



## EVALUATION OF THE SOVIET UNION'S INTERVENTION IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA IN THE TURKISH PUBLIC OPINION

SOVYETLER BİRLİĞİ'NİN ÇEKOSLOVAKYA'YA MÜDAHALESİNİN TÜRK KAMUOYUNDA DEĞERLENDİRİLMESİ

Yaşar ÖZKANDAŞ



Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Bingöl Üniversitesi, Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi, Tarih Bölümü, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Tarihi, yozkandas@gmail.com

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### Abstract

When the Second World War ended, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), established dominance over the region in all its dimensions by establishing satellite governments in the East of Europe that coincided exactly with its own system in political, economic, and social terms. The Eastern European countries, which had come under the full control of the USSR, began to take steps towards producing relatively more independent policies since the 1960s. Since January 1968, Czechoslovakia, under the leadership of Alexander Dubček, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC), also moved towards socialism in a more original way in accordance with its own social dynamics. It started a reform initiative called the "Prague Spring". After Dubček's insistence on reform, the Warsaw Pact countries, except Romania, intervened militarily in Czechoslovakia under the leadership of the USSR. The CPC leadership decided not to resist this invasion carried out by the countries affiliated with the Warsaw Pact. Soviet forces going into Prague arrested CPC General Secretary Dubček and Prime Minister Cernik and took them to Moscow. After the "normalization" talks between the parties in Moscow, although CPC General Secretary Dubček said that they would not back down from the idea of "socialism, humanism, and national independence", he ultimately agreed to act in accordance with the demands of the USSR. Turkish Political thought, following the developments in Czechoslovakia. In this study, based on the prominent newspapers and magazines of the period such as Akşam, Ant, Cumhuriyet, Milliyet, Ulus, and the Turkish Left, it was aimed to examine the reflections of the events experienced in Czechoslovakia in August 1968 on Turkey's public opinion.

### Öz

İkinci Dünya Savaşı sona erdiğinde Sovyetler Sosyalist Cumhuriyetler Birliği (SSCB) Avrupa'nın doğusunda siyasi, ekonomik ve sosyal açıdan kendi sistemiyle birebir örtüşen uydu hükümetler kurarak söz konusu bölge üzerinde tüm boyutlarıyla bir hakimiyet tesis etmiştir. SSCB'nin tam denetimi altına giren Doğu Avrupa ülkeleri 1960'larla birlikte görece daha bağımsız politikalar üretmeye yönelik adımlar atmaya başlamışlardır. Çekoslovakya da Ocak 1968'den itibaren Çekoslovakya Komünist Partisi Birinci Sekreteri Alexander Dubček'in öncülüğünde kendi toplumsal dinamiklerine uygun gelecek bir biçimde sosyalizme daha özgün yollardan gitmeye yönelmiştir. "Prag Baharı" adıyla anılan bir reform sürecinin kapılarını aralamıştır. Dubček'in, reform konusunda kararlı ve ısrarlı olması üzerine de Romanya dışındaki Varşova Paktı ülkeleri, SSCB'nin önderliğinde Çekoslovakya'ya askeri müdahalede bulunmuşlardır. ÇKP yönetimi, Varşova Paktı'na bağlı ülkeler tarafından gerçekleştirilen işgale karşı direnme kararı almıştır. Prag'a giren Sovyet kuvvetleri ÇKP Genel Sekreteri Dubček ile Başbakan Cernik'i tutuklayarak Moskova'ya götürmüşlerdir. Moskova'da taraflar arasında gerçekleşen "normalleştirme" görüşmeleri sonrasında ise ÇKP Genel Sekreteri Dubček "sosyalizm, hümanizm ve ulusal bağımsızlık" düşüncesinde geri adım atmayacaklarını söylese de nihayetinde SSCB'nin talepleri doğrultusunda hareket etmeyi kabul etmiştir. Türk Siyasal düşüncesi Çekoslovakya'da yaşanan gelişmeleri yakından izlemiştir. İşte bu çalışma Akşam, Ant, Cumhuriyet, Milliyet, Ulus ile Türk Solu gibi dönemin öne çıkan gazete ve dergilerini temel alarak 1968 Ağustos'unda Çekoslovakya'da yaşananların Türkiye'deki yansımalarını izlemeyi amaçlamıştır.

## Introduction

When the Second World War, one of the most destructive wars that history has seen, ended, two marginal states compared to Europe, namely the United States of America (USA) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), whose political and economic doctrines are opposed to each other, came to the fore on the world political scene. Thus, the structure of international politics changed, and a two-structured system emerged. After the war, the United States abandoned the Monroe Doctrine and began to play an active role in world politics. The USSR, on the other hand, turned to a policy that wanted to make communism dominant in the whole world with the effect of the technological development that it had realized (Armaoğlu, 2010, p. 510-513).

