1938/39, and again in confrontation with the Soviet Union in 1968/69, Europe today seems to lack confidence in dealing with contemporary challenges to liberty.

**Daniel Bird**, Sheffield University  
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#### ***The production of Juraj Jakubisko's 'The Deserter and the Nomads' (1968)***

**Dr Charles Sabatos**, Yeditepe University Istanbul  
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#### ***Criticism and Destiny: Kundera and Havel on the Legacy of 1968***

Milan Kundera and Václav Havel, two of the leading figures in Czech culture during the “Prague Spring” of 1968, took differing political positions after the reform movement was repressed by the Soviet-led invasion that August. In a pair of essays entitled “The Czech Destiny,” published in the months following the invasion, the two writers reveal their reactions to the crisis. Kundera praises the supposed Czech national tradition of “critical thinking” while Havel calls for a more politically engaged “criticism.” The gap between these two terms illustrates the difference between these two key figures of 1968: for Kundera, literary and intellectual integrity lie at the heart of Czech survival, while for Havel, true criticism calls for

concrete acts of resistance. This distinction can be followed in their literary careers through the 1980s, when Kundera and Havel became the best-known voices from the Czech exile and dissident communities, respectively, and the "Prague Spring" regained widespread attention with the worldwide success of Kundera's novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Havel's comments on Kundera's most famous work of fiction provide interesting perspective on its connection to the real events of 1968 and its historical legacy. In his latest essay collection, *The Curtain* (2007), Kundera reflects on the Prague Spring and the invasion in terms that return to his ideas on national destiny from four decades earlier.

**Dr Aviezer Tucker**, Queen's University Belfast  
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***The interpretation of 1968 among Czech dissident circles and its effects into the Velvet Revolution. Karel Kosik and Vaclav Havel***

This paper examines the debate about the interpretation of 1968 among Czech dissident circles and its effects into the Velvet Revolution. In the immediate aftermath of the Soviet invasion, the press was still sufficiently free to debate the meaning of 1968. The most significant debate was between the reformed Communist philosopher Karel Kosik (in his journal *Flamen*) and Vaclav Havel in his journal (*Tvar*). I shall follow this debate and demonstrate that the normalization process proved Havel right, and propelled him to the center of the dissident movement while it marginalized Kosik and his ideas. This rejection of the reformed Communist interpretation of 1968 carried over into 1990-1991 and the determined attempt of all Czech political factions to marginalize the survivors of 1968.

**1.00 – 2.00 Lunch**

**2.00 – 3.30 Session 3: Memory**

**Chair: Dr Laura Cashman**

**Libora Oates-Indruchová PhD**, Masaryk University, Brno and Marie Curie Fellow,  
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***Academic Memories, Personal Narratives: Publishing and Censorship in Social Sciences in post-1968 Czech Republic***

The paper draws on a research project on post-1968 academic publishing and censorship in the Czech Republic, during which I conducted interviews with academics who had "survived" in some professional way the post-1968 purges and who remained active within official structures in research and publishing between 1968 and 1989 within official structures, and who also continued to be respected by their peers in the post-1989 period. The aim of the project was to investigate mechanisms of intellectual communication through academic texts in conditions of ideological surveillance. The interviewees' accounts turned out to be heavily constrained by the lapse of time since those conditions ceased to exist and by the social memory of state-socialism that has prevailed in public discourse in the meantime. The paper will discuss how these two factors may have affected the findings that concerned memories of personal survival and institutional strategies of exclusion and surveillance in post-1968 Czech academia; findings concerning authors' relation to their written work and to their subject at the time; and the implications this can have on their today's work. The issues the paper will address include: self-stylisation, self-romantisation, colliding generational perspectives, and the politisation of memory.

**Veronika Tuckerová**, Columbia University, New York  
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### ***Memory of 1948 in Kundera's The Joke***

Milan Kundera's *The Joke* (1965) evokes the recent past (1948 and 1950s) and shows how the past continues to shape the present: the Stalinist Czechoslovakia is imprinted on every day life in post-Stalinist Czechoslovakia. The text thus marks the moment when *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coping with the past) becomes possible: the early 1960s allow for a glance back at the not so distant past of the 1950s. In this paper I explore the various ways of remembering.

