The ‘Soviet’ Intervention in Czechoslovakia (1968)

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I. Introduction: The Political and Historical Context

A. A Strong Wind Blew Across the Atlantic

In the early 1960s a strong wind blew across the Atlantic from the United States to Europe. It had been released by the protests of students at Berkeley and other American universities against the Vietnam War. Students felt free and readier to voice their own opinion against the political establishment, against the persons sustaining it, as well as against the existing economic, social and political order more generally. This sentiment encompassed a growing number of students and increasingly caused problems for the prevailing political system in the United States. The wind created by these protests then became a storm that reached Europe in the mid-1960s, a little more than fifty years ago, where it transformed as it fused with particular local grievances and movements.

B. The Situation in Europe – The Historical Context

This wind was felt not only within the universities of Western European States, but also reached Eastern European societies. At that time, when the

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Cold War was still existent, albeit not very manifest, Europe remained largely divided into three political parts: the Western European States, assembled as far as military issues were concerned in NATO and economically in the already existing Economic European Community (EEC), the neutral and non-aligned states like Austria, Switzerland, Ireland, Finland, Sweden and Yugoslavia, that did not belong to any military alliance, and the states belonging to the Eastern bloc under the regime of the Soviet Union, behind the Iron Curtain, and assembled in the Warsaw Pact organization. NATO was a typical organization of collective self-defense and encompassed the United States, Canada, as well as Western European States including Turkey. It was founded in 1949 as a reaction to a possible threat from the Soviet Union against Western European States, which had already revealed itself in the Soviet blockade of Berlin between 1948 and 1949. The previously created Brussels Pact, becoming the Western European Union (WEU) in 1954 and forming a military alliance of only Western European States without Canada and the United States, was rather dormant in the early days of its existence in view of the more powerful NATO.

The Warsaw Pact was created only in 1955 as a reaction to the Federal Republic of Germany joining NATO in 1954 and to a certain extent also due to the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Austria resulting from the conclusion of the Austrian State Treaty in 1955. That pact, signed in Warsaw on 14 May

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4 As to the intellectual history of the Cold War at that time, see, e.g., Jan-Werner Müller, ‘The Cold War and the intellectual history of the late twentieth century’, in volume III of Melvyn P Leffler and Odd A Westad (eds), The Cambridge History of the Cold War (2010) 7.


7 Lawrence S Kaplan, NATO 1948: The Birth of the Transatlantic Alliance (2007).

8 See Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty (signed 4 April 1949, entered into force 24 August 1949) 34 UNTS 243.


10 See supra note 6.

11 Staatsvertrag betreffend die Wiederherstellung eines unabhängigen und demokratischen Österreich (State Treaty for the Re-establishment of an Independent and