

# Dismantling the Czechoslovak Secret Police

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The purpose of this talk is to share a small part of the Czechoslovak (now just Czech) experience with the process of the transformation of its secret services. I hope that my words will be understood as a reflection—I am not trying to teach, but to share our experience during the long process in Czechoslovakia. You know, it is always better to learn from the experience of others than from your own.

The main differences between Russia and the Czech Republic, in this case, are mainly the period or stage of evolution. What I heard yesterday at this conference, reminds me of the discussions we had in Czechoslovakia back in 1990. At this point in time we were trying to solve a key problem—what to do with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the security organization amid the process of social and national democratization. We went through several stages of decision-making. At first, we thought that we could just reform the services by reviewing the members of the State Security Organization (StB), keeping the less discredited ones; by eliminating the department specialized in the so-called “fighting against internal enemies;” and by continuing to use, under strict parliamentary control, the Secret Intelligence Service and technical support departments comprised of new people. Almost the same concept or methodology was used in Poland and Hungary, where the whole process of transition from totalitarianism to democracy was slower and more gradual.

It is only symbolic that this concept was rejected early after the first liberal elections in 1990. I would say that more emotionally than rationally, we recognized that a new state security organ based on the old tradition of the StB could not comply with the democratic revolution. Moreover, it could have jeopardized or even destroyed this process altogether. We feared with good reason, that relations between the old StB and KGB members were strong, as the major part of the Czechoslovak secret police had been taught and trained in the KGB schools here. This fact mostly accounts for all the radical changes during 1990 and 1991 at the Ministry of Internal Affairs and in the secret services. Almost all the members of the StB were dismissed from their duties. They were giving the same excuses I heard yesterday—that they did not participate in these atrocities, in the crimes and the killings; that the accusations and recriminations are only a revenge that misses the real

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purpose and the real criminals. Probably they are right. However, they must also recognize that they voluntarily became members of this well-known criminal organization. That is why they should accept all the consequences. Finally, the actions taken by the democratic government are not so radical and earth-shattering. According to the Law on Lustration approved in 1991, the former StB members are barred from employment in the government for only five years.

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*“They [the StB people] were giving the same excuses I heard yesterday [from pro-KGB speakers]—that they did not participate in the atrocities, in the crimes and the killings. . .”*

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To summarize the above-mentioned, let me list the reasons which brought us to decide on eliminating the StB:

- 1) *Security.* The fear of the close contact between the StB and the KGB was considered the most dangerous element for democracy.
- 2) *Political.* The necessity to change the totalitarian Communist regime warrants the elimination of the StB as its most despised element.
- 3) *Moral.* It is absolutely impossible for a democracy to have in its structure an organization with such a criminal and appalling history as that of the StB.
- 4) *Practical.* The duties of the StB in a new democratic situation would be obsolete. These types of organizations and individuals can only work under totalitarian conditions, with wide access to sensitive information. Only a few of them would be able to adapt to new conditions.

Finally, please let me make two remarks regarding the aspects of the Law on Lustration and the general concept of a security policy.

—*Law on Lustration.* One of the sources of power of any secret service in a totalitarian state is the nature of its agents' work. Mainly, the relations between the agents and their bosses, and the possibility of influence and blackmail were the reasons for the creation and approval of the Law on Lustration. This does not mean that the Law is breaking those relations, only that it is breaking the pillars of the totalitarian state and the influence of the secret services.

—*Security policy.* The revolution in 1991 did not only mean the end of communism as a political system, but also the end of the bipolar world. The world is not divided into two camps anymore and the picture of the traditional enemy has disappeared. The world is different, more complicated and dangerous and all of the secret services are in a crisis of identity. Even the KGB will not escape this crisis and seeing your development and recalling our experience, I feel that a deep and radical transformation of the secret services will occur here as well.