After the war, the USSR gave particular importance to the Eastern European region since Germany had attacked Russia through Eastern Europe twice in history. The Soviets decided to take measures to prevent Eastern Europe from being a jumping board once again in any attack that would be launched against themselves. USSR considered the establishment of satellite governments in the countries of the region as a basic condition for its own security. With the influence of Eastern Europe's political structure, which paved the way for far-left parties after the war, the Soviets ensured the establishment of communist regimes in the region. In 1947, it made bilateral alliance agreements with most of the regional states and established the Cominform to ensure ideological integrity with these states. It strengthened its dominance in Eastern Europe by establishing Comecon as an international economic organization in January 1949. Thus, the Warsaw Pact emerged in all its dimensions (Sander, 2011, p. 234-238).

The Eastern European states, which had entered Moscow's sphere of influence immediately after the Second World War, began to take steps towards producing relatively more independent policies by the 1960s. This development had a parallel with what was happening in the economic field. Although they maintained Marxist principles, they tended to apply socialism in a more original way that fit their own social dynamics. Democratic Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, whose development had achieved very high rates at all points, began to be seen as a reaction against strict mechanisms in terms of planning and distribution of wealth. The participation of workers in the process and the softening of state controls started to stand out as serious expectations. This approach was persistently put forward, especially by intellectuals and students (Tanilli, 2019, p. 361).

Czechoslovakia, which resisted de-Stalinization until January 1968, exhibited the fourth (Faulkner, 2021, p.91) and most effective example of mass popular mobilizations against Stalinism for a period of about 8 months since that date. Nineteen years after the Prague Spring, when Mikhail Gorbachev's spokesman was asked about the gap between the Prague Spring and Gorbachev's Perestroika program, he replied "nineteen years". The reform process in Czechoslovakia, which was of such importance in the history of the Soviet bloc, was stopped on 1968, August 21 when the armed forces of the Warsaw Pact member states entered Czechoslovakia. The impact of this event on the world's public opinion was very great and shocking. China interpreted the incident as a "*downright fascist power policy*", while Yugoslavia considered it an "*illegal occupation*" and Romania considered it a "*reckless violation of national sovereignty*" (Davies, 2011, p. 1773-1774).

As in the whole world, the Turkish public also followed the developments very closely. The developments in Czechoslovakia initiated two important debates in our world of political thought. The first of these is that the discussions on Turkey's The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) membership have come up again. The second is the deepening of the difference of opinion that had been taking place in the left spectrum of politics for some time. While some consider the USSR as a hegemonic/imperialist power center like the USA, others approved of the policy followed by the USSR in the face of the "Prague Spring". This study aims to follow the reflections of the events experienced in Czechoslovakia in August 1968 on Turkish public opinion based on the prominent newspapers and magazines of the period, such as *Akşam*, *Ant*, *Cumhuriyet*, *Milliyet*, *Ulus*, and *Türk Solu*.

## **1. THE SOCIALIST OPPOSITION IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND THE WARSAW PACT**

Czechoslovakia, occupied by Germany during the Second World War, entered the military and political domination of the Soviet Union after the Red army invaded first in Slovakia on 1944, October 4, and then in Prague on 1945, May 9. Edvard Benes was elected president, and a coalition government was formed under the name of the National Front under the premiership of Communist Party leader Klement Gottwald (Altuğ, 1994, p.10-11). At first, the National Front government achieved a very harmonious and balanced pace of work. However, when the United States invited Czechoslovakia to join the Marshall Plan in June 1947, the government faced a serious crisis. The government announced at the first moment that it had accepted this invitation. But a few days later, when Stalin considered Czechoslovakia's

participation in the Marshall Plan as a hostile approach, the Government backed down. Twelve ministers resigned to protest this attitude of the government. Benes accepted both the resignations and the new list presented to him by Gottwald. Finally, a new constitution was made on 1948, May 9, and “People’s Democracy” was declared. Benes opposed some articles of the constitution and resigned on June 7 (Güvenç, 1986, p. 574-575).

After the resignation of Benes, Gottwald assumed the post of head of state. Antonin Zapotcky, the trade union leader, became prime minister, while the General Secretary of the Communist Party became deputy prime minister. Meanwhile, it was decided that against the Marshall Plan, Czechoslovakia would become a member of COMECON (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance). After Gottwald’s death in March 1953, Zapotcky was appointed head of state. Siroky assumed the post of prime minister, while Novotny assumed the post of the party general secretary. With these assignments in question, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia displayed a Stalinist attitude. The erection of a giant statue of Stalin in Prague on 1955, May 1 was one of the most important indicators of this attitude. Moreover, the conservative tendency of the party became even stronger when Novotny was elected head of state after Zapotcky’s death in 1957. Meanwhile, the name of the country was determined as the “Czechoslovak Soviet Socialist Republic” by a new constitution made in 1960 (Güvenç, 1986, p. 577).

While these developments were taking place in the political arena, the national economy did not grow as expected, on the contrary, it faced serious problems. Economists, sociologists, and lawyers came together to evaluate the causes of this situation. The most important of these groups was formed around Professor Oto Sik. As a result of the studies carried out, decisions foreseeing taking steps in the direction of private ownership and free enterprise were taken. Although these decisions were very limited, they became the touchstone of the conflict between the groups that insisted on their implementation and the party and state apparatus that opposed these decision (Pelikan, 1984, p. 22). The proposals raised by Professor Oto Sik and those around him were accepted at the 13<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, held between 1966, May 31 and June 4. Accordingly, it was decided to switch from a centralized system in which production was planned down to all details and shaped by heavy industry to a new Socialist economic model in which productivity would be increased by technological development and competition. This

situation deepened the difference of opinion within the party (Güvenç, 1986, p. 579-580).

