The Concept of Human Rights in Foreign Policy

An analytical and methodological study

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Translator's introduction

Although Tomas Pstross's paper is now over a year old, it is still the best formal statement we have that reveals how the Czech ministry of foreign affairs came to establish respect for human rights as a cornerstone of the country's foreign policy and, as a result, became involved in the fate of Cuba, to the deep displeasure of the current Cuban regime. It is only part of the story, of course: there are other, perhaps more adventurous tales to be told of informal diplomacy among the Cuban exile groups in Miami – most notably among former Cuban political prisoners; stories of the efforts of Czech NGOs to establish and maintain contacts with the dissidents on the island, and even tales of misfortune and near disaster. And there is much more to be said about more recent activities, including various conferences and seminars sponsored or co-sponsored by the Czechs, and efforts to look at the post-Castro, transitional period in the light of Czech experience as well. But Pstross's paper puts the effort in both an intellectual and an historical context, and gives us an insight into Czech diplomacy in action in the corridors of the UN Commission for Human Rights in Geneva, where for three years in a row, a Czech-sponsored resolution condemning Cuba's human rights record was passed.

Underlying all of these efforts was the Czech desire to turn their hard-earned experience of communist tyranny into an asset to be used for the benefit of others, and the belief that a strong and active political, cultural, and religious opposition inside these countries was a major factor in the rapid collapse of communism and its peaceful replacement with more democratic forms of government. Cuba was one of the first tests of this approach, though we will have no way of knowing whether or not it works until the moment of transition comes. Meanwhile, however, there have been some interesting side-effects. To name just one, Czech diplomacy has helped to "de-bilateralize" the Cuban discussion – that is, to take it out of the context of the highly fraught US-Cuban conflict and make it a broader issue. And their relative success in the diplomatic sphere has led the Czechs to target other countries as well, and they are actively engaged in supporting democratic change in places like Belorussia, Myanmar,

China, and North Korea as well. Cuba, however, remains the primary testing ground for this new approach to diplomacy.

What follows is a selective translation of Tomas Pstross's paper. I have included Pstross's own summaries at the beginning of each chapter, and any cuts are indicated by ellipses. In some cases, notably in Chapters 7 and 9, I have summarized longer passages to save space. I hope members of FOCAL will find the study useful as an introduction to a far larger subject..

Paul Wilson, October 2005

Chapter 1
The Problem of Conceptualizing Human Rights: The Current State of the Discussion

This introductory chapter stresses the importance of a clear, conceptual definition of human rights in carrying out an effective foreign policy in this area, and indicates some of the pitfalls in one-sided, particularistic approaches. A solution is seen in conceptions that lead to a balanced, multifactoral model of human rights. A "holistic approach" is recommended as the preferred model.

(excerpts)

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At the centre of the discussion is the question (traditionally understood) of how broadly human rights and norms are to be conceived. The position of the *universalists*, for whom human rights exist for all individuals, regardless of their culture, race, religion, gender, etc. clashes with the position of the *relativists*, for whom human rights and basic freedoms are *culturally* determined.

Universalism, historically speaking, derives from western (that is, the Graeco-Roman, later the Enlightenment, and the Euro-American) traditions and derives human rights from the notion of human nature. This is what makes them universal, inalienable, and a moral foundation that is the same everywhere. Such a point of departure aspires to see human rights recognized and respected world-wide.

Relativism assumes the dependence of legal and moral systems on mutually unrelated values systems anchored in

individual cultures. Relativists have the tendency to claim that human rights, in the traditional, Western – that is, the universalist – conception are merely an "ethnocentric construct" that inappropriately introduces into different cultural conditions systems of law and morality that do not belong to it. (For the relativists, therefore, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights establishes norms that are not generally applicable, but rather culturally, ideologically and politically limited.)

The development of the theory of human rights in the 20th century led to the codification of two basic categories. Category "A" comprises civic and political rights; category "B" comprises social, cultural, and economic rights. The former, historically older, category is usually referred to as "first generation rights" (rights that exist independent of the state), and the latter as "second generation rights" (based on the economic and social circumstances of the given state). Recently, the notion of "third generation rights" has come into play, among which are included the right to peace, sustainable development, a healthy environment, and so on.

Relativism, in essence, leads to a tendency to doubt the universality of the ideas in all categories of human rights, or to elevate category "B" rights above category "A" rights. In doing so, it is in sharp conflict with the modern (and generally accepted) tendency to see both categories as non-hierarchical and mutually connected.

The tendencies of relativism are characteristic of the developing world, for they reflect its scale of values, at the top of which are values related to satisfying the elementary needs of life. The process of identification with category "B" rights in the poor, third world is essentially a recapitulation of priorities that were characteristic of the poorer classes in 19th century Europe.

This basic dichotomy places immense burdens on the dialogue on human rights between the socio-cultural systems

of the West and the East. Appeals to the greater relevance of social and cultural, or rather socio-economic categories is usually deflected by western critics by reference to the state of civic and political rights in a number of political regimes in Asia and Africa that can, by western standards, be labelled "repressive." By way of illustration, China is a signatory of the International Pact on Social, Economic, and Cultural Rights, but remains reluctant to sign an analogous UN document on political and civil rights. It justifies its reluctance by referring to "Asian cultural values" such as the absolute superiority of the state over the individual, the responsibility of the individual to the collective, the Confucian system of morality with its emphasis on deference to authority in the family and in society, and so on. The essence of this approach is the rejection of the ideas that, in liberal democracies of the Euro-American type, are seen as the final form of the organization of human society. Thus they see the future of development not in adapting to the western model, but rather in the coordinated interaction of culturally unique centres of world civilization.

The tendency to stress human rights that are related to cultural and socio-economic circumstances is, in a way, an outcome of the deepening civilizational differences between the so-called developed and developing worlds, and it has been intensified by the collapse of the bi-polar [Cold War] world. Over the last two decades it has come to dominate the complex system of interactions within the United Nations – despite the oft-repeated mantra that civil, political, social, and economic rights are closely intertwined – as one of the conditions for achieving "sustainable development." This tendency mirrors the growing influence of developing countries on the basic philosophy and workings of the UN. But the tendency has also found fertile soil in a certain "confusion" in what used to be a highly structured world, whose basic course was set by the competition between two

differing political systems that were defined almost exclusively by their differing approaches to civil and political rights. . . .

It is clear that the one-sidedness of this cultural relativism is a barrier to creating a global consensus on the essential importance of democratic values. But the exclusive stress on category "A," that is, on civil and political rights, is also a problem, for it is often seen as "western cultural imperialism." . . .

There has been an attempt to bridge over this dichotomy . . . with a so-called "holistic approach" that stresses the non-hierarchical nature, the unity, and the interconnectivity of all the basic human rights categories. It is really only this complex of individual and mutually dependent rights that can be properly considered a universal and inalienable attribute of human existence.

