THE EXPERIENCE OF CZECH-SLOVAK DIPLOMATIC COOPERATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION OF UKRAINE

Abstract. The contemporary history of the Czech Republic’s and the Slovak Republic’s formation as independent European states has a meaningful specificity, compared to other Central European countries and post-Soviet states. First, in the early 1990s, against the backdrop of the former socialist federations’ «balkanization», the Czech and Slovak peoples and their political elites demonstrated the possibility of a civilized, peaceful and evolutionary self-dissolution of the Czech-Slovak federative union and the declaration of independence by the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. Second, the cessation of the Czech-Slovak federative union and the declaration of independence by Czechia and Slovakia took place on the basis and within the framework of the existing constitutional norms and laws. And thirdly, when still in the federation, the Czech and Slovak parties were in advance preparing conditions for the full functioning of national statehood from the first days of independence of the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic and the legal and contractual basis for their further close inter-state cooperation.

Keywords: Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, diplomatic cooperation, EU, NATO, European integration of Ukraine.

Definition of research problem and its justification. The proposed study examines the specific features of establishing and developing diplomatic, good-neighbourly relations and the strategic partnership between the new independent actors – the Czech Republic (the Czech Republic) and the Slovak Republic (SR), which have gained independence through an agreed, concerted and peaceful cessation of the Czech-Slovak Federation, the experience that is specific in the contemporary history of the European countries. As is constantly emphasized by the state-political leaders of both countries, Czechia and Slovakia have established and maintain «unique» interstate relations between themselves.

The experience of establishing and developing diplomatic cooperation between the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, which proclaimed national-state independence on January 1, 1993, is of utmost importance for Ukraine. It represents a vivid example of the close interaction of two sovereign countries created by a civilized peaceful way.
Analysis of recent research. Some aspects of the subject under research are highlighted in the publications of Ukrainian historians S.Vidniansky, T.Gerasimchuk, L.Kitsyly, D.Moroz, S.Motruk, T.Sergienko and others devoted to modern history, systematic post-socialist transformation, foreign policy, European and transatlantic integration of the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. An interdisciplinary fundamental approach to the theory and practice of Czech-Slovak relations is inherent in the work of the most reputable Czech political scientist-internantionalist Oscar Craichy. As to their theoretical depth, the factorial saturation, quality of analysis and the reliability of the generalizations and conclusions in studying international relations and interstate relations between the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, the works by the famous Slovakian political scientist-internantionalist Alexander Duleba are not inferior to those of the mentioned Czech scientist.

Purpose and tasks. The research aims to reveal the specific features of the process of shaping diplomatic cooperation between the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, the main directions of the interstate relations of the CR and the SR, and to determine the role of Czech-Slovak cooperation in the context of European aspirations of Ukraine.

Main material presentation. Since the beginning of 1993, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic have de jure deployed a comprehensive system of good neighbourly interstate relations as new independent and sovereign European states. However, the work, previously carried out and agreed between the Czech Republic and Slovakia, especially during the second half of 1992, in order to create a contractual basis and the mechanism of Czech-Slovak intergovernmental relations and the institutionalization of mixed bilateral structures, allowed developing cooperation in the political, economic, social, cultural, humanitarian and other fields from the first days of independence, without significant problems and difficulties.

Non-formalized non-governmental elements and structures of the two countries – social movements, organizations and associations, the Czech national minority in the Slovak Republic and Slovak one in the Czech Republic, their cultural-national societies, family and human contacts, etc. – played a significant role in the continuity of the Czech-Slovak relations’ evolution. The development of equal and good-neighbourly relations was facilitated by the historical, ethnic, cultural-spiritual and direct territorial vicinity of the Czech and Slovak peoples. All this confirms the appropriateness of the growing importance of not only the states, but also the broad circles of the public in modern international relations, which is a clear indication of their democratization.