First, how do the characters remember - or forget - the past, and how do they relate to it? Kundera's Ludvik is preoccupied with the memories to the effect that he becomes blind to the present. Second, I explore how do these constructions of the past operate within the time when the text was written: how does the author try to understand the past through his characters? What do the text tells us today about the way the sixties generation tried to cope with the 1950s? Third, the representation of a folk festival, *The Ride of Kings*, central to the text, posits yet a different kind of memory: cultural memory of ancient events and rituals that are commemorated in modern times which shape their contemporary form. The representations of folk rituals in Kundera's text reveal how in the post war Czechoslovakia, festivals were degraded to mechanisms of state control. Instead of preserving and reviving the past, they become metaphors for forgetting both on personal and collective levels.

**Deanna Wooley**, Indiana University – Bloomington, USA  
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### ***48-68-89: Generational Conflict and Historical Memory***

The end of state socialism in 1989 was accompanied by a large-scale drive to resurrect and reinterpret the past. 1948 and 1968, as two key historical moments in communist Czechoslovakia, were especially vulnerable to the efforts of social and political actors to redefine their meaning within a lens of emergent post-communism. The complexity of this task appears with particular clarity in the case of the 1989 student movement. Although most commonly linked to the tradition of the 1939 anti-Nazi demonstrations, student legacies from 1948 and 1968 played as much, if not more of a role in the 1989 students' efforts to construct their own collective and generational identity. Unlike the 1939 legacy, however, those of '48 and '68 were more ambivalent because they directly invoked the viability of the communist system, albeit in divergent ways. Drawing upon archival documents from the 1989 movement and secondary sources from all three periods, this paper explores the historical memory of 1948 and 1968 as part of a broader generational conflict over redefining history. The analysis focuses on two main themes: a comparison of divergent attitudes in the 1989 student community towards 1948 and 1968 as historical guidelines for their present revolutionary situation; and the often contentious dialogue between representatives of the three historical generations over the historical meaning of their respective defining moments. These themes are contextualized within a wider discussion of how multiple and competing interpretations of the watershed events in communist history were implicated in the moment of the regime's collapse.

**3.30 – 4.00 Coffee**

**4.00– 6.00 Plenary Session: Reflections on the Prague Spring**

**Chair: Dr Jan Čulík**

**Antonin J. Liehm** Founder of *Lettres Internationales* and the editor of *Listy* and *150 000 slov*.

*Reflections on the events of '48 and '68*

**Prof. PhDr. Vilém Prečan, CSc**, Historian and Author of "*Seven Prague Days*" (*The Prague Black Book*)

*The Three Dimensions of the Czechoslovak Crisis 1968*

**Ing. Václav Žák**, Head of the regulatory Council for Radio and Television Broadcasting and Editor in Chief of the political bimonthly *Listy*.

*Several personal reflections on the Prague Spring*

**6.00 – 7.00 Wine Reception**

Kindly sponsored by the Slovak Embassy

**4 April 2008**

Wolfson Medical School: Seminar Room 1 (Yudowitz Room)

**9.15 – 9.30 Welcome Address**  
Mr. Rastislav Kostilnik, Slovak Embassy

**9.30 – 11.00 Session 4: 1968 (2)**

**Chair: Prof. Martin Myant**

**PhDr. Petr A. Bílek, CSc**, Charles University, Prague  
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***The Re-presentations of the Prague Spring of 1968 in official Czech culture of 1970s and 1980s***

The paper focuses on the ways of constructing the image of the enemy in official propaganda culture after the arrival of the era of „normalization“ in early 1970s. It is going to use the representations of literati and artists as „bad guys“ in the blueprint picture of the 1968 as the era of „crisis“, „chaos“, and „reform“. The material interpreted is going to include the official statement *Poučení z krizového vývoje ve straně a společnosti...*, the speeches of the 1<sup>st</sup> Congress of the new Writers Union, the images of reforming intellectuals in official fiction (Pludek: *Vabank*), and in films (*Třicet případů majora Zemana*). The paper is going to focus on the juxtapositions of the ideological and narrative constrains, on the trait attributes of the „villains“, and on the ideological interpretation of the historical determination of the events of late 1960s in Czechoslovakia.

