

## NIGERIA-CZECHOSLOVAKIA RELATIONS BEFORE AND AFTER THE SPLIT OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA IN THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY AND BEYOND

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### ABSTRACT

*Nigeria-Czechoslovakia relations have been very robust and beneficial to both countries. The relations and interactions between both countries at the beginning of the 20th century were minimal because Nigeria was still under colonial rule but improved after her independence in 1960. This opened doors to a great deal of opportunities for developing long-lasting and broad relations in security, politics, economy, and socio-cultural spheres. With the split of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993, relations between Nigeria and the Czech Republic intensified in the areas of commerce and trade, military training, and education, but the relations Nigeria has had with Slovakia over the years have been minimal. This paper aims at discussing and identifying, while using both primary and secondary sources, the key areas where both countries have had relations over the decades and how the relations have impacted both countries in the twentieth century and beyond.*

**Keywords:** Diplomatic Relations, Cooperation, Military, Security, Sports and Trade

**Jel Codes:** N4, N40, N44, N47

## 20. YÜZYILDA VE SONRASINDA ÇEKOSLOVAKYA'NIN BÖLÜNMESİNDEN ÖNCE VE SONRA NİJERYA-ÇEKOSLOVAKYA İLİŞKİLERİ

### ÖZET

*Nijerya-Çekoslovakya ilişkileri her iki ülke için de çok sağlam ve faydalı bir ilişki ihtiva etmektedir. 20. yüzyılın başında Nijerya'nın sömürge altında olması nedeniyle iki ülke arasındaki ilişkiler asgari düzeydeydi ancak Nijerya'nın 1960'taki bağımsızlığından sonra ilişkiler gelişme gösterdi. Bu durum,*

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*güvenlik, siyaset, ekonomi ve sosyo-kültürel alanlarda uzun süreli ve geniş ilişkilerin geliştirilmesi için birçok fırsatın kapısını açtı. Çekoslovakya'nın 1993 yılında Çek Cumhuriyeti ve Slovakya'ya bölünmesiyle birlikte Nijerya ile Çek Cumhuriyeti arasındaki ilişkiler ticaret, askeri eğitim ve öğretim alanlarında yoğunlaştı, ancak Nijerya'nın Slovakya ile yıllar içinde sahip olduğu ilişkiler asgari düzeyde kaldı. . Bu makale, hem birincil hem de ikincil kaynakları kullanarak, her iki ülkenin onlarca yıldır ilişki içinde olduğu kilit alanları ve ilişkilerin yirminci yüzyıl ve sonrasında her iki ülkeyi nasıl etkilediğini tartışmayı ve tanımlamayı amaçlamaktadır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Diplomatik İlişkiler, İşbirliği, Ordu, Güvenlik, Spor ve Ticaret*

**Jel Kodları:** *N4, N40, N44, N47*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria and Czechoslovakia have had relations based on mutual benefits over the decades. Both countries had their first relations based on commerce and trade before the World War II, when the famous shoe company in the Czech lands, Baťa, formed the subsidiary, Czechoslovak-Nigerian Export-Import Company (CNEICO),<sup>1</sup> as a conduit for its purchase of Nigerian rubber for the soles of its shoes. Czechoslovakia's attempt to enter into political diplomatic relations with Nigeria recorded little success because Nigeria was still under British colonial rule. Both countries later built their diplomatic relations since the former's independence from British colonial rule from the 1960s. Muehlenbeck explained that Czechoslovakia was one of the first countries to recognize Nigeria's sovereignty in 1960. Over the decades, the relationship between both nations had evolved and grown stronger, with a focus on trade, investment, military training, education, aviation and cultural exchange.

This article will provide an overview of Nigeria-Czechoslovakia relations, highlighting the key milestones, areas of cooperation, and potentials for future growth. In the early years of Nigeria's independence Czechoslovakia was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with the country. In 1960, the Czechoslovakian government sent a delegation to Nigeria to congratulate the country on its independence. This visit marked the beginning of a strong diplomatic relationship between both nations (Muehlenbeck, 2016). During the 1970s and 1980s, Nigeria and Czechoslovakia maintained a cordial relationship, with occasional high-level visits and exchanges in areas such as trade, culture, and education. However, the split of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in January, 1993 led to a brief period of uncertainty in the relationship. Following the break of Czechoslovakia, the Czech Republic continued to maintain strong diplomatic ties with Nigeria. The relations between Nigeria and

Slovakia have been very insignificant. The article will focus on Nigeria-Czechoslovakia relations before its dissolution and also Nigeria-Czech Republic relations after the split of Czechoslovakia in 1993.

