

## **PEACEFUL DIVORCE AND THE NEW WORLD ORDER: AFTER CZECHOSLOVAKIA?**

Since the collapse of communism in 1989, much has been made of the violent eruption of ethnic nationalism in eastern Europe. The 'velvet divorce' between the Czech Republic and Slovakia is usually treated as the exception to the rule. In March of this year, Edinburgh University held a conference on the process of 'peaceful divorce' between these states and its implications for western Europe and the new world order generally.

In the 1990s the mutually reinforcing set of assumptions which has emerged requires careful and critical scrutiny. On the one hand, it is assumed that nationalism is 'inevitable', that each nation has to find its own state. This explanation has been used to account for the Czech-Slovak split, and it also has currency in the debate about the future of the nations of the UK. The second assumption is that the process of break-up is usually violent, and that peaceful separation is the result of good fortune rather than institutional practice.

The articles in this symposium are drawn from the Edinburgh conference. Tom Nairn has been a senior fellow at the Centre for the Study of Nationalism at the Central European University in Prague for the last two years, and is uniquely placed to draw out the comparisons between east and west. Petr Pithart is a former prime minister of the Czech Republic while it was still in federation with Slovakia. Jan Carnugorsky is leader of the Christian Democratic Party in Slovakia, and a former prime minister of that country. Sona Szomolanyi is a Slovak sociologist who was politically active in post-1989 politics. All three were dissidents under the old communist regime. Robin Wilson is the editor of the Northern Ireland journal **Fortnight**, which gives him a useful vantage point from which to draw out for the nations of these islands the implications for 'peaceful divorce'.

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