The tension between those who thought that the reforms should be continued decisively and those who wanted them to be stopped reached the highest point at the 4<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union, held on 1967, June 27-29, in Prague. With a resolution adopted by the Congress, the abolition of all kinds of censorship on the press and publication was demanded. This demand was reported to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia by a letter. This demand of the Congress brought Novotny, the First General Secretary and Head of State of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, and his entourage, who acted with a conservative approach, against the reformists. After that, reformist economists and pro-freedom writers began to gather around Alexander Dubček, a member of the Presidium of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (Armaoğlu, 2010, p. 510-513).

Dubček, who assumed the leadership of the opposition, defined his political line, which brought structural changes to the agenda that would enable the emergence of a socialist democratic society by taking into account the conditions of the country instead of a bureaucratic-centralized system, with the concept of "socialism with a human face". On the other hand, Novotny, who was positioned opposite Dubček, advocated strengthening the party monopoly and claimed that the crisis was caused by going outside the party discipline. During this process, Novotny faced rising opposition to him within the party on the one hand, and on the other hand, he lost the support of Leonid Brezhnev, the leader of the USSR. Finally, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC) separated the top two institutions on January 5, 1968, and appointed Dubček as the General Secretary of the CPC, and they decided that Novotny should continue his duty only as Head of State (Pelikan, 1984, p. 26-27).

Together with this development, which Moscow was following carefully and greeted with concern that is, with Dubček's CCP General Secretariat, Czechoslovakia faced a serious change (Paul, 1971, Vol.15, No. 2 p. 169). On 1968, April 4, the names in Novotny's working team were suspended from office, while Oldrich Cernik, who was close to Dubček, was appointed prime minister, and Ota Sik and Gustav Husak were appointed deputy prime ministers. Following these developments, Novotny resigned from the head of state (Altuğ, 1994, p.10-11). With Novotny's resignation, suspicions that the change of government in Czechoslovakia and the reforms on the agenda meant moving away from socialism and the alliance also began to gain weight.

Dubček, on the one hand, tried to assure the Warsaw Pact member countries that Czechoslovakia's commitment to socialism was unshakeable, on the other hand, he said that they were in an attitude towards the establishment of a democratic socialist society. He explained this approach style with the following sentence: "*We are creating a new model of political regime in the socialist society. This model differs greatly in essence from the old centralized and bureaucratic regime*" (Dubček, 1968, p. 32-33).

Meanwhile, Prague newspapers published a '2000 Words' declaration written by the novelist Ludvik Vaculik and signed by about 20 intellectuals on 1968, 27 June. The declaration called for the pressing of the masses into service to ensure the realization of reforms. The recommendation of a popular movement for the implementation of reforms received a reaction from Dubček and his entourage, as it would complicate the CPC's situation against the USSR. Referring to the declaration, Dubček said that he was "*against demagoguery, no matter from which direction it comes*". However, Moscow's pressure on the CPC began to intensify. In addition to the maneuvers of Soviet troops that began in Czechoslovakia at the end of June, USSR president Brezhnev said in a statement made on 1968, July 3 "*we cannot be indifferent to the fate of socialism in another country*". While the newspaper Pravda described the situation in Czechoslovakia as an "effort to restore capitalism", all five members of the Warsaw Pact also declared in a letter written to the CPC on July 14 that the developments in Czechoslovakia "*threaten the common vital interests of socialist countries*" (Güvenç, 1986, p. 577). In response to the letter, Dubček said that they would continue to make the changes necessary for the establishment of a democratic and socialist society. Then, Bulgaria, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and the USSR, which signed the Warsaw letter, met with Czechoslovakia in Bratislava. In the statement published by the participants of this meeting, it was emphasized that the protection of socialism is the priority task of all countries and that the Communist Parties should cooperate within the framework of respect for sovereign rights (Altuğ, 1994, p. 30-31).

While Dubček emphasized that no secret agreements were made in Bratislava, he positively evaluated the statement that came out of the meeting. After this meeting, the CPC continued to signal on every platform that it would continue to take steps in the direction of libertarian policies. This optimistic approach also reached its highest point when Marshal Tito, the President of Yugoslavia, and Ceausescu, the President of Romania, gave a clear support to Prague in Bratislava. The CPC leaders did not foresee that the USSR would make any intervention. However, on 1968, August 20-

21, the troops of the USSR, Poland, East Germany, Hungary, and Bulgaria affiliated with the Warsaw Pact began to invade Czechoslovakia. The CPC leadership decided not to resist the invasion because they were afraid of the example of Hungary. On the same day, Soviet forces entered Prague and arrested the General Secretary of the CPC Dubček and Prime Minister Cernik and took them to Moscow. After the “*normalization*” talks between the parties in Moscow, Dubček, Secretary General of CPC, said that they would not back down from the idea of “socialism, humanism, and national independence”, but ultimately agreed to act in accordance with the demands of the USSR (Güvenç, 1986, p. 586-587).