In the 21st century, Nigeria-Czech Republic relations have experienced significant growth and modernization. In 2001, the Czech Republic opened an embassy in Abuja, Nigeria's capital city, while Nigeria established a mission in Prague in 2005 (Řehák, 2022). These diplomatic missions have facilitated increased communication and collaboration between both governments and private sectors. Undoubtedly, both nations have had both good and difficult experiences. This paper is an assessment of kind of relations that have existed between both nations over the decades and it provides answers to the questions of the desirability and necessity of strong Nigeria-Czechoslovakia diplomatic ties.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

The theory used in this research is the traditional diplomatic theory. The theory entails government-to-government communication. Traditional diplomacy is the interactions of nations through their permanent ambassadors or specially appointed diplomats. Permanent bilateral representation is the apex of traditional diplomacy. Traditional diplomacy views nations as actors at the world stage. The theory argues that even when non-state actors engage in international relations and politics, they do so under the supervision of states. The top proponents of this theory are likes of Hedley, Basil, and Woodrow Wilson (Stuart, 2006). Traditional diplomacy takes its roots from history. Traditional diplomacy surfaced in Europe after the ultimate end of the thirty-year war of religion in 1648. The new state system required a means to resolve the religious conflict that had consumed Europe, for a long period in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Both diplomacy and state system became prominent. The idea of sovereignty, state representation national interest, and national security are all components of traditional diplomacy (Popa, 2016). This has been the main aim and desire of both Nigeria and Czechoslovakia in relating with each other since the independence of Nigeria in 1960.

There are some necessary proponents for traditional diplomacy to function. The first proponent is that there must be more than one state because only state cannot establish diplomatic relations with itself. At least two states must be involved. These states must be sovereign and independent countries, able to exercise ultimate authority over its unit 90 (Hedley, 2012). A second proponent is the presence of shared values, ideas and interests, which allow states to develop some decent level of interaction and relations (Richard, 2011). Traditional diplomacy is fundamentally based on one-on-one basis just as Nigeria and Czechoslovakia relations was mainly centered on state relations as it relates to the theory of the research.

## **3. Methodology**

Most important in this article is the issue of Nigeria-Czechoslovakia relations before and after the split of Czechoslovakia in 1993. This study adopts a qualitative and a quantitative method approach. The kind of relations that existed between the two countries encompasses sports, culture, military assistance,

trade and commerce. In all, interviews were conducted with people living in the Czech Republic and Nigeria. Nigerian Airforce officers were interviewed because they had some knowledge of the military agreements the Nigerian government and Czech authorities had and these officers were in the Czech Republic on military training for 12 months at the time of the interviews.

For the quantitative method, data were collected in both Nigeria and Czechoslovakia regarding the history, culture and economy of both countries. This to a very large extent reveals a clear picture of what both countries were like during the period of the relations between the two countries. The data collected also went a long way in broadening the analysis and discussions in the study. For the interviews, the perceptions of respondents were analyzed in comparison with the information gathered through quantitative data during this study.

The study employs qualitative research to discover, trace, gather information and establish new facts regarding Nigeria-Czechoslovakia relations. provides the framework to investigate this phenomenon in-depth. This research method of analysis is purposive, explanatory, evaluative and comparative. Secondary sources such as books, articles, published and other unpublished works were consulted to arrive at historical objectivity. This article, in essence, investigates and identifies the relations that exists between the two countries, when the relations start and how it was conducted over the years in the twentieth century till present times.

#### **4. A brief description of Nigeria, Czechoslovakia and Czech Republic *Nigeria***

Nigeria, officially known as the Federal Republic of Nigeria, is a vast country located in West Africa. It is the most populous country in Africa and the sixth most populous country in the world, with a population of over 225 million people. Nigeria is well known for its diverse culture, rich history, and abundant natural and mineral resources. Nigeria shares international borders with several countries including Niger at the north, Chad at the northeast, Cameroon at the east, and Benin Republic at the west. It has a coastline by the Gulf of Guinea at the south. The country covers an area and land mass of approximately 923,768 square kilometers (356,669 square miles), making it the 32nd largest country in the world. Nigeria's geography comprises of a variety of landscapes. In Southern Nigeria, there are coastal plains and mangrove swamps, while the central region consists of plateaus and hills. Northern Nigeria is dominated by the Sahel savannah and semi-arid regions (Nigeria, Wikipedia).