Practically all the western democracies (including the European Union) stand behind this ["holistic"] understanding of human rights, and attempt to give expression to them in their foreign policies. Despite its schematic nature, it would appear to be an acceptable starting point for us [the Czech Republic] as well, considering that:

- it does not undermine the moral or ethical bases of the "western" conception of human rights;
- it is one of the possible bases for carrying on a meaningful dialogue between ourselves (that is, the western cultural sphere) and countries whose political systems deviate from our standards of human rights;
- the fundamental "non-hierarchical" relationship, and the links between both basic categories of human rights present no barrier to establishing the variable (that is, differing from case to case) relevance of applying human rights standards that are determined

> by a specific context. On this determination should be based the selection of the most appropriate instruments for establishing these standards.

[. . . .]

Chapter 2
The Role of the Czech Republic in the International System of Defending Human Rights

This chapter lays out the main justifications for the Czech Republic's taking an active role in the world system for defending human rights. It points out the immediate importance of this role in connection with the approaching [now actual – Tr.] membership of the Czech Republic in the European Union, and draws attention to the principles that Czech foreign policy ought to contribute to any specific approach to the problem and to determining priorities. It emphasises that with respect to its authentic historical experiences, the Czech Republic should focus on countries where there are serious breaches of human rights. The main theatre for such an approach will be multilateral organizations. This chapter also offers a nine-point typology that might be used to determine the state of human rights in different countries.

[excerpts]

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In terms of ideals, what has made the Czech Republic determined to be an active player in the international system for defending human rights is not only its ambition to be seen as a member of the family of "traditional democracies" but also its own traumatic experience in the repression of human rights when it was dominated by two totalitarian dictatorships in the course of the last century. Much can be derived from such an experience, but what is chiefly important here is an *empathy* for all those who are living in similar conditions. The voice of the Czech Republic in international forums that deal with human rights ought to be heard; there is no place

here for the "small country" complex, the belief that our possibilities are limited. In the words of Carl Gershman, who represents one of the most influential American NGOs: "Even small countries can play a large role in the matter of human rights, if they approach the task as a *mission*."

The basic conclusion is that the steps taken by Czech diplomacy in the area of human rights – be it bilaterally or multilaterally – must be as far as possible a *principled* approach, that is, it must be as far away as it can possibly be from the politics of selective interests and "double standards."

This approach, however, can't be understood schematically. The strategy based on it must take into account the specific nature of each case, its developmental, cultural, security, and economic aspects – and not least, the position taken by the world democratic community.

It's not always easy to bring all these conditions into harmony, because the advanced democracies do not always approach human rights abuses in a coodinated and united way. In practical terms, we find a common approach only in special cases, where the human rights abuses are part of open acts of aggression against another country, or involve racist or genocidal policies. In countries where the abuse of human rights does not have such extreme contours, judging the situation is less straighforward and the positions taken by individual members of the international democratic community often differ from one another.

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A Typology of Political Systems – for orientation

. . . .We have derived the following table from the empirically based assumption that there is a significant and close correlation between the degree to which human rights

are abused and certain political systems. This gives the typology a descriptive and comparative value that can be used in thinking about the issues raised by this study. . . .

We present this typology in the awareness that the type of political system in a given country is only one of the possible criteria that can be applied for current purposes. (Another such criterium might be, for example, the way in which international human rights conventions are observed.) Certainly, this criterium tells us a lot, but it cannot be used to explain all the concrete examples of human rights abuses that take place in the world. . . .

The following typology contains nine basic categories:

Aa) Total dictatorship, characterized by a long-term and systematic repression of basic human and civil rights, with conditions that make it absolutely impossible to start or operate an internal opposition, with zero potential for reform and complete political repression that is impervious to influences either from the inside or outside. A rigid ideology. The absence of a civic sector. Historical parallels with Asian despotisms.

(Note: by “potential for reform” we mean in this, and following cases, the will to reform that comes from individuals and groups *inside* the power structure.)

Example: North Korea

Ab) basic characteristics the same as Aa), also with a rigid ideology, but with the existence of an illegalized but structured internal democratic opposition, indications of potential for reform, visible signs of a gradual weakening of the country’s isolation. Rudimentary forms (though still persecuted) of a civil society sector.

Example: Cuba

Ac) regimes with predominantly ideologically justified elements of totalitarianism (one-party rule, centralized political and economic power) but with gradually broadening, substantial economic freedoms and a gradual reform dynamic (embryonic pluralization of the electoral system, increased freedom of movement, the recognition of some social rights, more openness to foreign cultural influences, etc.) In multi-national countries of this type, there is a marked tendency to repress the rights of peripheral nationalities.

Examples: China, Vietnam

Ba) Democratized totalitarian dictatorships with an already crystallized and mostly functioning democratic political structure, but with major aspects of the old authoritianism still in place. Connections between political and economic interests reflected in the influential position of interest groups inside the sphere of power. Significant influence of armies and security structures. Reform potential exists. A marked tendency toward centralization, linked with the dissemination of nationalistic ideas. Tough nationalist policies regarding "peripheral" nationalities attempting to assert their right to self-determination.

Example: Russia (Included on the understanding that in certain cases, it may also be considered to belong to category D, below).

Bb) Partially (i.e. formally) democratized totalitarian dictatorships with increasing authoritarian tendencies. The personification of these tendencies on the level of political "leaders." The existence of a legal, but passively tolerated

and bureaucratically castrated democratic opposition. The interference of executive power in the independent exercise of legislative and judicial power. The persistent influence of the state sector in the economy. Weak reform potential.

Examples: Belorus, former Soviet Central Asian republics – Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

Bc) Regimes that combine elements of strongly authoritarian regimes and (occasionally military) dictatorships with local socio-culturally defined systems of power. Marked statist tendencies with elements of nationalism. Dominant role of the military in the power structure. Often parallel (formal) democratic institutions taken from western political culture. Relatively less interference of the state in economic freedoms. Very limited or impossible conditions for the activities of a legal political opposition, independent media, judiciary, etc. The sharing of power is significantly determined by ethnic or tribal membership, or to a specific branch of a religion. Extreme forms of repression of basic rights and freedoms occurs mostly in special cases (like the former Iraq), most often in periods when power is being consolidated; later, more liberal policies tend to be the rule. There is often pressure from the power structures toward mass indoctrination of a religio-ideological or racial nature (pan-Arabism, pan-Africanism)
Examples: Libya, former Iraq, Syria, most states in Equatorial and sub-Saharan Africa, Myanmar. It might have been possible to include some right-wing Latin American dictatorships, which do not exist at the present moment.