However, without diminishing the importance of the non-governmental socio-political structures in developing the contemporary relations between the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, the primary subject of research, from scientific-theoretical and pragmatic-applied viewpoint, is the interaction of state structures and institutions. The close cooperation between the two countries in the foreign policy has become the central element or the core of such a modern system of Czech-Slovak intergovernmental cooperation during the 1990’s and the beginning of the 2000’s. It included a permanent political dialogue at the highest state level, a coherent coordination of foreign policy steps in the international arena, especially in the primary direction – the accession of the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic into pan-European and transatlantic structures.

The foreign policy cooperation of the independent Czechia and Slovakia, as it should be objectively admitted, has not always followed an upward trend during the studied period. It was characterized not only by the periods of rise, but also by the decline in the activity of bilateral relations, especially in the 1990s.

The present study examines the specific features of the unique for Europe’s contemporary history experience of the emergence and development of good-neighbourly relations and the strategic partnership between the newly independent states – the Czech Republic (CR) and the Slovak Republic (SR), which have become independent by means of an agreed, contractual and peaceful cessation (self-dissolution) of the Czech-Slovak federation in the early 1990’s. As the state-political leaders of both countries constantly emphasize Czechia and Slovakia, have established and maintain «super-standard» interstate relations among themselves.

The experience of establishing and developing diplomatic cooperation between the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, which proclaimed their national-state independence on January 1, 1993, is extremely important for Ukraine. It represents a vivid example of the close interaction of two sovereign countries created by a civilized peaceful way from the former united federal state.
The CR and the SR belong to the group of post-socialist countries that have achieved the greatest success in the systemic socio-political transformation of the post-socialist transition period of the 1990s – early 2000s. Since May 1, 2004, the CR and the SR have become full members of the European Union. In 1999, the CR, together with the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Hungary, was admitted to NATO. Slovakia became a member of the North Atlantic Alliance in 2004. Solidarity and diplomatic mutual support played a very important role in implementing strategic all-European and Euro-Atlantic integration plans of the CR and the SR. Permanent consultations, coordination of positions and coordination of steps in the international arena provided, for example, the simultaneous accession of the CR and the SR to the EU. And for SR, targeted support from Czechia and other states of the region – NATO members, has become almost crucial in accelerating the country’s accession to the transatlantic bloc.

The system of bilateral interstate cooperation between the CR and the SR in the period of 1990 – 2005 proved its efficiency and stability. The close interaction between the CR and the SR resulted in the accession of these post-socialist states into pan-European and Euro-Atlantic structures. Czech-Slovak cooperation remains the main platform for coordinating the actions of the two new Central European EU members and within the framework of the enlarged European community. In general, for the years of its existence the Czech-Slovak intergovernmental cooperation has become a significant, integral part of the new security architecture in the region of Central Europe and the European continent as a whole.

In the context of implementing the priority European choice of Ukraine, the study of the cooperation experience between the CR and the SR is relevant and extremely important from scientific, theoretical and practical points of view due to the following:

First, the Czech-Slovak diplomatic relations of this period are a vivid example of a well-thought-out and purposeful building of close, non-conflict relations between two independent countries – former members of a single federal state. This became possible as a result of implementing the civilized version of the so-called «Czech-Slovak divorce», when still in the preparatory phase of the federation’s self-dissolution, all aspects of the sovereignty of Czechia and Slovakia were preliminarily agreed upon – even the principles of the federal property division in the proportion of 2:1, that is, by the ratio of the number the republics’ population (CR – about 10 million people, SR – about 5 million people.).

Secondly, the CR and the SR have jointly taken preventive diplomatic steps for their independence to be recognized by the international community from 1 January 1993 and have continued to coordinate their foreign policy activities, especially in the priority direction – accession of the EU and NATO.