The climate of Nigeria varies from region to region. The Southern part experiences a tropical rainforest climate with high rainfall throughout the year. The Central Nigeria has a savannah climate with distinct wet and dry seasons. The Northern part of Nigeria has a semi-arid climate with very hot temperature. Nigeria has a rich history that dates back thousands of years. The area that is now Nigeria has been inhabited since at least 9000 BC by various indigenous peoples. Over time, different kingdoms and

empires rose and fell in different parts of the country. One of the earliest known civilizations in Nigeria is the Nok culture, which thrived between 1000 BC and 300 AD. The Nok people were skilled in ironworking and created intricate terracotta sculptures. In later centuries, several powerful empires emerged in Nigeria, including the Kanem-Bornu Empire, the Hausa Kingdoms, and the Oyo Empire. These empires also controlled several vast territories and traded with merchants from other parts of Africa and the Arab world. European established contact with Nigeria in the 15th century when Portuguese explorers arrived on the coastline. The Portuguese established trade routes and introduced Christianity to the region. In the 19th century, Great Britain gained control over Nigeria through a series of colonial conquests. Nigeria gained independence from British colonial rule on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1960, becoming a sovereign nation. Since then, Nigeria has experienced periods of military rule and civilian governments. The country has faced various challenges including political instability, ethnic tensions, and economic struggles (Falola, 2008).

Nigeria is a sovereign nation with a presidential system of government. The Nigerian President is the Head of State and also the Head of Government. The president is elected into office by a majority vote and serves as the Chief Executive of the nation. The National Assembly is the legislative arm of government in Nigeria. It consists of two chambers: the House of Senate and House of Representatives. The members of both chambers are elected by the Nigerian people. Nigeria operates a multi-party system, with several political parties competing in elections. The two major political parties in Nigeria are the All Progressive Congress (APC) and People's Democratic Party (PDP) (Dhikru, 2020). Nigeria has one of the largest and greatest economies in Africa and is also referred to as the "Giant of Africa." The country has made efforts to diversify its economy by promoting sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and services. Nigeria is famous for its diverse culture, with over 250 ethnic groups and languages. The three major ethnic groups in Nigeria are the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo. Each ethnic group has its own distinct traditions, languages, and customs. Nigerian culture is influenced by a blend of indigenous traditions, colonial heritage, and globalization. Traditional Nigerian music includes various genres such as highlife, juju, afrobeat, and fuji. Nollywood, Nigeria's film industry, is among the largest in the world. Nigerian cuisine is diverse and tasty, with popular dishes including jollof rice, egusi soup, suya (grilled meat), and pounded yam. Traditional clothing varies across ethnic groups but often includes vibrant fabrics and intricate designs (Obomeghie, 2021).

#### **4.1. Czechoslovakia**

Czechoslovakia was a country located in Central Europe that existed from 1918 to 1992. Its history is marked by significant political, social, and economic developments such as World War II, Communist period, and Velvet Revolution. This comprehensive overview will delve into the key events and transformations that shaped Czechoslovakia throughout its existence. Czechoslovakia emerged as an

independent state following the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end of World War I. On October 28, 1918, Czechoslovak leaders proclaimed the establishment of an independent republic in Prague. The new country was named Czechoslovakia and Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk was elected the first president (Rick, 2000). During the interwar period, Czechoslovakia experienced a period of relative stability and economic growth. The country adopted a democratic political system and implemented progressive social reforms. The new country was one of the most industrialized nations in Central Europe and enjoyed a high standard of living compared to its neighbours. However, tensions between ethnic groups within Czechoslovakia persisted. The country was home to a diverse population consisting of Czechs, Slovaks, Germans, Hungarians, Ruthenians, Jews, and others. The issue of minority rights became a significant challenge for the government (Jaroslav and Oldřich, 2018)

In 1938, as Nazi Germany sought to expand its influence in Europe, it demanded the annexation of the predominantly German-speaking Sudetenland region from Czechoslovakia. Under pressure from France and Britain, Czechoslovakia reluctantly agreed to cede this territory to Germany in what became known as the Munich Agreement. The Munich Agreement failed to appease Hitler's ambitions, and in March of 1939, German soldiers occupied the remaining Czech lands, creating the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Slovakia, led by Jozef Tiso, declared independence as a separate state under German influence. The Czechoslovak government-in-exile, led by President Edvard Beneš, operated from London throughout the war (Jaroslav and Oldřich Pánek 2018). After the start of World War II, Czechoslovakia revolted against Nazi occupation. The Czechoslovak government-in-exile coordinated various acts of sabotage, espionage and the killing of Reinhard Heydrich, one of the architects of the Holocaust. In 1945, Soviet and Allied forces liberated Czechoslovakia from German control. The country's borders were restored, and the government-in-exile returned to Prague. However, the post-war period was marked by political turmoil and the beginning of Communist influence (Mahoney, 2011).