**Dr Jan Čulík**, University of Glasgow  
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***1968 through the eyes of Czech postcommunist filmmakers***

It is extremely interesting to analyze how the momentous events of the Prague Spring of 1968 are seen in contemporary Czech Republic. In this sense, it is useful to examine how the events of 1968 are presented in post-communist Czech cinema. Some three hundred feature films have been made in the Czech Republic since the fall of communism. They put across a fairly consistent value system to Czech society. This paper looks at two of these feature films dealing with the events of 1968 from the postcommunist perspective. The perception of the Prague Spring is grossly distorted within them. It is perhaps not terribly surprising that the vision of the Prague Spring offered by these two pictures is quite closely related to the image of the Prague Spring that is consistently presented by the Czech right-of-centre daily newspapers.

**Dr Mary Heimann**, University of Strathclyde  
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***The Machiavelli of the Prague Spring***

The Prague Spring continues to be presented as a high-minded reform package undertaken by an exceptional Communist leader: Alexander Dubček. This article seeks to overturn popular notions that a ‘liberal’ Dubček replaced ‘Stalinist’ predecessors, suggesting that Dubček jumped on a pre-existing ‘reformist’ bandwagon for tactical reasons. As a rising functionary in the regional Slovak Communist Party, it argues that Dubček developed and used a new tactic – the strategic lifting of censorship – as the principal lever with which to

remove political rivals. The method succeeded in getting Dubček to the top of the statewide Czechoslovak Communist Party; but ultimately provoked invasion.

**Prof. PhDr. Vladimír Papoušek CSc.** University of South Bohemia, České Budějovice  
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**“1968” from the point of view of Czech Exile Writers**

The paper deals with the problem of various contradictory reflections of Czech cultural and political movement of 1968 in fiction, essays and journalism of Czech exile writers, especially in the U.S.A and Canada. Through analysis and interpretation of texts by E. Hostovsky, P. Javor, F Peroutka and others the paper displays the ambivalences and counterpoints between the image of „1968“ in concepts of „old exile“ (after 1948) and new wave of exile writers coming after Russian occupation of Czechoslovakia.

**11.00 – 11.30 Coffee**

**11.30 – 1.00 Session 5: The wider view**

**Chair: Prof. Geoff Swain**

**Muriel Blaive PhD**, Collegium Minor Pragensis, Prague  
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***Between the Prague coup and the Prague spring: The state of communist Czechoslovakia in 1958***

My proposal might seem paradoxical since I hereby offer to reflect not on 1948 or 1968 but on 1958. However, it does address the issue of « re-interpreting the events of 1948 and 1968 based on newly available archive materials » and also that of studying « attitudes towards the Communist Party. » More generally, it challenges the master historical narrative on Czechoslovak communist history inspired by Democrats in exile after 1948 and by Reform Communists in exile after 1968, which is in both cases centered on a political reading of history, while leaving until today almost no place to social history.

The seemingly uneventful year 1958 indeed is in many ways more revealing than the « big events » of 1948 and 1968 about the state of the relations between the population and the communist regime, between the totalitarian tendencies and the population's defense strategies, between the famous « Eigen-Sinn » coined by historians of the former GDR and the practices of domination of the communist party.<sup>1</sup> It occurred only two years after the 1956 Hungarian and Polish uprisings and the relegitimization of the communist power over Czechoslovak society.<sup>2</sup> And it occurred just two years before the proclamation of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the official achievement of this important first stage on the way to communism. A study of the year 1958 is a useful window on the daily practice of postwar Czechoslovak communism.

**Jana Fischerova**, University College Dublin  
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***The 1948 Communist Takeover: Czech Literature Discontinued***

This paper will consider the impact of the 1948 Communist takeover on Czech avant-garde literature and Czech literature in general. Avant-garde literature and art flourished in interwar

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<sup>1</sup> See Thomas Lindenberger (ed.), *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur. Studien zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte in der DDR*, Cologne, Böhlau Verlag, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> See Muriel Blaive, *Une déstalinisation manquée. Tchécoslovaquie 1956*, Brussels, Complexe, 2005.