Thirdly, the CR and the SR preliminarily developed the framework of the system and mechanism of bilateral intergovernmental cooperation. This approach, in particular, in the foreign economic sphere, allowed, with the help of specific mechanisms of the customs and monetary union, preserving and developing close trade and industrial-cooperative ties between the Czech and Slovak economies.

Fourthly, during the period mentioned, there was established and functioned effectively an integral system of diplomatic interstate cooperation between the CR and the SR, which covered all spheres, levels and directions of bilateral cooperation. It included a permanent interaction between the supreme bodies of state power – presidential and governmental structures, two countries’ parliaments, as well as sector ministries and departments, regional bodies of state power and local self-government, territorial communities, etc. The system of Czech-Slovak intergovernmental relations is legally determined by the developed international treaty basis, which consists of documents of bilateral and multilateral character, including 200 bilateral Czech-Slovak treaties, agreements, protocols and other international legal acts.

From the pragmatic point of view, the scientific study and synthesis of these and other important aspects of the Czech-Slovak cooperation experience allows identifying the most positive aspects that can be applied by Ukraine both in relations with the Central European EU member states and the European Union as a whole, and in improving relations with others countries of the world and other integration groups in the post-Soviet area. However, what remains the most important is the need to study the practice of the latest diplomatic Czech-Slovak intergovernmental cooperation in the context of implementing the modern strategy of Ukraine's European integration.

Studying the process of building and developing interstate relations between the CR and the SR due to their modern character is complicated due to limited access for researchers to unpublished sources. An insignificant time lapse from the events of the 1990s and early 2000s mainly results in the official closure of
the relevant archival funds, most of which are current. In this regard, in the CR and the SR, there are even clear prohibitive legislative provisions.

However, we have managed to analyze the maximum amount of available documentary material from the central state archives, as well as the current records of individual ministries and departments and other authorities, political, non-governmental and public organizations of Czechia, Slovakia and Ukraine.

The main array of documents concerning the contemporary Czech-Slovak cooperation, of course, is kept in the archives of the foreign policy offices of Czechia and Slovakia. However, access to them for researchers is quite limited. Only thanks to the worldwide information network of the Internet and the assistance of foreign, especially Slovak colleagues-scientists, it became possible to get acquainted with the materials on modern interstate Czech-Slovak relations from the archives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic and the SR. Moreover, the Czech Foreign Ministry provides the highest level of access to foreign policy documents through a specially created electronic archive.

The Czech Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs has created a special electronic version of its own archive. This site hosts the entire international legal framework for the Czech Republic's foreign relations; in particular, the system of multilateral and bilateral treaties, agreements, conventions, protocols and other international legal acts. In the context of this research, the complete list of contractual and legal documents concluded between the CR and the SR given here is of primary significance. A similar list of international legal documents of bilateral cooperation can be found on the website of the SR Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Here they are listed in chronological order from the early 1990s to the present. In the Czech version, on the website of the CR Foreign Ministry, on the contrary, they are presented in reverse order – from now until the beginning of the 1990’s. But the list of the Czech Foreign Ministry immediately contains the full text version of a document, which greatly facilitates the analysis of the contractual framework. However, the positive feature of the Slovak version is the possibility of grouping the above-mentioned international treaty acts on the main directions of bilateral cooperation – political, economic, cultural, humanitarian and other spheres. At the same time, the electronic archive of the CR Ministry of Foreign Affairs also contains an extensive additional source-information block in the form of «A Monthly of the Czech Republic's Foreign Policy». This is a special regular electronic edition, which essentially consists of two separate parts. The first is «Events», which lists in chronological order the main facts of the Czech Republic's foreign policy for the given month. The second part is «Documents», which contains documentary materials of the country’s foreign policy during the mentioned month, including statements, articles, etc. by President, Prime Minister, Chairs of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate of the Czech Republic, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, deputies and senators and other state politicians of the Czech Republic on foreign policy issues. Among other things, the monthly of the CR Ministry of Foreign Affairs also contains a rich factual material on the development of Czech-Slovak intergovernmental ties.