In February 1948, a Communist coup led by Klement Gottwald resulted in the beginning of a Communist regime in Czechoslovakia. The country came under Soviet influence and became a satellite state under the Eastern Bloc. Under Communist rule, Czechoslovakia experienced significant political repression and economic centralization. Dissent was suppressed, and opposition figures were persecuted. The economy stagnated due to inefficient central planning. In 1968, Czechoslovakia underwent a short period of liberalization that is known as the Prague Spring. Led by Alexander Dubček, the government introduced reforms aimed at creating "socialism with a human face." These reforms included greater political freedom, freedom of speech, and economic decentralization. However, fearing the loss of control over an Eastern Bloc country, the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact countries invaded Czechoslovakia

in August 1968. The invasion crushed the Prague Spring movement and reaffirmed Soviet dominance over the country (Cottrell, 2005).

In the late 1980s, Czechoslovakia experienced a wave of popular discontent against Communist rule. The Velvet Revolution, a peaceful mass protest headed shortly after the outset by a respected figure of the Czech Dissent Václav Havel and other dissidents, brought an end to Communist rule in late 1989. The post-Communist era saw Czechoslovakia transition to a democratic system and embrace market-oriented reforms. However, tensions between Czechs and Slovaks grew, leading to demands for greater autonomy. In 1992, negotiations between the leaders of the Czech people and the Slovaks resulted in the agreement to peacefully divide Czechoslovakia into two independent nations: the Czech Republic and Slovakia. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 1993, Czechoslovakia was split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia, marking the end of its 74-year history as a single state (Rick, 2000).

#### **4.2. Czech Republic**

The Czech Republic is a nation that is landlocked and it is located in Central Europe. It shares borders with Slovakia at the east, Germany at the west, Austria at the south, and Poland at the northeast (Wikipedia, Czech Republic). The Czech Republic has a rich history and cultural heritage, making it a popular tourist destination. Czechia covers an area and land mass of approximately 78,866 square kilometers (30,450 m<sup>2</sup>). It is characterized by diverse landscapes, including mountains, plains, and plateaus. The highest peak is Sněžka, standing at 1,603 meters (5,259 feet) above sea level. The climate in the Czech Republic is warm during summer and very cold in winter. The average temperature in July, the warmest month, ranges from 20°C to 22°C (68°F to 72°F), while in January, the coldest month, temperatures range from -4°C to -7°C (25°F to 19°F) (WorldAtlas, Czech Republic).

The history of today's Czechia dates back to ancient times when Celtic tribes inhabited the region. In the 9th century AD, the Duchy of Bohemia was established under the rule of the Přemysl dynasty. Over the centuries, Bohemia became an important political and cultural center within the Roman Empire. During the period of Hussite Wars in the 15th century, Czech religious reformer Jan Hus played a significant role in challenging the authority of the Catholic Church (Mahoney, 2011). The Bohemian Kingdom later fell under Habsburg rule and was incorporated into the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1918, after the end of World War I, Czechoslovakia was formed as an independent state. However, during World War II, Czechoslovakia was taken over by Nazi Germany under the rule of Adolf Hitler. After the war ended in 1945, Czechoslovakia regained its independence and underwent a period of communist rule under the authority of the former Soviet Union. The Velvet Revolution in 1989 marked the peaceful transition from a communism nation to a democratic one, leading to the split of Czechoslovakia in 1993. The Czech Republic

and Slovakia emerged as separate nations after the split (Rick, 2000). The Czech Republic is a parliamentary democracy with a multi-party system. The President is the head of state, while the Prime Minister is the head of government. The Parliament consists of two chambers: the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The country is a member of various international organizations, including the United Nations Organisation (UNO), NATO, and the European Union (EU). However, the Czech Republic does not use the euro as its currency and but the Czech koruna (CZK) as its national and official currency (Czech Republic, Wikipedia).

Czechia has a developed and industrialized economy. It has a high-income market economy with a strong focus on exports. Key sectors include automotive manufacturing, machinery, electronics, chemicals, and services. The country has attracted significant foreign direct investment due to its skilled workforce, strategic location within Europe, and favorable business environment. Prague, the capital city, is an important financial hub and a popular destination for international companies (Czech Republic, Britannica). The Czech culture is diverse and influenced by both Western and Eastern European traditions. It has a rich artistic heritage, particularly in literature, music, and visual arts. Renowned Czech composers include Antonín Dvořák and Bedřich Smetana. Czech cuisine is known for its hearty dishes such as goulash, svičková, marinated beef with creamy sauce. Beer is very vital in Czech culture, with the country being famous for its breweries and infamous for its beer consumption per capita. Tourism is a big earner for the Czech economy. Visitors are drawn to historical sites such as Prague Castle, Charles Bridge, and the historic center of Český Krumlov. The country also boasts numerous natural attractions, including national parks, caves, and spa towns (Czech Republic, World Facebook).