Bd) Regimes that combine Islamic religio-cultural traditions with European elements. Most Islamic countries that are not dictatorships run by dominant secular power groups fall into this category. (See Cat. Bc) A wide range of possibilities

here, embracing on the one hand dictatorships with an absolute dominance of clerical structures in political and public life, and on the other hand, less conservative, secularized regimes with an established (though incomplete) system of democratic institutions. The legal systems that have developed out of local traditions are for the most part in conflict with European (Western) notions of law. In some instances, there is the clear influence of the military in the power structures (Pakistan), sometimes there is a (conflict-ridden) coexistence of differing religious and ethnic systems. (Malasia, Indonesia, Pakistan). Nationalistic tendencies are frequently exist in combination with a pan-Islamic mindset.

Example (roughly from the most to the least problematic): Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Egypt, Indonesia, Malasia, Tunisia.

C) Political systems in countries that combine sharp social inequities with democratic or quasi-democractic traditions, which in the past have tended toward oligarchically structured (military) dictatorships (in Latin America). As a rule, these are governments of the presidential type, often led by charismatic personalities that show authoritarian leadership tendencies. Other symptoms: nationalistically coloured rhetoric (sometimes pseudo-revolutionary), a limited space for legal opposition, the influence of military structures in the power apparatus, the emasculation of democratic institutions (free elections, independent media), and in some cases, the suppression of the original ethnic population.

Examples: Venezuela today, Haiti

D) The so-called new or “transitional” democracies, with a system of democratic institutions already in place but with

continuing shortcomings in different categories of human rights (mainly ethnic, social, and cultural rights)

Examples: the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the former Baltic Soviet republics.

Chapter 3
Cooperation with Non-governmental Organizations in the Field of Human Rights: A Mandate for Czech Foreign Policy

Chapter 3 is a reminder that a systematic engagement with the problems of human rights violations is impossible without cooperation between official diplomacy and the civic sector of society. Possible models of such cooperation are outlined).

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A recent example of openly declared support for democratic opposition relates to Cuba. Here there was a common initiative, that grew out of a conference on human rights in Cuba that took place on July 1, 2003 in Madrid, to create a "European Fund for the Support of Democracy in Cuba." This initiative was supported by the former Czech president, Vaclav Havel, and its aim was to support Cuban society in such a way as to guarantee a peaceful, bloodless transition to democracy, and at the same time, to achieve a certain "liberation" of Cuban dissidents from their dependence on the exile community and on the financial and diplomatic support that currently comes exclusively from Washington.

A democratic country that openly (that means on the level of international diplomacy as well) criticizes human rights violations should look for ways to facilitate as much as possible the activity of the civic sector that is aimed at supporting the democratic forces in the countries so criticized.

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There are two funding models that are most frequently cited:

- The German and American models: the main political parties administer and finance their own

funds. For example, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung sponsored by the Social Democratic Party and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung run by the CDU-CSU. In America, one example is the influential National Endowment for Democracy, run by the Republican and Democratic parties.

- The British model: such funds are generally administered by a parliamentary committee representing a consensus of all the parties in parliament.

The appropriateness of these two models for the Czech Republic is severely limited because a) the democratic parties do not yet have either the appropriate resources, or the political will for such a step, and b) attaining the necessary concensus in the current Czech parliamentary spectrum is practically impossible.

Chapter 4
Human Rights in the Foreign Policy of the European Union

Chapter 4 deals with the new situation that entry into the European union will mean for Czech foreign policy. It will be necessary to learn how to use the machinery the EU deploys in its human rights policies, and to master the rules of codified approaches, and to acquaint ourselves thoroughly with the relevant institutional structure. The chapter provides a succinct overview of the evolution of Union policies on human rights and provides information about the basic documents and organizations of the UN that deal with these policies. Particular attention and commentary is paid to the so-called "political dialogue" that is one of the basic instruments of Union human rights policies. Other instruments are mentioned as well.

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Chapter 5

Policies of the European Union Toward Cuba

Chapter 5 discusses in detail a concrete example of how the Union's human rights policies are applied – Cuba, a country that Czech foreign policy has recently taken an openly critical position on as well. It will be clear that the evolution of the Union's Cuban policies has been long and winding. Special attention will be paid to the ways in which this policy differs from that of the United States. . . .

The cornerstone of the official policy of the European Union is the "Common Position on Cuba" from December 2, 1996. The basic idea of this document is the decision to link the development of commercial relations to progress in the field of human rights and democracy. The document is based on the conviction that the transition to democratic conditions in Cuba can be peaceful if the regime displays a willingness to change. The introduction already indicates the will of the European Union to lessen the economic problems of Cubans without the current practice of applying "coercive measures." In this way, the EU distances itself from the approach of the USA, which is based on the strict enforcement of embargo legislation. It welcomed (when the document first came into existence) the first signs of an economic opening in Cuba. It took a fundamental stance against the tendency to isolate Cuba.

It is not without interest that the chief initiator of the Common Position, that seeks a balance between pressure to democratize and the development of economic cooperation, was Spain, the member of the Union with the deepest emotional attachments to Cuba.

In the document, the European Union undertakes to:

1) intensify the dialogue with Cuba with the purpose of supporting human rights and the trend toward a pluralistic democracy, and to emphasis to Cuban officials their responsibility for the respecting of basic human rights;
2) to support internal Cuban reforms in the areas of legislation (criminal law, political judgements);
3) to follow developments in the matter of respecting fundamental international standards and agreements in the area of human rights;
4) to provide Cuba with ad hoc humanitarian aid;
5) to conduct a constructive political dialogue with Cuba;
6) to consider the possibility of cooperation treaties with Cuba;
7) to evaluate the implementation of the Common Position every six months;

From today's point of view, the common position of 1996 . . . is the expression of a certain (clearly a simplistic) hope on the part of the EU that a natural result of economic cooperation with the totalitarian Cuban dictatorship would be its gradual liberalization. Although this position has its pragmatic side (commercial interests, unexpressed but clearly anticipating a time when the current regime will no longer exist, and an emotional cultural and historical affinity on the part of some southern European countries, etc.), developments in the subsequent years provided numerous examples of resistance on the part of the Cuban political system to any substantial changes.

This reality has been pointed out in the first place by the pro-democratic Cuban activists, who have been exposed to various forms of repression. Their position on the dialogue

between the countries of the EU and the Cuban government is mainly sceptical, or expressly negative. The representative of the Christian opposition, Oswaldo Paya (when he was still relatively unknown), expressed his scepticism thus: “The common position has nothing common about it, and it is certainly not a position.”