Unfortunately, the Slovak Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not have the specialized foreign-policy archive as in the Czech Republic. However, the website of the SR Foreign Ministry has enough information on interstate relations with the Czech Republic. In addition, by the way, both in the CR Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in the SR Ministry of Foreign Affairs there operates the diplomatic archive as a separate structural unit. Most of the funds of the Diplomatic Archive of Ministry of Foreign Affairs contain certain documents that directly concern the Czech-Slovak cooperation. In this Bratislava foreign-policy archive the materials are grouped in the following funds:

1) bilateral intergovernmental agreements of the CSR, the CSSR and the CSFR of 1921 – 1992;
2) multilateral international agreements of the CSR, the CSSR and the CSFR in 1919 – 1992;
3) multilateral intergovernmental international agreements of SR in 1993 – 2005;
4) bilateral intergovernmental international agreements of SR in 1992 – 2005;

The largest and almost complete list and text originals of the Czech-Slovak intergovernmental agreements of the period 1990 – early 2000s, with the exception of some interdepartmental and special ones, are contained in the consolidated Fund of bilateral international documents if the Diplomatic Archive of SR MFA. In addition, in the archive there are two separate funds of the collection with credentials and other documents of foreign countries' representatives in the SR and Slovak officials and diplomatic, consular and other officers abroad.
It should be emphasized once again that the bulk of documents relating to interstate relations between the CR and the SR (as well as the Ukrainian-Czech and Ukrainian-Slovak cooperation) are stored mainly in the current document archives of the central ministries and departments and other state bodies and institutions of the Czechia, Slovakia and Ukraine, therefore, are for the most part inaccessible to researchers. The CR Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example, officially warns that it provides scholars with diplomatic documents from their main archives only for the period until 1974 for the research and application purposes. At the same time, in the democratized Czech and Slovak society, the policy itself, including the foreign policy, has undoubtedly become open. Unlike the previous regime in the CR and the SR, there completely disappeared the concept of «secret diplomacy» and the practice of the closed-door, back-end foreign policy decision making by the state leadership. On the contrary, the state's most important steps in the international arena are made only after a preliminary public discussion of their expediency among the general public and specialists, political forces and parliamentary hearings.

The content analysis of diplomatic documents for the purpose of identifying the main provisions for assessing the status and main objectives of developing Czech-Slovak intergovernmental relations should be applied to the program declarations of governments, post-election coalition agreements and concepts of the Czechia's and Slovakia's foreign policy. At the same time, it is important to compare the declared political goals with the results of election and government programs' implementation. Such analytical comparisons in Slovakia are already being published, for example, by the Slovak Institute of Public Policy. And in the Czech Republic they are issued periodically in the form of a separate publication – reports of the CR Foreign Ministry on the country's foreign policy.

As the original documents testify, the systematic approach that is unique for the Central European post-socialist countries has been established in the Czech practice of foreign policy. On February 17, 1999, the CR Cabinet of Ministers approved a special document – «The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Czech Republic». Regarding the Czech-Slovak relations, it stated, «The Czech Republic attaches particular importance to the full development of ties with Slovakia and puts efforts for them to reach the supra-standard level, while the Czech Republic proceeds from the fact that for almost 70 years it has shared the fate as a common state and that between Czechs and Slovaks there have been such interconnections that have no analogy in the relations between the Czech Republic and other states»4. The new edition of the «Concept of Foreign Policy of the Czech Republic», approved by the CR Government on 3 March 2003, states that within the framework of supra-standard Czech-Slovak relations, Czechia will focus on deepening bilateral and regional cooperation with Slovakia, especially in the economy5.