##### **5. Nigeria-Czechoslovakia relations before the split in the twentieth century**

The diplomatic relations between Nigeria and Czechoslovakia which spanned from 1918 to 1993, encompassed political, economic, and cultural interactions. Czechoslovakia, during this period, classified Nigeria, Congo-Brazzaville, Tanzania, Ghana, Guinea, Mali and the United Arab Republic as countries of high economic interest and potentials (Zdeněk et al 2016). This period witnessed significant changes in both countries, including the formation of Czechoslovakia, Nigeria's struggle for independence, and subsequent political developments. Throughout these years, the relations between Nigeria and Czechoslovakia experienced fluctuations influenced by global events, ideological shifts, and domestic policies. The creation of Czechoslovakia in 1918 after the fall of the Austro-Hungarian empire marked the beginning of formal diplomatic relations between the Czechoslovakia and other independent countries around the world. However, due to geographical distance, limited interactions and the fact that Nigeria was still under British colonial rule made the relationship relatively low-key during this period. Czechoslovakia's primary focus was on consolidating its position in Europe after the first world war, while Nigeria gradually began to agitate for independence (Obomeghie, 2021).



Czechoslovakia was very passionate about establishing relations with newly independent nations of Africa because they knew what they would benefit. The then Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Vaclav David was quite specific when he explained the basic problems of the newly independent countries in Africa and how to end the scourge of economic and political domination of colonialism, to strengthen and broaden their national sovereignty and independence. Czechoslovakia saw its ultimate duty as providing the much needed assistance to African countries in her efforts to achieving this course within the shortest possible time. The strategic importance and location of Africa, where Nigeria was also situated, was given much attention by the Czechoslovaks (Curt, 1963).

Czechoslovakia's first contacts with Nigeria was established before World War II, as earlier explained in the introductory part of this article, was when the Czech shoe company formed the subsidiary, Czechoslovak-Nigerian Export-Import Company (CNEICO), as a conduit for the purchase of Nigerian rubber for the soles of its shoes. Bata was a very successful shoe company. By 1929, Bata was the world's leading footwear producer and exporter. Before the start of World War II, the company already had over 100,000 workers, and its shoes were already being sold all over the world, mostly in African countries. The company established several factories in Africa, as its affordable footwear was very good for the African market, and Bata was soon known as the "shoes of Africa." Attempts were made to strengthen these relations but it yielded little results because it was not comfortable for the British, former colonial master of Nigeria (Muehlenbeck, 2016).

The idea of starting a Czechoslovak diplomatic representation in Nigeria first emerged in the mid-1950s when Nigeria was still a British colony. However, due to the Suez Crisis, efforts were delayed. The initial attempt at diplomatic representation occurred in March 1958, but it was rejected by Great Britain. Even after Nigeria gained independence, British influence persisted in its political affairs. Initially, Czechoslovak diplomats faced challenges in obtaining visas. Festus Okotie-Eboh, a former Bata accountant who had experience in Czechoslovakia, became the Minister of Finance in the newly independent Nigerian federal government. This presented a promising opportunity to establish relations between the two countries. Diplomat Emil Keblusek was assigned to initiate negotiations in Nigeria. The goal was to navigate around the pro-British Nigerian politicians, focusing on negotiations with Eboh and Nnamdi Azikiwe. In October 1961, diplomatic relations were officially established, and Emil Keblusek was tasked with setting up the embassy (Sieber, 2002). Political power in independent Nigeria was concentrated among the Hausa, Fulani, Ibo, and Yoruba tribes. The Yorubas, making up the majority in the western regions, became the focal point of early violence in independent Nigeria. Czechoslovakia refrained from involvement in these conflicts, understanding that none of the major political parties had a significant inclination to align with the communist state. Giving his own experience with the communist domination

of Czechoslovakia in 1948, he held a strong anti-communist stance. His interest in relations with Czechoslovakia was primarily economic. In June 1963 Keblusek was made the head, East African Department of the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry and was succeeded as head of the embassy by Otakar Liska (Sieber, 2002).

Despite the rejection of communist states by the main political parties, there were factions sympathetic to communist ideals. These groups became targets for Communist Czechoslovakia. However, these parties were deeply divided and did not hesitate to criticize each other to secure support from their sympathetic electorate. Essentially, these parties were primarily interested in financial aid from Czechoslovakia, rather than genuine cooperation. As Karel Sieber points out, "the Czechoslovak leadership wasted money financing and bribing the most questionable figures in African political life without achieving anything. The loyalty of these individuals to communist Czechoslovakia lasted only as long as financial support came from Prague." Moreover, these parties were unsuccessful in elections (Sieber, 2002).