## **2.THE APPROACH OF PUBLIC OPINION TO THE CZECHOSLOVAKIA PROBLEM**

Turkey met the end of the 1960s with a rapidly changing political system and social structure. Because small businesses became unable to compete with new and large sectors that received government support, millions of people who made their living through these businesses had to face a serious economic crisis. Politically, the reaction of these sections was to withdraw their support from the Justice Party (JP) and turn to small parties on the right (Ahmad, 1987, p. 1997). On the other hand, the concept of “extra-parliamentary opposition” became widespread among the left movements that came to prominence with the demand for social justice, and groups that did not receive the votes they wanted from the masses turned to seek power by fundamentalist methods. In the face of this development, the right-wing parties also adopted a radical method of struggle against the left, which they defined by expanding it to include the Republican People’s Party (RPP) (Çavdar, 2013, p. 159-160).

During this period, when political tension had risen in an extraordinary way, public opinion also tried to follow the developments in Czechoslovakia very carefully. Milliyet newspaper which was one of the most important newspapers published in Turkey during the period in question and had a wide staff of writers consisting of names such as Mumtaz Soysal, Ismail Cem, and Metin Toker, had come to the fore as one of the newspapers that followed and discussed the process in the most comprehensive manner (Topuz, 2003, p. 242). Editor-in-Chief and editorial writer Abdi Ipekçi compared the Soviet Union’s attempt to damage the independence of a state in Eastern Europe to the U.S. presence in Vietnam and assessed both situations as an imperialist initiative. He wrote that with this war waged by the Soviets against Czechoslovakia, it had lost the chance to both “lead the war against American imperialism” and encouraged the United States to take similar initiatives as in

Vietnam. İpekci, who defended that although the attempt to establish a Western-style democracy in Czechoslovakia was likely to have harmful consequences “*for the communist bloc*”, the aggressive attitude of the Soviet Union would have more destructive consequences for communism, stated that with this policy put forward by the USSR, it would strengthen the claims that “*communism is based on totalitarianism, not democracy*” (İpekçi, 1968, August 22). In addition to these two issues mentioned, İpekci, who believed that the USSR would not be able to achieve a positive result in Czechoslovakia under pressure but would also have serious problems with other socialist countries of Eastern Europe, suggested that such a development would lead to more critical and more shocking consequences for the Warsaw Pact (İpekçi, 1968, August 27).

Aydın Yalçın, who opposed the Democrat Party (DP) because of his membership in the Forum magazine and the Freedom Party (FP), was arrested after the 1960 military coup because of his approval of DP politics, was a founding member of the Öncü newspaper and the New Turkey Party (NTP), and exhibited a liberal stance in the ranks of the Justice Party (JP) (Coşar, 2018, p. 398), also evaluated the developments in Czechoslovakia from the same perspective. Yalçın first of all underlined the political and economic differences between the countries of the Eastern Bloc and the countries of Western Europe and emphasized that the superiority and success of the West are indisputable. Then, he also touched on the difference between the way socialist movements in Western Europe rendered Marxism and the system applied in the Soviet Bloc. He argued that as long as the Soviet Union was determined to produce its domestic and foreign policy under the shadow of Stalinism, the difference between it and Western communism would be getting bigger. He stated that after the invasion of Czechoslovakia, which took place as if recalling Stalin’s era, the development of Western communism would accelerate “*in a direction that cuts off the revolutionary aspects of the doctrine that tries to adapt socialism to the parliamentary order and takes on a revisionist color in full*”, as the French and Italian Communist parties were trying to do (Yalçın, 1968).

Prof. Tarık Zafer Tunaya (dean of the Faculty of Law of Istanbul University) and Prof. Dr. Nermin Abadan Unat (a faculty member of the Faculty of Political Sciences of Ankara University), who wrote serious texts both in the context of understanding and analyzing the period in question and who were cared for by faculty members, stood out as two names who made important determinations about the policy of the Soviet Union in Czechoslovakia. According to Tunaya, the USSR pursued an



unsuccessful policy of “*self-denying, such as being able to bring humanity to prosperity through a system of exploitation*” by failing to take into account the local and national conditions of the societies under its guidance. It proved that an imperialist policy could be created from Leninism and showed that imperialism and colonialism could come not only from the West but also from the East (Tunaya, 1968).

It can be said that Nermin Abadan Unat was an intellectual who made the most advanced determinations about the Czechoslovakia problem during that process. Unat who participated in seminars at the University of Freiburg on the purposes and values of NATO during the period in question and participated in events organized by former American Secretary of State Henry Kissinger as a Harvard University faculty member, (Unat, 2021, p. 220), used his impressions there in his analyses on the subject. According to Unat, due to the fact that Soviet Russia resorted to “*brute force, the traditional weapon, in order to impose its leadership among the communist states*”, predictions that the militant aspects of Marxism –Leninism would undergo an “*increasing erosion*” during the period in question and in the decade after, and reports that the USSR would show more tolerance towards the “*liberalization and protest movements*” that would arise because of the developing social and economic relations in Eastern European countries remained quite marginal. She showed that hopes related to the fact that the Warsaw Pact and the North Atlantic Defense organization would be replaced by a “*common European Defense System*” and thoughts that a Europe independent of NATO could be created under the leadership of De Gaulle, who “*decided not to have NATO-affiliated military units in his country*”, were doomed to be forgotten for a long time (Abadan, 1968).