Strictly speaking, a positive outreach to the Cuban democratic opposition can only be inferred from the Common Position, because it does not state it explicitly. Looking back on the last ten years, it can be concluded that contacts between European diplomats and the Cuban opposition were systematic, but they were marked by caution – and only very infrequently did they step outside the framework that would have brought them into direct confrontation with the power structures, usually only in isolated instances, when there was a significant worsening of official relations. There were other exceptions to that model of behaviour, such as the granting of important international prizes to the foremost Cuban democratic activists for their efforts in the struggle for human rights. After the wave of repressions in the spring of 2003, the steps the European Union took to protest them represented an extraordinary re-evaluation of the principle of maintaining contacts with the internal Cuban opposition.

Given a certain willingness to reach a compromise in the common position of 1996, it is not surprising that at times voices inside the European Union pointed to the position’s formalism and insufficient criticism. On the other hand, opposite opinions were expressed, according to which the common position stood in the way of commercial relations. These unofficial conflicts, which reflected, in a certain simplified way, an imaginary psychological demarcation line between the southern, largely romance-language countries, and the northern wing of the Union, made possible a kind of

uncoordinated shift in the actual politics of individual countries in the Union towards bilateral stances to Cuba.

Critics of the Common Position's shortcomings saw a way to make a more effective condemnation of the Cuban deficit in the human rights area by stiffening the conditions for accepting Cuba in the Lomé Convention. There, Cuba merely had observer status, and was expressing a great interest in taking part in the negotiations. In March, 1999, the European Commission reminded Cuba that any negotiations were conditional upon accepting the basic principles of the Lomé Convention, particularly Article V, which made cooperation dependent upon respecting human rights and democratic principles. After its defeat in the UN Commission for Human Rights in April, 1999 (the European Union co-sponsored the anti-Cuban resolution), however, Cuba backed away from its intention to take part in the Lomé Convention. As further developments showed, giving up its membership in the Afro-Caribbean-Pacific group of developing countries (ACP), which provided the unilateral advantages of a special trade regime with the EU, proved to be a temporary propaganda move. A group of participants in the Lomé Convention tried to ease the consequent cooling in relations between Cuba and the EU by attempting to have Cuba at least recognized as having special status within its framework. This, however, did not happen and Cuba did not express an interest in accepting the conditions of another phase of the process (the Cotonou Agreement) until August, 2000. That possibility remains open to this day.[1]

[1] The common position was changed in early 2005, after Castro released 14 political prisoners arrested in 2003, and re-established diplomatic relations with all the EU states with delegations in Havana, including the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland. Shortly afterward, the EU lifted the economic sanctions imposed after the wave of arrests in 2003, and undertook, among other things, not to invite Cuban dissidents to special events in their embassies. The Czech Republic opposed the move, reminding the other states that the rights of the oppressed came first, and reserving the right to continue unofficial contacts with dissidents. Ex-president Havel wrote a widely published condemnation of the change. "One of the strongest and most powerful democratic institutions in the world, the European Union," he wrote, "has no qualms about making a public promise to the Cuban dictatorship that it will re-institute diplomatic apartheid. The EU's embassies in Havana

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An interesting shift in the general approach of the European union was created by the situation that arose in 2003. A kind of psychological underpinning for this new situation was created by the response to the “Todos Unidos” movement, founded in May 2002 on the basis of the broadest based opposition action so far, the “Varela Project,” a petition based on articles 63 and 88 of the Cuban constitition and demanding a referendum on basic civil liberties. The representatives of this project, led by the Christian opposition leader Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas, was able in extremely difficult circumstances to gather more than 11,000 signatures, that is, more than the 10,000 required by the constitution. In an eloquent gesture, the European Union conferred the prestigious Sacharov Prize on Payá.

The Cuban regime responded defensively by staging a nation-wide referendum declaring the permanence of the socialist system, but even so, the moral impact of the opposition’s campaign was immeasurable and it gained a great deal of international support.

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will now craft their guest lists in accordance with the Cuban government’s wishes.” Meanwhile, the EU reitereated its “urgent demand that Cuba unconditionally release all political prisoners ... still in detention.” The new postition was reviewed in June of this year, and kept in place.

Chapter 6

Initiatives Taken by Czech Foreign Policy in Relation to the Human Rights Situation in Cuba.

Chapter 6 summarizes the assumptions on which the critical stance of Czech foreign policy toward Cuba, which it began to express systematically in international forums in 1999, is based. The commentary stresses that the Czech Republic was led to its position not only by general principles, but by specific reasons that have to do with its historical circumstances and in particular, with its special relationship with Cuba.

On an entirely general level, the Czech Republic's engagement on behalf of improving human rights in Cuba is an expression of the thesis that has been repeatedly included in the Conception of Czech Foreign Policy as it was being drawn up. In relation to the acceptance of the Czech Republic into the European Union in 2004, the general principle of defending human rights has become "one of the principle elements of our contribution to the common foreign and security policies." Our fourteen-year experience of transformation from communism to democracy has become an "added value" that we intend to offer the European Union, and that may be used in the formulation of Union policies toward countries that are either going through such a process, or will soon face it.

As we know, the first independent expression of our (Czech) engagement on behalf of human rights in Cuba on an international level happened at the end of the 1990s. Up to that point, official Czech foreign policy more or less followed the line laid down by other democracies, above all

those in the European Union. But the Czech Republic did not take any particular initiative in the strategy of political dialogue set by the EU. Essentially, we were not required to take an official, independent position on the basic conflict between the EU and the United States regarding the effectiveness of the economic isolation of Cuba. The only exception (and it was, in essence, indirect) was at the end of the 1990s, when, in the General Assembly of the United Nations, the Czech Republic repeatedly voted (along with countries in the EU) in support of a Cuban resolution condemning the use of economic pressure in international relations.

In a sense, the academic question of the effectiveness or not of the economic isolation of Cuba was not the subject of a wider discussion in this country, nor of media attention, if only because of the minimal economic interchanges between the two countries. By way of illustration, Czech exports to Cuba in the 1990s almost never exceeded ten million US dollars, the only exception being 1998, when it reached $18.1 million. And imports from Cuba dropped from $3.5 million in 1991 to its current value, in general in the hundreds of thousands of US dollars.

The opinion of the informed Czech public, however, almost certainly inclined (and still inclines) to the belief that the economic embargo is not working, and this opinion is bolstered by precedents in different parts of the world (South Africa, Yugoslavia, Iran, Iraq, etc.) and by published reports on about how the embargo had become the subject of criticism in the very centre of American political and economic circles, and that the radical propagator of the economic isolation of Cuba in the United States is essentially the influential “Cuba lobby,” which was able to turn the embargo into an important US internal political question. The prevailing opinion among the relatively well-informed Czech

public is that the basic isolation of undemocratic regimes provides fertile soil for repression.