In the area of technical skills based on their historical experience in Africa, the Czechoslovaks emerged important partners for a number of African nations, especially the so-called 'radical' ones. Beginning from the late 1950s, Czechoslovakia began to render military assistance to Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, and Ghana (Marco, 2018). Nigeria gained independence from British colonial rule in 1960, which opened up new avenues for international engagement. Czechoslovakia was one of the first countries to congratulate Nigeria after attaining independence. Czech official missions were sent to attend the independence celebration. During this period, Czechoslovakia pursued a policy of supporting anti-colonial movements and newly independent nations as part of its broader foreign policy objectives. As a result, Czechoslovakia extended diplomatic recognition to Nigeria shortly after its independence (Curt, 1963). The Cold War dynamics also influenced Nigeria-Czechoslovakia relations during this period. While Nigeria initially pursued a non-aligned foreign policy stance, it leaned towards socialist ideologies under the regime of Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. This ideological alignment led to increased cooperation between Nigeria and Czechoslovakia in areas such as trade, education, and technical assistance (Wapmut, 2011). On 15<sup>th</sup> January, 1966, the civilian regime in Nigeria collapsed due to a military coup in which top politicians, including Festus Okotie-Eboh, were assassinated. While the military removed corrupt leaders, it failed to provide a lasting solution. General John Aguiyi Ironsi briefly assumed the role of head of state. By July 1966, another coup led by General Jacob Gowon took control. This period saw violent pogroms against the sizable Igbo community, resulting in the demise of thousands of people. The massacre involved Hausa soldiers and triggered Igbo retaliation against the small Hausa community in the Eastern of the country. (Sieber, 2002).

After Ironsi abolished the federation, the authority of provincial military commanders continued to expand following Gowon's coup. Consequently, Czechoslovakia shifted its focus to the regional rulers (Sieber, 2002). Furthermore, in October 1966, a report from the Czechoslovak embassy indicated that the secession of the Eastern part of the country (Biafra) was still a possibility. Ambassador Vítězslav Wagner was tasked with understanding the situation in the Nigerian provinces. A visit to the Eastern region, governed by Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, took place. Col. Ojukwu was one of the first foreign representatives that informed the Czechoslovak representative that the East intended to separate from Nigeria. He expressed his plan to seek recognition of diplomatic relations and admission into the United Nations, along with the introduction of a new currency. Describing the differences between the Eastern and Northern part of Nigeria as "a contradiction between two different socio-economic formations (feudalism-bourgeois democracy)," Ojukwu pledged to do everything possible for the best relations with Czechoslovakia. Ojukwu even likened the Eastern region secession to the birth of Czechoslovakia, made possible by the fall of the Habsburg monarchy. He intended to purchase machines for printing of newspapers and magazines, a steady supply of arms, and the minting of new banknotes in Czechoslovakia. However, as a satellite state of the USSR, Czechoslovakia had to consult the Soviets about its stance on the emerging nation. The proposal to mint banknotes in Czechoslovakia was considered not feasible, and Czechoslovak arms could only be supplied through an intermediary to obscure their origin. Later, during a meeting in March 1967, there was an emphasis on Czechoslovak commercial interests primarily targeting Lagos and the North. Omnipol, an enterprise of the Federal Ministry of Foreign Trade, however, took a different stance, expressing enthusiasm about new potential markets for its arms and equipment. It's important to note that Czechoslovakia was one of the major suppliers of arms to 'third world countries,' potentially playing a significant role in the secession and maintenance of independence in the Eastern Nigeria. In March 1967, Chidi Dike arrived in Prague as a representative of Ojukwu with the aim of negotiating support for the Ojukwu regime in Czechoslovakia (Sieber, 2002).

In mid-1967, tensions between the central government and the eastern regime escalated, leading to the outbreak of a civil war. Even during that year, Czechoslovakia did not adopt a definitive position on the developments in Nigeria. It kept its options open, maintaining relations with both the Gowon and Ojukwu regimes. Nonetheless, deliveries of arms and equipment to the federal government had already commenced through an intermediary. While Czechoslovakia had previously exported arms to Africa, this marked the first time it was exporting arms to a country engulfed in a civil war. The decision seemed purely pragmatic, with ideology or sympathies playing no apparent role, as the weapons were sent to the feudal and Muslim north rather than the more progressive south, which might have been considered more advantageous. However, the Czechoslovak side was cognizant of the risks associated with selling arms through an intermediary that could end up supplying both warring parties. Additionally, the arms supplies were seen

as a challenge to the authority of Great Britain, the US, and West Germany. Therefore, the supplies were independent of a specific political stance and were determined by the Soviet Union (Sieber, 2002)