The Soviet Union’s move to establish broader sovereignty over Czechoslovakia once again brought the assessments confirming Turkey’s NATO membership and its official pro-Western policy to the agenda. Metin Toker stated that with the invasion of Prague, the Warsaw Pact’s “*defense capability*” disappeared, and he suggested that it is an aggressive alliance system “*against the liberalization and democratization currents*” emerging around the USSR. Based on this determination, he argued that discussions on NATO in NATO member countries should be conducted more carefully (Toker, 1968). Orhan Aldıkaçtı, professor of constitutional law, stated that those who declared that Turkey should leave NATO membership by claiming that Stalin’s Russia “*did not adopt the wishes of the new leader regarding the Straits and our Eastern provinces*” should make “*new assessments*” after the developments in Czechoslovakia (Aldıkaçtı, 1968). Fikret Ekinçi, who tried to analyze the events in Czechoslovakia

from the point of view of Turkey, also put forward a similar thought. First of all, he stated that “*the Soviets and four puppet states, which are colonies of it,*” had committed a great “*murder*” in Czechoslovakia, (Ekinici, Ulus, 25 Ağustos 1968, p.2) and emphasized that the Soviet foreign policy coincided with Wed Russia’s “*policy of oppression, which it resorted to against all forms of social, economic and political change*” (Ekinici, 1968, August 30). Then, by implying that those who advocate a neutral Turkish foreign policy other than NATO membership are in a misjudgment, he claimed that “*Turkey would face what Czechoslovakia had experienced*” if it left NATO. In addition, he called on social democratic segments that wanted to accelerate and deepen the leftward turn in Turkish domestic politics to carefully evaluate the process that resulted in the invasion of Czechoslovakia and to take a more distant attitude towards socialist ideologies (Ekinici, 1968, September 1).

In contrast to these approaches, which considered Turkey’s becoming a part of the Western alliance as a dynamic that would eliminate the Soviet threat and considered the left other than the RPP as a serious threat to the country’s independence, socialist movements in Turkey shaped their discourse within the framework of the idea of national liberation, which included political and economic independence, in the 1960s. In this context, while they were constantly pointing out that the anti-American and Western European reactions should turn into an anti-imperialist line of struggle that includes economics and politics, (Atılğan, 2008, p. 176-181) they were also in a sensitive approach to the Soviet Union in terms of independence (Atılğan, 2007, p. 679).

In this context, the RPP, which stood out by claiming to represent the left that was outside of Socialism, took a position criticizing the Warsaw Pact in the face of the invasion of Czechoslovakia. RPP Secretary General Bulent Ecevit stated that in Czechoslovakia, the struggle was for the establishment of a “*libertarian regime*” and assessed the Soviet-led movement as an “*attack on the independence*” of Czechoslovakia. He also underlined that this attitude of the Soviets was a serious threat to the independence of nations and the ability of humanity to live and progress freely and stated that the military forces should withdraw from Czechoslovakia as soon as possible (Ulus, 1968, August 22).

A significant part of the non-RPP left-wing movement in the 1960s, which produced politics on the axis of the idea of national liberation, which included political and economic independence, did not hesitate to harshly criticize Soviet Russia’s move to establish political and military sovereignty over Czechoslovakia. The

sharpest criticism of the Soviet invasion was made by sections accused of being pacifists by the youth, Mihri Belli, and the Turkish Left (Akın, 2014, p. 95).

Mehmet Ali Aybar, who was the Chairman of the Turkish Labour Party (TLP), highlighted the concept of freedom as the main goal of socialism throughout his political struggle and made this concept the starting point of his critical attitude towards Soviet socialism (Özman, 2014, p. 383), came to the fore as one of the figures who criticized the occupation of Czechoslovakia in the sharpest terms. Aybar, who was in search of paving the way for a socialist and democratic socialist regime “*jealously attached*” to national independence in Turkey (Aybar, 1968, p. 481) condemned the stopping of Czechoslovakia’s attempt to establish an original socialist administration based on its own terms by a military intervention targeting Prague with the words “*the habit of the cruel big state acting by top-down methods*”. He accused the Soviet government, acting “*based on the criteria of Stalin’s time*”, of preparing negative developments that would benefit American imperialism (Selçuk, 1968, August 22).

In his assessments made immediately after the events in Czechoslovakia, Aybar suggested that it had become a necessity to reconsider Turkey’s foreign policy preference and argued that approaches that attached vital importance to NATO membership would leave Turkey facing more serious problems. He noted that military alliances built around the concept of common defense are the most important instruments of “*American imperialism*” or “*Soviet domination*” and stated that Turkey should leave NATO membership as soon as possible within the framework of the principle of “*full respect for national independence and sovereignty rights*” and terminate bilateral agreements. He emphasized that if the Justice Party (JP) government did not follow an independentist and anti-imperialist political line, a similar development as that experienced in Greece or Czechoslovakia could happen in Turkey as well (Kemal, 1968).