Czechoslovakia, which was possible due to the liberal democratic nature of the society that tolerated expressions of nonconformity and eccentricity. During the Nazi occupation of the country, Czech avant-garde (and other) writers were driven underground. Shortly after the end of the war their work was interrupted again, when in 1948 the Communists took over and a new, Bolshevik regime emerged. Literature was supposed to become socialist realist and any expression of pluralism was to be suppressed. As part of this plan, the whole of the avant-garde tradition was to be erased from Czech cultural history. This paper will examine the reasons for this decision and its consequences for the development of Czech literature in the second half of the twentieth century. Special attention will be paid to the period of 1948-1968, during which the attitude of the authorities (including the censors) towards avant-garde writers and non-socialist realist literature in general changed more than once. The second and fourth Czechoslovak writers' congresses will be regarded as key moments in regard to this development. Among the writers considered will be Jaroslav Seifert, František Hrubín, Vítězslav Nezval, Milan Kundera, Ludvík Vaculík and Ivan Klíma. It will be argued that the elimination of the avant-garde tradition after the Communist takeover caused significant, long-term damage to the essence and continuity of Czech literature, as well as to the nation's understanding of its cultural history.

**Dr Kevin McDermott**, Sheffield Hallam University  
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### ***Czech Popular Responses to the Slánský Affair***

On 27 November 1952 Rudolf Slánský, the former General Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ), was sentenced to death by a court in Prague. He stood accused of heading an 'Anti-State Conspiratorial Centre' consisting of fourteen prominent party and state officials, ten of whom also received the supreme penalty and three life prison sentences. Only in 1963 was the trial repudiated and the unjustly convicted men judicially exonerated, albeit reluctantly and without public fanfare. Full political rehabilitation came as late as March 1968.

My aim in this paper is not so much to evaluate the relative roles of Stalin, KSČ leaders and Soviet and Czechoslovak secret police agents in the complex and unsavoury 'Slánský Affair'. Rather my task is to focus on the barely researched theme of popular reactions to the arrest and trial of Slánský. How did 'ordinary' Czechs, both party and non-party members, respond? What were the dominant attitudes towards the accused? How widespread and deep were anti-Semitic sentiments given that eleven of the condemned, including Slánský himself, were 'of Jewish origin'? To what extent were sceptical, non-conformist and even dissenting political views expressed? How far, if at all, did rank-and-file reactions escape control from the central authorities? And what do the multifarious responses tell us about Czech political culture, which is invariably regarded as democratic and humanist, and about the limits of 'Stalinization' in the party and country as a whole? My conclusion, based on materials in the KSČ and Ministry of Interior archives, is that societal responses were highly diverse ranging from solid support for the leadership's version of the trial to deep-seated scepticism, and even outright opposition.

**1.00 – 2.00 Lunch**

**2.00 – 3.00 Session 6: Slovakia and the Consequences of 1968**

**Chair: Dr Stefan Auer**

**Scott Brown**, University of Washington, USA  
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### ***Prelude to a Divorce? The Prague Spring as dress rehearsal for Czechoslovakia's "Velvet Divorce"***

With the gradual onset of de-Stalinization, Slovak political and cultural elites of the 1960s cautiously rehabilitated a form of Slovak nationalism. The blossoming of reform during the "Prague Spring" of 1968 led to open and insistent Slovak demands for federalization – the resolution of the "Slovak question" within Czechoslovakia. But the reemergence of Slovak nationalism during the sixties also seemed to anticipate the "irreconcilable differences" that surfaced a quarter-century later, culminating in Czechoslovakia's "Velvet Divorce" in 1992. In hindsight, the emerging Slovak political agenda of the sixties can be seen as a rehearsal for the disputes that helped to precipitate the division of the republic in the nineties.

Drawing on a variety of sources, including newly available materials from Slovak archives, this paper highlights the more salient features of the re-emergent Slovak national movement of the 1960s that proved harbingers of developments in the 1990s. In particular, Slovak assertions of national sovereignty in the constitutional debates of the post-communist era echoed Slovak demands for the federalization of Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring. These similarities showed the importance of political cataclysm, whether reform in the sixties or transition in the nineties, for bringing the Slovak question to the fore. In both contexts Slovak assertions of the *national* highlighted differences in the Slovak and Czech conceptions of democracy and reform that informed their respective agendas, which seemed to put the two nations at odds with one another in the context of reform in 1968 and the post-communist transition in the early 1990s.