It must be said in this regard that supporters of closer economic ties with Cuba, ties undisrupted by the adoption of conflict-inducing political stances – people in the entrepreneurial spheres, or who work in institutions that represent the economic interests of the country – comprised (and still do) a potentially powerful interest group. But it is also true that influential positions in this group are still held by people who, for one reason or another, maintain a latent, or even an open, sympathy for the current Cuban regime, led by a charismatic dictator who, in their youth, was surrounded by the romantic aura of a left-wing revolutionary.

In the course of the 1990s, however, Czech diplomacy did not stand to one side in the active, largely discreet support for the Cuban democratic opposition. Some of the less hidden forms of this support evoked occasional conflicts with the Cubans (in 1997)[2]. This had a visibly negative impact on the formal diplomatic level (two secretaries in our diplomatic mission were expelled; the new ambassador was not given official recognition). But this temporary worsening of relations did not affect economic relations. The general bilateral relationships remained relatively correct, despite the opposing ideological and ethical premises of the political systems of both countries. In general, however, we can say that just below the surface of official Cuban positions toward the Czech Republic there still smoulders an ideologically tinged animus over their "betrayal" by a once faithful, Marxist-oriented ally, who is now restoring capitalism and

[2] One such person was Petr Pribik, the Czech Charge d'Affairs in Cuba in the mid-nineties who deliberately cultivated contacts with the Cuban dissidents, inviting them to embassy events, and providing support and assistance for dissidents who were ill, or in prison. In a recent interview, Pribik told me that such contacts had been going on before his arrival in Havana, but that he instituted regular contacts as a deliberate, though unofficial, policy of the Czech Embassy. After one such meeting, Pribik's wife was injured in her car when it was rammed from behind by a Cuban armoured car. The Cubans allowed Pribik to take the matter to court, but only on condition that it be treated as an "accident, not an incident."

reorienting itself toward Cuba's greatest enemy – the United States.

We should recall that of all the former Soviet satellites, Czechoslovakia was the most active economic partner of Cuba, and that over many years of contact between the two countries, there developed countless, often emotionally complex, relationships on an elementary human level. For the citizens of a country as isolated as Czechoslovakia was, Cuba was an intimately familiar place, attractive because of its exotic and otherwise inaccessible natural beauty, and because of the mentality of its citizens. Many Cubans, as well, gained a sympathy for Czechoslovakia during study and other visits in the Czech and Slovak republics. It should be said that in such cases, ideology did not play an important role.

It's hardly surprising that after 1989, the Cuban democratic opposition turned chiefly to developments in our country to help in its evaluation of the social changes in the former Soviet bloc. The myth of the "Velvet Revolution" and the personality of President Vaclav Havel undoubtedly contributed to this. Because of his dissident past, Havel became a kind of model for representatives of the Cuban opposition, the personification of an inspiring and successful mastering of a process that, in their expectations, their own country would have to go through, sooner or later. From the early nineties, it was clear that the tendency to look to the Czech example had an impact right throughout the rather fragmented Cuban democratic opposition, and in a way became an integrating factor.

For these reasons, President Vaclav Havel, after he took office, became the frequent addressee of complaints from the ranks of the Cuban activists, and as well from ordinary citizens, who were exposed to various forms of persecution. Relatives of imprisoned Cubans also turned to him, and appealed to his moral authority. They did so because they understood that, based on his own experience, he knew how

important it was for the democratic world to take an interest in the fate of individuals and groups who were promoting the ideas of civil rights in a dictatorship. His office became the natural, and often the first, destination for individual Cuban dissidents who were fortunate enough to be able to travel out of the "island of freedom." Over time, a network of connections developed as well between the Cuban opposition and several Czech non-governmental organizations who were concerned with the problem of human rights and humanitarian assistance.[3] The interest of the Czech media in Cuba increased as well, and gradually, even though it continued to be occasional and accidental, the awareness in our exceptional position in the context of the whole problem became more firmly anchored in the mind of the public.

At the same time, an interest in concrete assistance and in sharing our experience with the non-violent transition to democracy was being systematically communicated to us from Cuban circles both on the island and outside it. As Elizardo Sanchez Santa Cruz, the chairman of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, unofficially confirmed, the Czech experience is in many regards interesting not only for the opposition, but also for the younger, "reform" oriented members of the Cuban power structures.

To take this spontaneous, increasingly concrete but informal patronage of the Czech Republic over the problems of human rights in Cuba to a formal level and to exploit the opportunities offered by multilateral diplomacy, then became the next logical step. . . . To assist in the matter of human rights in Cuba is something we should understand as the realization of one of the top goals of our foreign policy, and as a way of fulfilling the spirit of a whole series of international documents that we have signed.

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[3] Chief among these was the People in Need Foundation, that provides humanitarian aid to people living in crisis areas.

We bring these facts up because the activity of Czech diplomacy in the UN Human Rights Commission from 1999-2001 is often (even here at home) taken out of context and construed as being exclusively motivated by factors ourside the country, with no reference to its real contintuity in time and substance.

Chapter 7
The Activity of the Czech Republic on the UN Commission for Human Rights in Geneva

Chapter 7 is a chronological account of the three successive appearances of the Czech Republic in the United Nations Commission for Human Rights. It provides information about the background, the problems and the barriers encountered by the Czech co-sponsorship of the resolution on the state of human rights in Cuba, and about the tactics it employed in each of the three sessions of the Commussion. The response to these initiatives is evaluated, along with its importance for the prestige of Czech foreign policy, and the impact of the Czech initiatives on bi-lateral relationships with Cuba.

a) The 55th Meeting of the UN Commission for Human Rights, 1999.

For six years after 1992, criticism of the state of human rights in Cuba within the UN Commission was the domain of the United States. Until 1998, when it failed to pass by three votes, the American "country oriented" resolution on Cuba reproduced the same sharply critical text. (The Czech Republic, which became a member of the Commission in 1997, along with the countries of the European Union co-sponsored the resolution in that, and the following year.)

Although one-third of the 53-member commission is rotated every year, in 1998 a certain exhaustion could be felt from the vote on the American resolution, caused in part by the yearly repetition of virtually the same document, and exacerbated by its bilateral optics. There were external reasons for this as well. In the preceding period, Cuba had undertaken some limited liberalizing steps that offered some

hope in the future. The authors of the resolution themselves came to the conclusion that they had already exhausted their possibilities and their potential for the future, particularly since the voting in the Commission, with its heavy representation of countries from the Third World, reflected not only their relationship to the country criticized, but also, indirectly, to the country that tabled the resolution.

But the "closed," reproachful language of the American resolution also limited its hope for success. It was clear that if Cuba was to remain the subject of criticism in an international forum, that criticism would have to be consistent, but also offer new perspectives, and mainly, express a new openness and ability to see the whole problem in its broader context.