Like Mehmet Ali Aybar, Çetin Altan, who was another deputy of the party, sharply criticized the fact that the reform movement in Czechoslovakia was stopped by the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact member states. He wrote that although the Soviets had a significant power determining the axis of the socialist movement in the world, they did not adopt the “*principles of socialist action aimed at great freedoms*” and therefore dealt socialism “*blows too heavy to pay*” (Altan, 1968, August 23). In another assessment related to the issue, Altan subjected Soviet Socialism to a more comprehensive criticism independent of the developments in Czechoslovakia. In other

words, he criticized the system. He considered Soviet practice as a whole of practices in which exploitation continues interminably as a result of the irreconcilability between Marxist and Leninist theories, and the establishment of a liberal and democratic socialist regime was prevented. He stated that due to the incompatibility of Marxist – Leninist theory, “*the diktat of the working class had turned into a diktat of the party, and the diktat of the party had turned into a diktat of the party managers*”, and he wrote that this situation, together with the articulation of the propaganda of capitalism, prevented socialist development (Altan, 1968, August 25). Altan, who believed that the liberation of socialist values from the Soviet mortgage was the most serious issue facing the socialist world, considered the reform process attempted under Dubček’s administration as a milestone that would “*bring great innovations and changes*” for the establishment of socialist democracy (Altan, 1968, August 24).

Behice Boran, who was appointed to the ministerial order in 1945 with Niyazi Berkes, Mediha Berkes, and Pertev Naili Boratav while she was serving as an associate professor in the Philosophy Department of the Faculty of Language and History-Geography of Ankara University, was later dismissed from the teaching staff, and served as a TLP deputy in the National Assembly from 1965 to 1969 (Kayalı, 2009, p. 155-156) took a critical attitude towards the USSR in his first assessment of the Czechoslovakian problem. According to Boran, Soviet Socialism get into a wrong practice because it did not adequately grasp the “stage of working-class dictatorship” that Marx and Engels foresaw for the transition to socialist democracy. The concept of the “dictatorship of the working class” in the Soviet Union took the form of the “imperious, arbitrary rule” of the party and even later only of the party administration. The Soviet government, with a Stalinist approach, considered the practice in its own country as an exemplary prototype of the socialist order. Due to this dogmatic point of view, it evaluated the reformist dynamics in Czechoslovakia as a process of “liberalization”, and with an unfair intervention that it could not foresee the consequences of it, ignored the principle of “national independence and equality”. However, the demands for freedom rising in the Socialist Bloc countries were not caused by liberal grounds, but by a humanistic approach that expresses the “*peak point*” of the socialist view, such as “*freedom of the person, respect for the human personality, participation of the people in state administration*” (Boran, 1968).

The attitude that Boran and Aybar developed towards the invasion of Czechoslovakia, even though they seemed to overlap at first, brought to light the disagreement that has been going on for some time in the TLP (Atılgan, 2007, p. 384).

In later years, Boran made a self-criticism of his views in Milliyet newspaper dated August 27, 1968, by stating “*I was wrong in diagnosing the solid elements in the Czechoslovakia incident*”. She emphasized that the rapid recovery of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from the depression it was in after the events in Czechoslovakia proved the “*lack of accuracy*” in his views and comments. Later, she stated that his own attitude and Aybar’s attitude were not identical from the very beginning and emphasized that the Czechoslovakian issue had created a serious intellectual division in the TIP ranks. She argued that while his own sentences were “*an assessment and criticism of the situation*”, Aybar’s analyses were the expression of an Anti-Soviet approach. She also stated that an Anti-Soviet attitude lies behind Aybar’s use of the concept of “*friendly socialism*”. She claimed that this approach harmed the working-class movement and Turkish-Soviet relations while it pleased the Western Bloc (Mumcu, 2019, p. 58-59).

Yaşar Kemal, who published articles on the political development process of Turkey in Ant magazine, which had a strong connection with the TLP and supported TLP as an action and ideology (Landau, 1978, p. 98), criticized the Soviet Union’s policy towards Czechoslovakia with a more cautious style from the first moment, unlike Boran. Kemal, who stated that Czechoslovakia was entering the liberalization process in its own socialist world, wrote that the Soviet Union, which supported all the independence wars waged against imperialism and therefore provided serious prestige, should not have invaded Czechoslovakia, even if it was “*for a just cause*”. He stated that the policy followed by the Soviets caused great damage to the phenomenon of independence, which forms the axis of socialist thought, and emphasized that with its aggressive attitude towards Czechoslovakia, he positioned himself in the face of “*progressive forces fighting for independence all over the world, fighting for the socialist order*” (Kemal, 1968).

Like Yaşar Kemal, Doğan Özgüden, the editor-in-chief of Ant Magazine, also took a distant approach to the reform process that developed under the administration of CPC Secretary General Dubček. Özgüden stated that first of all, if the economic policy that was started to be implemented by the Dubček administration failed, the possibility of Czechoslovakia getting closer to the western system like Yugoslavia and Romania should not be ignored and considered the reform process in Czechoslovakia as a “*movement of liberalization*”. On the other hand, he also did not refrain from writing that the policy pursued by the Kremlin, which “*could not save itself from the conservatism of the Stalin era*”, contradicted the principle of “*national independence*”

*and non-interference in internal affairs*”, which is the essence of socialism (Özgüden, 1968).