Regular practice in the CR and the SR, especially during the early 2000s, has implied the reporting of foreign policy departments in parliaments. For example, the annual report of the Government and the Foreign Ministry of SR on the foreign policy is heard and discussed at the National Council of the SR (NC SR)6. The Czech-Slovak relations of the investigated period were repeatedly debated in the House of Representatives and the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic. During the period under review cooperation of the CR and SR parliaments' actions reached such a level that by the preliminary agreement the sessions of the NC SR and the CR Chamber of Deputies were held in parallel – almost simultaneously to discuss certain important issues of bilateral relations, for example, the consideration and approval of decisions on the state Czech-Slovak border or the ratification of bilateral agreements and treaties. In general, according to their intensity, regularity, smooth mechanisms of making contacts and approving mutually beneficial decisions, inter-parliamentary ties are one of the most effective and fruitful types and levels in the system of Czech-Slovak intergovernmental cooperation in the period of 1990s – early 2000s7.

The transcripts of the highest legislative bodies’ meetings, systematically published in Czechia and Slovakia are an important documentary source on the history of the contemporary relations between the two countries. By the way, the Czech Republic is the only among Central European countries that implemented a unique project of expanding the access to parliamentary documents. The materials of the Czech Parliament sessions are completely transferred to the electronic media and can be freely viewed through the Internet8.

And, finally, another important group of sources used while characterizing the Czech-Slovak diplomatic interstate relations is the materials and documents on the issues of Euro-Atlantic integration of the CR and the SR and a wider range of contemporary international relations9. It would be wrong to consider the
contemporary Czech-Slovak relations in isolation – only in the format of bilateral relations. The dynamic change in the international environment, in which relations between the CR and the SR developed, had a significant impact on Czech-Slovak cooperation. At the same time, it was a component – a subsystem – of the continental (European) and regional (Central European) system of international relations.

The specificity of the Czech-Slovak diplomatic cooperation also seems to be more clearly defined by comparing the Czech and Slovak cooperation with other European countries. In this case, documentary sources on developing good-neighbourly relations of the CR and the SR with the nearest international environment are of particular interest. It should be borne in mind that from the very first days of independence Czechia faced the challenge of complete settlement of a complex of relations with Germany, its largest European neighbour. In this regard, we have made a brief review of the process of the Czech-German so-called «historical reconciliation», which ended with signing a bilateral declaration in 1997. And for Slovakia, it was equally important to settle relations with neighbouring Hungary. A positive role in this regard was played by the framework agreement on good-neighbourhood and cooperation between the SR and the Republic of Hungary concluded in 1995. In order to compare the documentary sources of the interstate cooperation system between the CR and the SR it was also necessary to study the international treaty basis of the Ukrainian-Czech and Ukrainian-Slovak relations.

Such an expansion of the source-documentary base allowed deepening the comprehensive and systematic nature of researching the process of formation and development of diplomatic cooperation and the integral system of Czech-Slovak intergovernmental co-operation during the late 1990s and up to the present period.

The constitutional termination of the Czech-Slovak federative union, which should be considered the third, specific civilized «Central European» model, was completely different. Settling the entire complex of divorce matters, still at the preparatory stage of self-dissolution of a single state, retained the basis for close cooperation between the already independent CR and SR in 1993 – 2003. In the following period the Czech-Slovak relations were not overburdened with a set of federal «historical misdeeds». Independent Czechia and Slovakia did not bother much about the problems of settling bilateral relations, like, for instance, the Balkan or post-Soviet states, but focused on accelerating domestic reforms and transformations. Consequently, the fluid, contractual and constitutional nature of the self-dissolution of the Czech-Slovak federation created favourable conditions for systemic social transformations and the completion of the post-socialist transformation process in the CR and the SR.

At the turn of the XXth and XXIst centuries the formation and dynamic development of an integrated system of interstate relations between two new European democracies – the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic – is a unique example in the modern history of the possibility of civilized development of equal good-neighbourly relations between the Czech and Slovak peoples after the constitutional liquidation of a unified federal state. The agreed contractual termination of the federal union of Czechs and Slovaks at the end of 1992 and the proclamation of independence of the CR and the SR on January 1, 1993, laid the solid foundations for fruitful Czech-Slovak cooperation for the future.