At the same time, it was clear that a new sponsor for the resolution had to be found, one who enjoyed either universal authority (a condition that would be hard to meet) or who possessed special qualities fitting it to take on such a role. Such a sponsor, naturally, would also have to have the capacity and have its hands free (ideologically and otherwise) to take a critical stance regarding the situation of human rights in Cuba.

Let us list at least three theoretical possibilities (in no particular order) that meet the above qualifications:

1) a country that has gone through a similar experience of the repression of human rights as Cuba, and is now going through, or had gone through, a process of democratization. In this case, some of the countries of the Soviet Bloc would qualify.

2) a country that has a democratic system, and is historically and culturally close to Cuba and in this sense enjoys some authority. In this case, a small circle of Latin American democracies would qualify.

3) a democratic country that enjoys a general authority not only in Cuba, but in the Third World; in world forums it

supports the wider interpretation of human rights and it has conducted directly with Cuba and other authoritarian regimes a long-standing political dialogue. Here some of the Scandinavian countries might qualify.

Clearly, the Czech Republic meets the requirements outlined in position one. From that point of view, it is of secondary importance (even though the ideologically coloured Cuban interpretation of our actions considered it highly relevant) that at the beginning of 1999, representatives of the US Congress, and later members of its executive, were the first to approach us with the recommendation that we take over the initiative. (For the sake of accuracy, I should point out that the very first country they approached in this matter was the Polish Republic, but the Poles were hesitant to do so.)[4]

In the end, the Czech Republic sponsored the resolution on the state of human rights in Cuba for three years in a row. We will look in most detail at the first instance, in 1999, because circumstances in subsequent years repeated themselves and most of the external circumstances remained unchanged as well.

For the Czech foreign ministry, the decision to sponsor the "Cuban resolution" in the UN Commission for Human Rights in April 1999, was neither simple nor inevitable. It was an unprecedented step in this forum, and we had no experience, and no concrete assurance that our initiative would gain a majority of votes. From the beginning, it was obvious that Cuba would be a difficult diplomatic opponent that, in the field of multilateral diplomacy, could count on the

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[4] The current Czech Ambassador to Washington, Martin Palous, told me that when he was in Washington in 1997 as deputy foreign minister, he was approached by Frank Calzon, head of the Free Cuba organization, who asked him, informally, if the Czechs would consider sponsoring the Cuban resolution. Palous says he agreed immediately, and then argued his decision with ministry officials on his return to Prague. Palous's account does not contradict Pstross's; it merely suggests that the approach may have been made in stages.

support of the greater part of the block of developing countries, and from the influential great regional powers like Russia, China, and India. We had to be aware that in this the asymmetrical ideological conflict between a small country and a superpower, Cuba had gained considerable prestige and sympathy in the Third World. We also anticipated that the support of the European Union would not necessarily be unqualified, and that some countries might secretly welcome a defeat for the United States in the Commission for Human Rights in 1998. A major unknown was the reaction of the Latin American countries. . . . From the beginning, it was clear that the final result would be close either way, and that the number of abstentions would have considerable influence.

Other factors making our step an uncertain one was the general tendency of international organizations to avoid the paralysis of their own activities brought about by sharpening conflicts, and the antagonistic propaganda directed against us by making a connection between our initiative and the American lack of success the previous year.

The will to undergo all those risks (including the risk of failure) was strengthened by the Polish decision to become a co-sponsor of the resolution.

From all this, it's clear that a new, more open and non-confrontational wording of the resolution would offer some hope for success, and to a certain extent, that is what happened, even though our original ideas were more radical in that regard. What's important is that at the core of the resolution was a fundamentally critical, fact-based approach of Cuba to human rights (including a reference to the then new "Law to Defend Cuban National Independence and the Economy," which essentially made it tougher for the democratic opposition to maintain its contacts abroad.) An explicitly cooperative approach was expressed in a paragraph, later dropped, that suggested a willingness to

acknowledge some of the momentary difficulties, mainly economic, being experienced in Cuba. In the final text, however, there did remain a statement that said the world welcomed some of the recent positive changes in Cuba (the broadening of religious freedoms) and that it hoped this trend would continue. At the end of the resolution a paragraph was added inviting Cuba to consider asking for assistance from the program of international technical assistance, the purpose of which was the acceleration of reform in the field of human rights and basic freedoms.

As complicated the lobbying process for the resolution was, it confirmed the rightness of our basic points of departure: the moral principle of supporting human rights in Cuba from the position of a country that had gone through the same historical experience.

Preparing the draft resolution was a complex job, because in the course of it, the European Union wanted to insert a preamble condemning the economic embargo and relating it to the human rights question, which understandably was opposed by the United States. Similar attempts had been made by the European Union when America had sponsored the resolution, but the United States always swept them from the table with the comment that a "human rights" resolution should not be contaminated by paragraphs that raised economic issues. . . .

Countless and repeated attempts to formulate a compromise between the positions of the United States and the European Union (a special aspect of the whole matter that deserves its own detailed analysis) led nowhere. The final wording of the draft came closer to the American notion than was originally intended. The European Union did nothing to hide its dissatisfaction and let it be known that at best, it would not take a united position on the resolution. In any case, that unity was lacking from the beginning, which of course did not make the situation any more transparent. The

EU countries inclined toward the resolution gradually, and did not take a clearly positive stance toward it until the very end of the negotiation process. . . .

In attempting to explain why we had backed away from criticizing the embargo to countries that were inclined to be anti-American and whose support we tried to enlist, we were helped to some extent by the fact that we had supported the most recent Cuban resolution against economic pressure tactics in the General Assembly in 1998. . . .

The demand for sending a special rapporteur on human rights to Cuba was also not included in the text of the resolution. (The efficacy of this demand is conditional on the agreement of the country being criticized, which hardly seemed likely in this case.)

It must be openly admitted that working with Poland in preparing the text was not without problems, for it turned out that Poland had a tendency to be even closer to the American position than we were. As well, coodination between the Polish delegation in Geneva, the office in Warsaw, and the Polish diplomatic network in the rest of the world turned out to be clumsy and inadequate, and that affected the general process of preparing the text of the resolution.

As might have been expected, the Czech-Polish initiative brought a sharp, propagandistic response from Cuba that was not limited to various declarations by the Cuban delegation in Geneva, but involved the official Cuban media as well. The core of the criticism were attacks on the Czechs and Poles as “lackeys” and “servants” of United States’ interests, and references to hypocrisy in the application of “double standards” (criticism of Cuba while at home, suppressing the right of the Romany people, of migrants, etc.) It was clear that Cuba was attempting to ideologize the whole matter as much as possible, and to demonstrate that it was an example of the arrogance of the North toward Third World countries. The general tone of the Cuban propaganda

radiated confidence that the Czecho-Polish efforts would end in fiasco. Cuba also differentiated between the two presenting countries, and aimed the brunt of its attacks at the Czech Republic, which was generally felt to be the initiator.