**Juraj Marušiak, PhD**, Slovak Academy of Sciences  
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### ***Slovakia and 1968: The Slovak reaction to the so called "Normalization"***

This paper focuses on the reaction of the Slovak society on the attempt on the reform of Communist regime in Czechoslovakia in 1968. It is based on the analysis of public opinion polls in this period and on content analysis of the main topic of Slovak politics at this time, mainly on the dilemma between "democratization" and "federalization." The paper will also analyze the reasons of the lower support for democratic changes in Slovakia in 1968 with the background of the perception of the Communism by Slovak society.

The different perceptions of Communism, when, especially in its first period (1950-1970) Slovakia experienced delayed industrialization, allowed the restoration of the totalitarian control of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia over the society after the Soviet occupation (so-called "Normalization") to pass much easily in Slovakia than in Czech lands. The lesser extent of persecutions caused the myth of the "soft variant of Normalization" in Slovakia in the 70's and 80's. On the other hand the persecuted people, that actively resisted the neo-totalitarian regime, became more isolated in Slovakia including Bratislava, than in Prague. Thus, this paper will argue, the regime of "Normalization" was in Slovakia more successful in the terms of the achieving the control over society than in the Czech Republic.

Further, the paper argues that measures in social policy and the federalization of the country that positively affected particularly the development of the Slovak society acted in favor of the relatively easy victory of the "Normalization" as did, paradoxically the lack of Communist traditions in Slovakia before World War II. Due to this fact the new ruling elite came from the various social and political strata of the Slovak society and for most of the members of the Communist Party of Slovakia Party membership was connected with loyalty to power rather than with devotion to a particular ideology. Thus, the support for the reform initiatives or the restoration of the totalitarian system was for the Slovak Communist elites more a pragmatic than ideological choice.

**3.00 - 3.30 Coffee**

### 3.30 – 5.00 Session 7: International Reactions

**Chair: Dr Eamonn Butler**

**Dr Kevin Adamson**, University of the West of Scotland  
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***Nicolae Ceaușescu, the Romanian Communist Party, and 1968: The deployment of Prague Spring symbolism in the service of national Stalinism.***

The events of 1968 in Czechoslovakia are remarkable from a number of points of view, not least the ill-fated re-articulation of Marxism-Leninism by Alexander Dubček, the subsequent Soviet-led invasion, and its reverberative effects on communist parties throughout Europe. Whilst the events of 1968 can in some ways be seen as simply reinforcing the Soviet policy last witnessed in 1956, from the point of view of one man, Nicolae Ceaușescu, they represented the chance to act in a completely different fashion to that of his predecessor, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej in 1956. 1968 undoubtedly marked the pinnacle of Ceaușescu's career. Before the invasion in August, Ceaușescu had already been having a very good 1968. The party had walked out of an international committee of communist parties in Budapest after being accused of 'nationalist manifestations' by the Syrians. He then successfully purged his main opponents in a 'mini destalinisation' operation, designed to moderate his image in the eyes of the public by separating himself from the messy and violent business of communist terror in the early years of the regime. August was to be the moment when Ceaușescu's image among the Romanian public and internationally soared, as a trenchant critic of the Soviet-led invasion, turning into the opportunity to accumulate undreamed of political capital. This article focuses on Ceaușescu's policy on Czechoslovakia in 1968, arguing that it formed the symbolic and ideological foundation for the rest of his period as leader. His public support for the Prague Spring was then sometimes misrecognised as support for the actual policy of Dubček. What Ceaușescu really supported more than anything else was the 'right of a fraternal socialist party' to carry out the policy best suited to their conditions. The Romanian public were encouraged to interpret this as 'national independence' and this helped to maintain Ceausescu's popularity throughout the 1970s. To Ceaușescu, this meant the start of a policy that represented the complete opposed to either the principles of the Prague Spring or of the Soviet Union of Brezhnev, but justified nonetheless on the basis of a Marxist-Leninist principle - the right of a party to choose the path best suited to it.

**Dr Maud Bracke**, University of Glasgow  
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***The end of reform socialism? The Prague Spring in the history and memory of the European left***

The paper investigates the importance of the Prague Spring and the events in Czechoslovakia in 1968 in the longer term history of the European left. It does so by analysing the immediate reactions and debates provoked by the Prague Spring, the Soviet-led invasion of August 1968 and the subsequent "normalisation" of the country, as expressed by various political actors of the left in Western Europe, specifically Italy and France. These include the Soviet-aligned communist parties PCI and PCF, socialist and social democratic parties, radical student movements and Marxist intellectuals. It is based on detailed analysis of party archives and press material.