The CR and SR are now full members of the North Atlantic Alliance and the EU. Therefore, it is entirely reasonable to assert that the Czech-Slovak relations during the 1990s – 2005 followed certain evolution according to the historical spiral «rings» dialectic – from disintegration of a single state through the further development of close bilateral cooperation to a qualitatively higher level of integration within the framework of the European and Transatlantic Communities.

From the first days of independence a positive role in the dynamic deployment of Czech-Slovak intergovernmental cooperation has been played by the preliminary formation of its foundations and contractual basis when still within the framework of a unified federal state in the early 1990’s. There was a process of substantial expansion of Czechia’s and Slovakia’s competences as republics of a federal state. Under upward pressure the federal centre was even forced to give the republics significant rights to participate in international relations, however, mainly at the regional and sub-regional levels. Originally in Slovakia, and then in Czechia, along with the federal bodies, the Republican Ministries of Foreign Affairs were created. During the second half of 1992, in parallel with the process of liquidating the federation, the process of contractual registration of future interstate relations between Czechia and Slovakia was intensively implemented. A number of agreements and treaties of a diverse nature were concluded – from
the basic agreement on good-neighbourhood and cooperation to monetary and customs union agreements. Previously, the problems of the federal property division, the passage and the regime of the common state border were stipulated by laws and contracts. Institutional structures and mechanisms of Czech-Slovak intergovernmental cooperation began to be created – joint councils, commissions, committees, etc., for each of the areas of cooperation. Therefore, in general, the main components and mechanisms of the interstate cooperation system between the CR and the SR began to operate without significant problems from the first days of the two countries’ independence.

However, as evidenced by our analysis of the recent historical process of Czech-Slovak cooperation, during the period under research it developed unevenly and possessed several qualitatively different stages:

The first is the formation of a bilateral interstate relations system and the practical formation of cooperation structures and mechanisms, which covered 1993 – 1994.

The second is the complication of the Czech-Slovak relations in the period from the end of 1994 to the parliamentary elections in the SR in the autumn of 1998, largely due to the international isolation of the regime of V.Mechiar because of the undemocratic nature of the internal political processes in Slovakia.

The third is the transition to close coordination of foreign policy activities on a bilateral and multilateral basis, focusing on the practical assistance provided by Czechia to Slovakia while preparing for the EU and NATO accession, covering the period from the end of 1998 to the end of 2002.

Fourthly, the practical preparation of the CR and the SR for accession to the European community, which covered the period from the end of 2002 to 1 May 2004, the date of Czechia’s and Slovakia’s full membership in the European Union, and to the SR’s NATO membership in April 2004.

Conclusions. After the EU enlargement in 2004, the CR and the SR entered a new stage of cooperation characterized by the transition from a paradigm of simple cooperation to a comprehensive integration paradigm.

The modern integration or post-integration stage of cooperation between the CR and the SR after the European Union’s enlargement is characterized by the expansion of Czech-Slovak intergovernmental cooperation on new principles. On the international scene, Czechia and Slovakia implement the common foreign and security policy of the EU. They have coherently integrated into the common internal market, the EU trade and customs union. That is, the Czech-Slovak cooperation in implementing integration interests and tasks comes into the forefront. At the same time, as it is constantly emphasized by the state-political leaders of the two countries, there was preserved the specificity of the Czech-Slovak relations, as supra-standard, i.e. especially close and confiding ones.


3 Z.Kollárová, J.Hanus, Sprievodca po slovenských archivoch [Guide to Slovak archives], Prešov, Universum, 1999, s. 84.


5 Koncepce zahraniční politiky České republiky [The Concept of Foreign Policy of the Czech Republic], in «Scváleno vládou ČR 3.3.2003o», Praha, UMV, 2003, s.19.