The Nigerian civil war broke out in July 1967 following a series of inter-ethnic quarrels and armed confrontations which had begun earlier. The Nigerian government, finding it very difficult to end the rebellion and unrest in Eastern Nigeria, requested for foreign military assistance from both the Eastern and Western nations. Soviet Russia and Czechoslovakia were the first countries that honoured the Nigerian government's request. Other nations were Poland and former German Democratic Republic. After the agreement between Nigeria and Soviet Russia in 1967, military weapons began to be transported to Nigeria. Czechoslovakia did not make a separate agreement relating to arms supplies with the Nigerian Government. The first military consignment was six L-29 Delfin trainer aircraft, a few hundred crates of Kalashnikov AK-47 automatic rifles and some heavy mortar guns (Orobator, 1983). The only exception was Czechoslovakia's ban on arms supplies to Nigeria in 1968, a policy which was reversed, however, after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 (Oye, 1976). In January 1968, there was a shift as public opinion in Czechoslovakia, influenced by the so-called Prague Spring, started to oppose the export of arms to war-devastated Nigeria. By the close of April in 1968, further arms shipments were stopped. Embargo on exports were swiftly imposed by the Netherlands, Italy, France, and Belgium (Sieber, 2002). Weapons were once again supplied following the August occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops. From this point onward, the activities of the USSR, which had been exporting arms to Nigeria, were once again mirrored, with economic gain taking precedence over public opinion for communist officials (Sieber, 2002).

The quality of Czechoslovak aviation engineering was greatly improved in 1961. The L-29 Delfin planes became regarded as the best jet trainer in the world. L-29 Delfins were exported to Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, Uganda, and later to Angola. Also, during the Nigerian Civil War, Czechoslovak aviation experts made offers to Nigeria to train their pilots on to fly the L-29s, a sophisticated fighter jet at the time (Muehlenbeck, 2016). Czechoslovakia found the opportunity to displace West German military aircraft supplies, instructors, and overall influence in this sector attractive. This eventually became a reality following the killing of West German team members in a raid, coincidentally carried out by a Czechoslovak mercenary fighting on the side of Biafra (Sieber, 2002). Czechoslovakia provided Nigeria with economic aid, technical expertise, and scholarships for several Nigerian students to study in universities in Czechoslovakia.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, Czechoslovak companies participated in infrastructure projects in Nigeria, including the construction of roads and industrial facilities. These collaborations contributed to the development of Nigeria's economy and human capital during its early years as an independent nation. The political landscape in both Nigeria and Czechoslovakia underwent significant changes after the Civil War of Nigeria, which impacted on their bilateral relations. In Nigeria, a series of military coups and

political instability characterized this period. The government's focus shifted towards consolidating power domestically, leading to a decline in international engagements. Czechoslovakia also experienced some political changes during and after the Prague Spring in 1968 followed by a period of normalization under Soviet influence. This shift in Czechoslovakia's foreign policy priorities affected its engagement with African nations, including Nigeria (Richterova, 2021).

Furthermore, economic challenges faced by both countries also influenced their bilateral relations. Nigeria experienced an economic downturn due to falling oil prices and mismanagement of resources, leading to reduced capacity for international cooperation. Similarly, Czechoslovakia faced economic difficulties as its centrally planned economy struggled to adapt to changing global dynamics. These factors contributed to a decline in the intensity of Nigeria-Czechoslovakia relations during the later part of 1970s and 1980s. However, some level of cooperation continued, particularly in areas such as education and cultural exchanges. Nigeria-Czechoslovakia relations from 1918 to 1993 were characterized by periods of cooperation and engagement interspersed with challenges influenced by global events, ideological shifts, and domestic policies. While the early and later years after Nigerian independence witnessed increased collaboration between both countries, political changes and economic challenges later impacted the intensity of their interactions. Nonetheless, the diplomatic ties established during this period laid the foundation for future engagements between Nigeria and Czechoslovakia (Ojo, 1985).

#### **6. Nigeria-Czech Republic relations since 1993**

On January 1, 1993, Czechoslovakia was officially split into two independent nations, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The separation was carried out peacefully, without any armed conflict or violence. Both countries became members of the United Nations and other international organizations in their own right (William, 2011). After the split, the Czech Republic continued to maintain a cordial relationship with Nigeria and this relation was mutually beneficial to both countries. Over the years, both countries have engaged in various areas of cooperation, including trade, investment, education, culture, and development assistance (Obomeghie, 2021).