In addition to the TLP circle that takes care to keep the distance between Kemalist ideologues, İlhan Selçuk, who prefers to read Kemalism with a leftist tendency, evaluated the developments in Czechoslovakia by making a special emphasis on the concept of independence. In an article published in Cumhuriyet newspaper on August 22, Selçuk stated that the Warsaw Pact was an instrument that “*registered Czechoslovakia’s characteristic to be a satellite and facilitated its occupation*” more than being an apparatus to protect it from external threats, and he considered the coup carried out by the Soviets against Dubček's administration as a “heinous rape”. He suggested that with this initiative, the USSR met on the same ground as the United States, which was an “aggressive state”. He argued that the Soviet power, on the one hand, seriously undermined the principle of full independence of nations, while on the other hand, it would strengthen the tendencies that adopted acting with the Western World and especially the United States in countries such as Turkey (Selçuk, 1968, August 22).

After the USSR’s attack on Czechoslovakia, İlhan Selçuk, who defined the most important issue of Turkish political life as the inability to establish an independent and national foreign policy in all its aspects, also criticized the bilateral agreements between the United States and Turkey and the approaches that advocated NATO membership with a louder voice in a fundamentalist manner. He stated that the unequal relations established with both the Western and Eastern blocs would undermine Turkey’s independence and argued that strategies wedged between NATO and the Warsaw Pact can never be a way out. He defended that Turkey, as the “*Republic of Atatürk*”, should follow a fully independent political line without “*being a Washington satellite like the Philippines or a Moscow satellite like East Germany*” (Selçuk, 1968, August 23).

While a significant part of the prominent left intellectuals of the period criticized the policy of the USSR in Czechoslovakia by evaluating it as a continuation of the practices of the Stalin era, another part tended to approve of the Soviet intervention by considering the reformist steps of Alexander Dubček as counterrevolutionary and revisionist. These approaches in question exhibited a character that was similar and exactly coincided with the thoughts of Fidel Castro, who sincerely supported the invasion. In the days when the Soviets moved to end the Prague Spring, Castro said,

“The Czechoslovak regime was drifting inexorably towards capitalism and imperialism. We did not have the slightest doubt about it” (Castro, 1969, p. 17).

Unlike the intellectuals/politicians of TLP, it is possible to find a side coinciding with Castro’s assessment in the thoughts of Sadun Aren, who explained his thoughts about the Czechoslovakian problem in his memoir book called “*From Behind a Misty Glass*” after a long time passed over the issue. In his assessment, Aren was in harmony with Behice Boran’s thoughts which were in agreement with the reaction of the Soviets instead of his approach criticizing the attitude of Soviet Russia as an occupier. Aren interpreted the Prague Spring as a step to away from the socialist world and supported the entry of the Warsaw Pact armies into Prague with the following statements):

Czechoslovakia was already on the socialist front. It was moving to the other side, but its owners did not let it go. To oppose the taking back of Czechoslovakia, to say that socialists would not do such a thing is not to understand the issue. I think of the occupation of Czechoslovakia as a necessity of the cold war. Of course, there is no invasion of an independent country in the logic of socialism, but in such a world, it is unthinkable for a country that breaks away from socialism to remain independent; it will move to the opposite camp. Therefore, I think the occupation of Czechoslovakia is a necessity of war. It is the necessity of the war between socialism and capitalism. This should not be evaluated with socialist morality or anything like that. Of course, when socialism and capitalism clash on a global scale and the rules become clear, details and originality are erased. Imagine that you are fighting on a front line; no matter how original a man you are, you will act like the man next to you. Perhaps, it is necessary to think about socialist morality if something is done that is contrary to socialism after the whole world has become socialist (Aren, 2006, p. 161, 162).

Mihri Belli and the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) circle, who were influential on the Turkish thought life of the period, criticized the Czechoslovak reform and supported the political line followed by the USSR in a way that left no room for discussion. Türk Solu ( The Turkish Left) magazine said that the movement represented by the Dubček group could not be defined as a new movement called “Reform in Socialism” and considered this movement as a capitalist initiative trying to destroy the basic principles of socialism. While based on the developments in Czechoslovakia, the authors of this magazine emphasized that Turkish socialism

should avoid assessments that coincided with NATO's theses and contradicted the Warsaw Pact, they stated that it should "cling more tightly to the basic principles of socialism". They emphasized that if the Czechoslovakian problem is evaluated from the perspective of Western European countries, it would bring serious problems in terms of the struggle for the realization of the "*National Democratic Revolution*" (Çekoslovakya - Cevaplandırılması, 1968).