It is argued that the reactions on the West European left were characterised by misinterpretations regarding the nature of the Prague Spring programmes. Debates on the nature of the Prague Spring – whether it was a revolutionary or reformist project, a social democratic or anti-capitalist one – were a matter of political instrumentalisation and appropriation in the context of the fierce political and symbolic battles on the West European left in the late 1960s, rather than genuine attempts to analyse the specificities of the situation in Czechoslovakia. In the 1970s the memory of the Prague Spring, as it was constructed

especially by various actors of the left in France, continued to be invoked for domestic political purposes. Finally, also in the post-1989 context, the memory and a certain interpretation of the Prague Spring serves political elites, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, to justify their current political choices and programmes.

**Roger Gough**, Policy Exchange  
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### ***Odd Man Out: János Kádár and the Prague Spring***

Hungary's János Kádár was the odd man out among the leaders of the five countries that took part in the August invasion of Czechoslovakia. While not a public critic like Tito or Ceaușescu, he dissented enough to arouse considerable mistrust from the Soviets and their allies. There were several reasons for Kádár's caution. A military solution to the Czechoslovak crisis could, by raising fears of a return to the past, undermine the hard-won (and qualified) legitimacy that he had achieved since the early sixties. Secondly, the potential impact of any military action on East-West relations was a concern, given Hungary's growing reliance on international trade. Finally, his private conversations with the Soviet leadership make clear that Kádár took the 'two-front struggle' seriously: while sharing their unease with the growing radicalism of the Prague Spring, he believed that the Soviets should show 'creative Marxism' and not be 'the defender of yesterday'. He found few takers for these views among the 'five'. Kádár's role in the crisis can be divided into three phases. The first (January-May) established the parameters of Hungarian behaviour and Kádár's ambiguous intermediary/ soft cop role. In the second (June-July), Kádár was forced to choose where he stood and backed intervention: given his long-term political strategy of consumerism and low-intensity politics, he was never likely to take the Ceaușescu route of wrapping himself in nationalist, anti-Soviet colours. In the last phase (August 1968 and its aftermath), Kádár was a full participant in the invasion and 'normalisation' of Czechoslovakia.

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### ***Tito and the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia***

This paper will address two issues: first, Tito's response to the Prague Spring, his concerns about its negative aspects, and his response to the Soviet led invasion; second the impact the invasion had on the internal politics of Yugoslavia.

The Yugoslavs welcomed the Prague Spring, but were always aware of the potential dangers. As a commentator noted after the Soviet led invasion event: "although we may have feared such a course of developments, we never really believed it possible". Tito was convinced that in 1956 a genuine anti-Stalin movement had been hijacked by counter-revolutionaries, hence his opposition for the use of Soviet tanks in October but his support for the military intervention of November that year. Although when he visited Brezhnev in July 1968 he warned that it would be wrong "dramatise certain negative concurrent manifestations in the present changes in Czechoslovakia", when he visited Dubček on 9 August it was precisely the danger of counter-revolution that he raised. Apparently he was satisfied with Dubček's, because in his own personal statement after the invasion, Tito referred to his realisation "that they [the Czechoslovak leaders] were determined to prevent any anti-socialist elements to impede the normal growth of democracy".

Tito argued that the invasion was not just an attack on Czechoslovakia but "a significant turning point in history" with implications for "the further development of socialism in the world". This was certainly true in the Yugoslav case. In June 1968 student radicals in Belgrade occupied their campuses and established the "Karl Marx Red University"; in Zagreb

their fellows established the strangely named “Socialist University of the Seven Secretaries of the Communist Youth League”. By 1971 students in Zagreb would be demonstrating under nationalist slogans. Although in the immediate aftermath of the invasion there was a rush to join the Yugoslav League of Communists, that was quickly followed by a haemorrhage, particularly of working class members. Central to this process were the state and party reforms discussed in autumn 1968 and implemented at the 9<sup>th</sup> League Congress in March 1969.