The vote on April 23, 1999, produced a narrow victory for the presenters of the resolution: 21 for, 20 against, and 12 abstentions. The disposition of the votes by individual countries produced some surprises (for instance, Morocco supported the resolution) and showed that lobbying for the resolution can never be considered finished until the last moment. Of the Latin American countries, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Equador voted in favour of the resolution; Mexico voted against it, and the remaining three abstained. . .

The vote, close though it was, administered a “cold shower” to the self-assurance of the Cuban regime. Without a doubt, it dealt a blow to its prestige in the third world and gave a shot in the arm to both the internal and exile Cuban opposition. This was confirmed by many responses from those groups. In relation to the United States, our initiative, which played out on the eve of our accession to NATO membership, was a symbolic confirmation of our ability to stand up for the values that have justified the very existence of the alliance.

The result brought some prestige to Czech diplomacy. On the whole, it could be considered as a clear expression of a possible special role for the Czech Republic in dealing with the problem of defending human rights in multilateral forums, and it was a promise of more activities in that direction.

To round out the picture, it has to be mentioned that Cuba, which found it hard to come to terms with its defeat, attempted in July of the same year, to pass a “non-action” resolution in the Economic and Social Council of the UN, in other words, a decision that would in a way annul the conclusions of the Human Rights resolution. . . . This

proposal did not pass, and after a debate in which the Czech Republic took part, it was struck from the agenda.

Naturally, there are different ways of looking at the impact of this new situation on our bilateral relations with Cuba. This mainly involved a suspension of a process involving succession treaties, part of which was rectifying old Cuban debts to the Czech Republic. Working contacts were broken off. In one way or another, the Cuban side let it be known that they would enter into discussions with us about the debt only after they concluded agreements with their largest creditors, Russia and Germany. Other agreements involving support and protection for investments were not threatened. . . . The least affected area was that of educational and cultural contacts. The resolution had the greatest impact in the visible chilling of diplomatic relations. In the period following the passage of the resolution, Cuba let it be known through diplomatic channels that it sharply condemned the Czech initiative (which in their view was engineered by the United States), but that it also wished our relations to remain correct. Unofficially, Cuba let it be known that in view of our ambition to become fully fledged members of the European Union, it expected that the restrained and non-confrontational position of the Union would act as a corrective to any further Czech efforts to pillory Cuba on the international stage. (They seem not to have considered an opposite process, the radicalizing influence of the Czech Republic on the European Union in this matter.)

b) The 56th Session of the UN Commission for Human Rights in 2000:

In strategizing for the Cuba resolution in the following year, the Czechs were counting on Polish co-sponsorship again, but this time devoted considerable lobbying effort to win over

the key Latin American countries – Mexico, Argentina, Chile, and Brazil. Early in 2000, President Havel sent personal letters to the heads of state in these countries asking for their support. The Cubans could not longer underestimate the Czechs, so they pulled out all the stops to influence the vote. The campaign took place against the backdrop of the Elian Gonzalez affair. The Czechs now had a clearer idea of what they wanted to achieve, and realized that the text of the resolution had to be "situated in the imaginary triangle formed by the United States, Latin America, and Europe." In other words, it had to represent a balance of the three perspectives.

With more experience now, the Czechs and the Poles went about drafting the 2000 resolution and circulating the drafts far in advance of the voting. They sent a memorandum to selected countries in the EU, Latin America, the Visegrad "Four" (Hungary and Slovakia, as well as the Czech Republic and Poland), and to the USA and Canada, that put their Cuban initiative in the larger context of the Czech human-rights-based foreign policy. There were the usual wording problems to be solved; the EU countries still wanted to soften the language, and even objected to using the same language that was contained in their "common position" on Cuba. The US continued to reject any wording suggesting that the embargo was not working. A preamble was added that talked of the willingness of the international community to contribute to the development of a pluralistic society and a more effective economy for Cuba. Spain, France, Portugal, and Italy urged sharper about "the interest of many countries to end the economic isolation of Cuba," but the US strongly objected. Meanwhile, Cuba attempted to torpedo the process by putting strong pressure on undecided third world members of the commission, and by unleashing a massive campaign against the resolution on the island. Many of the highest Cuban officials, including Castro, issued statements

full of "revolutionary pathos" accusing the Czechs and Poles of being servants of the US. "It was clear," Pstross writes, "that these statements were aimed mainly at the bloc of third world countries on the commission."

The resulting text, Pstross says, was "essentially sharper" than the previous year. It reminded the Cuban government of commitments it had made in the field of human rights at the 9th Ibero-American summit in Havana in 1999 and at the EU-Latin American conference in Rio de Janeiro in the same year. It also demanded that the government invite a special rapporteur from the Human Rights Commission to look into human rights abuses.

The resolution carried, with 21 countries voting for it, 18 against, and 14 abstaining. The vote was welcomed by Cuban opposition circles and by NGOs working in the human rights field. Official Cuban reaction, Pstross says, verged on hysteria. There were organized mass demonstrations in front of the Czech Embassy, complete with an appearance and a long speech by Castro. [Summary by PW]

57th Session of the UN Human Rights Commission, 2001

The HR Commission this year presented the Czechs with a number of problems, one of which was that the new make-up of the commission included countries that could be expected to vote against the resolution. The Czechs had hoped that the Americans would soften their position on the embargo, but this did not happen. The Czechs, however, still hoped that the resolution would contain some form of the statement that "correctives to human rights abuses cannot be attained by economic sanction."

But the Czech position was made immensely more complicated when two Czech citizens, a member of parliament and a former student leader, were arrested in Havana in early 2001 and threatened with long prison

sentences. They were eventually released after some high-level interventions by the Czechs, but the Czech media speculated that the stronger "anti-American" wording of the resolution had been the price they paid the Cubans for letting their citizens go. This was strongly denied by the Czech foreign ministry.

In any case, a strongly worded condemnation of the US embargo was out of the question, and in the end, a French-proposed compromise version was inserted, to the effect that the Czech Republic recognized that member states should take steps to improve the economic situation in Cuba, and in doing so, support the human rights and the economic prosperity of the Cuban people."

Final vote: 22 for, 20 against, 10 abstentions. The US voted for it despite misgivings about some of the language. The Czechs were somewhat disappointed by the outcome, since they had hoped that inserting the "economic" paragraph, which had cost them so much time and effort, would have won them more support than they received.
[Summary by PW]

Chapter 8
Some Conclusions from the UN Human Rights Commission Experience

If we compare the results of the three years [of our sponsorship] we have to conclude that in the case of some of the countries on the Commission, the famous politicization of the UN is projected into the stances taken on the Cuban question. It expresses itself in voting in pre-defined blocs, in which the individual countries are linked not by a principled approach to the question of human rights, but by interests of a different category. In the voting patters of individual members of the Commission, repeated positional stereotypes may be observed.