### **Conclusion**

At the end of the 1960s, the intervention of the Soviet Bloc against Czechoslovakia opened the door for an intense discussion in the political thought life of Turkey, which would also be discussed a lot in later years. Two different approaches came to the fore in the discussions. The first of these was adopted by the right wing of the political spectrum. While this approach condemned the Czechoslovakian policy of the USSR with fundamentalist statements, it considered Turkey's NATO membership as a prerequisite for ensuring the country's security. The proponents of this approach emphasized that the Soviet threat should be taken more seriously and defended that Turkey should continue to cooperate with Western European countries in the international system.

The second approach, which came to the fore in the discussions, was adopted by the left movements. The RPP, which stood out for its claim to represent the left that was outside of socialism and defined its political line as the "*left of the middle*", evaluated the developments in Czechoslovakia with an approach that coincided with the right political line and Turkey's traditional foreign policy perspective. However, the wing of the left other than the RPP approached the issue from different perspectives. The separation and division that the left was in were further embodied with the issue of Czechoslovakia. One front of the left movement focused on the problem in Czechoslovakia by emphasizing the concept of full independence. While harshly criticizing the Warsaw Pact member countries for blocking the reform movement in Czechoslovakia, they also stated that Turkey's NATO membership should be reviewed. Although another faction within the left took a critical attitude toward the USSR or remained silent at first, it adopted an approach approving Soviet policy in later years. The representatives of this faction accused the statements condemning the invasion with making propaganda of an anti-Soviet ideology. In addition to these two approaches, an intellectual approach that considered the reformist steps of Dubček's group as a betrayal of the socialist camp and obviously supported the Soviet invasion, manifested itself within the left movement.



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### Summary

When the Second World War, one of the most devastating wars in human history, ended, the world map began to exhibit a bipolar appearance around the United States of America (USA) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), whose political and social systems were diametrically opposed to each other. The European States, which emerged from the war with a great destruction in terms of political and socio-economic, gathered around these two hegemonic powers. After the war, the USSR began to take a close interest in the region in question in order to prevent Eastern Europe from once again being used as a stepping stone for an attack to be launched against it. In this context, it established dominance over the region in all its dimensions by establishing satellite governments in the East of Europe that coincided exactly with its own system in political, economic, and social terms. The Eastern European countries, which had come under the full control of the USSR, began to take steps towards producing relatively more independent policies since the 1960s. Since January 1968, Czechoslovakia, under the leadership of Alexander Dubcek, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC), also moved towards socialism in a more original way in accordance with its own social dynamics. It started a reform initiative called the "Prague Spring". This initiative of Czechoslovakia faced a harsh reaction from the USSR. After Dubcek's insistence on reform, the Warsaw Pact countries, except Romania, intervened militarily in Czechoslovakia under the leadership of the USSR. The CPC leadership decided not to resist this invasion carried out by the countries affiliated with the Warsaw Pact. Soviet forces going into Prague arrested CPC General Secretary Dubcek and Prime Minister Cernik and took them to Moscow. After the "normalization" talks between the parties in Moscow, although CPC General Secretary Dubcek said that they would not back down from the idea of "socialism, humanism, and national independence", he ultimately agreed to act in accordance with the demands of the USSR.

Turkish Political thought, following the developments in Czechoslovakia very closely and excitedly, approached the issue from two different perspectives. One of these perspectives criticized the Warsaw Pact member countries for blocking the reform movement in Czechoslovakia. They compared the Soviet Union's attempt to damage the independence of a state in Eastern Europe to the U.S. presence in Vietnam and assessed both situations as an imperialist initiative. According to Ipekçi, this war waged by the Soviets against Czechoslovakia, it had lost the chance to both "lead the war against American imperialism" and encouraged the United States to take similar initiatives as in Vietnam. The RPP, which stood out by claiming to represent the left that was outside of Socialism, took a position criticizing the Warsaw Pact in the face of the invasion of Czechoslovakia. RPP Secretary General Bulent Ecevit stated that in Czechoslovakia, the struggle was for the establishment of a "libertarian regime" and assessed the Soviet-led movement as an "attack on the independence" of Czechoslovakia. Mehmet Ali Aybar, who was in search of paving the way for a socialist and democratic socialist regime "jealously attached" to national independence in Turkey, condemned the stopping of Czechoslovakia's attempt to establish an original socialist administration based on its own terms by a military intervention targeting Prague with the words "the habit of the cruel big state acting by top-down methods". Like Mehmet Ali Aybar, Çetin Altan, who was another deputy of the TLP sharply criticized the fact that the reform movement in Czechoslovakia was stopped by the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact member states. İlhan Selçuk suggested that with this initiative, the USSR met on the same ground as the United States, which was an "aggressive state". He argued that the Soviet power, on the one hand, seriously undermined the principle of full independence of nations, while on the other hand, it would strengthen the tendencies that adopted acting with the Western World and especially the United States in countries such as Turkey. Although another faction within the left took a critical attitude toward the USSR or remained silent at first, it adopted an approach approving Soviet policy in later years. Mihri Belli and the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) circle, who were influential on the Turkish thought life of the period, criticized the Czechoslovak reform and supported the political line followed by the USSR in a way that left no room for discussion. The Turkish Left magazine said that the movement

represented by the Dubček group could not be defined as a new movement called “*Reform in Socialism*” and considered this movement as a capitalist initiative trying to destroy the basic principles of socialism.