

Abstract

As it is clear from the title, this thesis is focused on the development of international relations between Czechoslovakia and the nascent state of Israel in 1947-1949. For the Jews, the year 1947 represents a significant time period. The UN granted them the right to their own state in Palestine, which they should have shared with the Palestinian Arabs. Czechoslovakia figured among the states that prepared the draft of the United Nations Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) and took part in the creation and implementation of this draft in a significant way

In addition to this help in the UN our government also began to support the Jewish requirements in other ways. In order to resist the invasion of the neighbouring Arab countries the Jews urgently needed weapons. These weapons were delivered from Czechoslovakia in 1947-1949 despite the arms embargo declared by the UN over this area. Total volume of the supplied military equipment is estimated at more than 1 milliard crowns. Since the Israelis needed weapons as soon as possible, a secret airlift between a Czechoslovak airport in Žatec and some airports in Israel was established from May to August 1948. This covert operation became a symbol of excellent mutual relations in the tracking period. Not only light weapons (infantry rifles and machine guns) ranked among the supplied ones but also heavy machine guns, cannons and above all 25 Avia S-199 and 50 S-99 (Spitfire LF Mk IX E) aircraft, due to which the Israeli army dominated the airspace and stopped advancement of the Egyptian army in the first Jewish-Arab war.

Training soldiers for Israel can be considered another significant kind of help. More than 200 military specialists were trained in Czechoslovakia, especially pilots, airmen-technicians, parachutists and tankists. In addition to the specialists our government enabled to organize a brigade of Jewish volunteers from Czechoslovakia and some other Eastern Bloc countries in our territory. The brigade was trained at Libavá military complex and its surroundings from August to November 1948, and during the winter all 1335 members of this brigade emigrated with their families to Israel. Czechoslovakia supported Israel diplomatically and demographically. Our government was among the first ones to recognize the new state since 19 May 1948. And in the first half of next year 15 to 20 000 Czechoslovak citizens of Jewish origin were allowed to emigrate.

There were several reasons for a positive attitude of Czechoslovakia to the Jewish Agency and future state of Israel. In the postwar years Czechoslovakia followed favourable relations with the Zionists from the interwar period, mainly through Jan Masaryk and Eduard Beneš. Czechoslovak international policy was increasingly influenced by the attitude of the USSR,

which our country was slowly but surely becoming dependent on. Since the Soviets unexpectedly supported the plan for partition of Palestine and creation of an independent Jewish state, the Czechoslovak Communist leaders took a similar line and positive attitude to Jewish demands until 1949, when the Moscow's approach began to change. Apart from the influence of Moscow and the fact that the most prominent citizens of communist Czechoslovakia as Gottwald, Clementis or Reicin, for example, stood up for Israel, the economic motivation may not be ignored as one of the major factors during determining on the aid to Israel. Dealings with the Jewish Agency brought Czechoslovakia immediate gains in scarce foreign currency, and cooperation with the Jews also seemed to be more rewarding than the one with the Arabs.

Ben Gurion coordinated mutual cooperation at a distance and Ehud Avriel, the first ambassador for the Jewish state in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, worked directly in Czechoslovakia. However, the period of cooperation ended soon. In 1949 a slow turnover of the Czech-Israeli relations reflected in the gradual cessation of arms sales and turning down renewal of emigration projects, in attacks against the Zionist organizations and complications during concluding the agreement on economic and trade cooperation.

In the first half of the fifties, cooperation turned to the opposition and resulted in a diplomatic rift caused above all by the monstrous trial with Slansky, which had a very clear anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic dimension.