These stereotypes are most often ideological in nature. In the case of Cuba, they represent the "solidarity" of their ideological fellow-travellers – countries like China, the South African Republic, Venezuela, Libya. It is practically impossible to have any influence on their positions during the negotiation process, nor does the offer of substantive changes in the formulation of the draft texts make any difference.

The negative position of most third world countries in the Commission toward the United States can probably also be considered an ideological position, one that, as it turned out, is one of the main weapons deployed by Cuba, not just in this forum, but in its entire foreign policy.

But stereotypes have other, less rigid, manifestations, for example those formed by an awareness of a common cultural and historical identity with the criticized country. An example of this might be the countries of Latin America, and to a certain extent countries in the European Union as well (Spain and Portugal). In these cases, the possibility of influencing them during negotiations is greater, especially if

their position is formulated with regard to their membership in a larger community like the European Union or in potential Latin American economic and political groupings. Then, in the position of France, we may observe what might be called a "cultural" stereotype, which takes the form of resistance to the role of the USA in the world today. The repeatedly negative positions of India (solidarity that is not ideological, but addressed primarily to the third world) and Russia (probably from a variety of reasons at the same time: setting themselves off from the US, pandering to the third world bloc, perhaps even a latent sympathy for the Castro despite the breakdown in mutual relations after the termination of Russian economic and military aid.)

It was these positional stereotypes that were partially responsible for the weak showing in our attempts to achieve substantial concessions in formulating the most controversial aspect of the whole resolution – the relationship between human rights and economic sanctions.

The voting of the Commission in 2003, when the Czech Republic was no longer a member, provided a certain confirmation of these hypotheses. This time, the initiative (with the active contribution of the Foreign Ministry of the Czech Republic) was taken up by four Latin American countries – Uruguay, Costa Rica, Peru, and Nicaragua. That resolution was essentially no more than an appeal, addressed to Cuba, to admit Ms. Chanet, the personal representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and to create the conditions for her work in Cuba, monitoring the implementation of some mildly formulated Latin American resolution from the year before. The heightened reaction of a large number of countries to the current stepping up of repressions against opponents of the regime in Cuba found no expression at all in the text of the resolution. Behind this cautious approach lay the apparent fears of its presenters that it might have a generally negative influence on the voting of

members of the Commission from developing countries. A sharply worded addendum that would have made the resolution specifically critical of the state of human rights in Cuba was suggested by Costa Rica and supported by Western countries, but it was not possible to get it through.

The results of the voting in 2003 essentially repeated the pattern of the preceding three years: 24 votes for the resolution, 20 against, with 9 abstentions. This leads to a rather unsettling hypothesis, that in the voting on "country oriented" resolutions, the first consideration is the general position taken on the country being criticized, and only then the actual content of the resolution, and the degree of sharpness, mildness, or balance of its criticism.

[. . . .]

Chapter 9
Recent Developments in Czecho-Cuban Relations

Synopsis: *This chapter includes new activities and initiatives for the year 2003*

1. *Czechs levelled sharp protests against the arrest and trial of 75 members of the Cuban opposition in March, 2003. Ex-president Havel gave an interview to the Cuban exile media.*
2. *Official Czech protest against the execution of the hi-jackers of the Havana harbour ferry. Appeal to Cuba to repeal the death sentence and subscribe to the International Pact on Civil and Political Rights, including the optional protocol.*
3. *The Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs supports the nomination of Oswaldo Paya for the Nobel Peace Prize.*
4. *Vaclav Havel is named 'ambassador of good will.' At a conference on human rights in Cuba, held in Madrid in July, 2003, he supports the proposal to set up a fund to support democracy in Cuba.*
5. *Havel, Arpad Goncz and Lech Walesa issue a document calling for the democratization of life in Cuba, and at the same time, announce the formation of the International Committee to Support Democracy in Cuba. The organizational duties on the Czech side are taken up by the People In Need Foundation, and members of the board include Madeleine Albright and Mario Varga Llosa.*
6. *The Committee sponsors a conference in Prague in September, 2004*
7. *The Czech Republic has observer status in the UN Commission for Human Rights, and continues to*

> *advise countries sponsoring the Cuban resolution.*
> [Summary by PW]

At this point, it must be stressed that interest in Cuba, motivated by the clear parallels between the ideologically formed experience of both countries, and our solidarity with the Cuban opposition will not, in the future, be the only example of how the Czech Republic applies the principle of respect for human rights in its foreign policy. Other countries are gradually being brought into the sphere of attention, countries with a strong or extreme human rights deficit -- for example, Burma/Myanmar, and North Korea, and countries geographically closer to home that are going through a transition to democracy from a starting point of dictatorship. They could be countries where this transition has been halted and now shows opposite tendencies (Belorussia), or whose transition to democracy is slow, or slowed down by internal conflict or by a traditional bias toward authoritarian rule. The Czech Republic's interest in these countries will not be limited to multilateral diplomacy; we believe that bi-lateral relations provide an excellent, though complicated basis for some immediate improvements in the way international standards of the defence of human rights are employed.

The Czech Republic's engagement in the matter of positive changes in the state of human rights in these countries can take various forms. Open diplomatic criticism in international forums of such conditions is only one of these forms. No less important is a widespread support, both intellectual and material, for the pro-democratic forces operating directly in the home territory, or in exile. Though it is logical to expect that this assistance will encounter resistance from the power structures of the countries under criticism, this is not necessarily always the case, and in countries that are "transitional democracies", building the foundations of civil society can even meet with cooperation

on the official level. At the risk of stating the obvious, it is here that immense opportunities arise for many Czech NGOs who have been working in this field for a long time now and have accumulated a wealth of experience.

Clearly, this form of assistance must receive the proper material support, and therefore we welcome the efforts of the Czech ministry of foreign affairs to establish a special fund for this purpose. . . .

In general, we may express satisfaction that the theme of human rights has found a place in Czech foreign policy, and that in some places (the UN Commission for Human Rights, and in the working committees of the EU) we are becoming visible actors in attempts by countries in the International Community to establish democracy as a universally accepted form of global development. There is no question that in the future, our role in this process need not be limited by the size of our country. If we build on our recent successes, we will have, in the system of international defence of human rights, our own firm, authoritative place. At the same time, we may express the hope that the sharp edge of our approach, based on firm principles, will not be blunted in particular instances by pragmatic interests, however they may be justified, and the insertion of which into practical politics is, unfortunately, a widespread phenomenon today.