Political and economic relations between Nigeria and the Czech Republic have been characterized by diplomatic engagements and cooperation at both bilateral and multilateral levels. High-level visits have played a significant role in strengthening ties between the two independent countries since 1993. In 2002, President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria paid an official visit to Czechia, which marked a milestone in bilateral relations. The visit resulted in the signing of several agreements aimed at enhancing cooperation in areas such as trade, investment, and cultural exchange. Both countries have maintained regular diplomatic consultations through their respective embassies. These consultations serve as platforms for

discussing issues of mutual interest and exploring avenues for further collaboration. The political relations between both nations have remained stable and have continued to grow stronger over time (Dawood, 2021).

Economic relations between both countries have witnessed significant growth since 1993. Trade volumes between the both nations have increased steadily, with a focus on sectors such as machinery, automobiles, chemicals, textiles, and agricultural products. The Czech Republic had also shown interest in investing in Nigeria's energy sector, particularly in oil and gas exploration. In recent times, there has been an increase in bilateral trade missions and business forums aimed at promoting economic cooperation. These initiatives have provided opportunities for Nigerian and Czech businesses to explore potential partnerships and investment opportunities. Additionally, both countries have signed agreements to avoid double taxation and promote investment protection. Development cooperation has been an essential aspect of Nigeria-Czech relations since 1993. The Czech Republic provided development assistance to Nigeria through various channels, including technical cooperation, capacity building, and humanitarian aid. These initiatives have focused on areas such as healthcare, education, agriculture, and infrastructure development. In order to emphasize the importance of the Nigerian market for Czech businesses and increase their commercial opportunities in Nigeria, a new office for Czech - Trade was opened in Lagos, Nigeria in 2017 (Rudincová, 2019).

The Czech Republic supported Nigeria in capacity building programs by offering scholarships to Nigerian students to study in Czech universities. This has contributed to the human resource development of Nigeria and strengthened people-to-people ties between both nations. Educational cooperation has been a vital component of Nigeria-Czech relations. The Czech Republic has offered scholarships to Nigerian students to pursue undergraduate and postgraduate studies in various fields (Ojo, 1985). This has contributed to the human capital development of Nigeria while strengthening educational ties between both nations. Several Nigerian students have attested to the fact that they have either received full or partial scholarships from the Czech government to study in their universities. Cultural and educational exchanges have played a significant role in enhancing mutual understanding and friendship between Nigeria and the Czech Republic. Both countries have organized cultural festivals, exhibitions, and performances to showcase their rich cultural heritage (Curt, 1963). These events have fostered cultural exchange and promoted tourism between both nations.

Nigeria and the Czech authorities experienced an unpleasant diplomatic mishap due to the Nigeria government cancellation of a scheduled trip by the Czech Republic Prime Minister, Petr Fiala and his delegation, to Nigeria. The cancellation of the scheduled trip took place on November 6, 2023. This cancellation was not too pleasant to the authorities of the Czech Republic and it generated opinions and speculations that it was linked to the Czech Republic's support for Israel in the on-going war between

Palestine and Israel (Gencturk, 2023). The Nigerian government was able to clear the air on their action by insisting that the cancelled trip was not in connection with the Czech Republic's stand on the Palestine-Israeli war at meeting of the United Nations Organization. A media aid to the Minister of Foreign Affairs told the media in Nigeria that the Czech government notified the Nigerian authorities only thirteen days before the scheduled visit and that usual diplomatic procedure was that a one-month notice was supposed to be given to the Nigerian government in advance for them to adequately prepare to receive the Czech Prime Minister and his entourage. He further added that Nigeria has always considered the Czech to be a friendly nation and hope to welcome the Czech Republic Prime Minister to Nigeria at a more convenient time in line with the established diplomatic procedure in the near future (Afolabi, 2023).

### **7. The impact of Nigeria-Czechoslovakia and Nigeria-Czech relations since 1918**

The bilateral relations between both nations were officially established after Nigeria gained independence from Britain. Czechoslovakia recognized Nigeria as an independent nation on October 1, 1960. This marked the beginning of diplomatic ties between both countries. This establishment of a diplomatic relations between both countries marked an important phase in formal and official diplomatic relations between sovereign states. In the area of commerce and trade, there has been the export of raw materials from Nigeria. Nigeria has, since independence, exported raw materials such as oil, rubber, and cocoa to Czechoslovakia, while Czechoslovakia also reciprocated by also exporting machinery, equipment, and other manufactured goods to Nigeria making both countries benefit immensely from the trade relations (Ondřej and Rudincová 2012).

Both countries have established joint ventures in various sectors of their economies, including agriculture, manufacturing, and infrastructure development. In the 1970s and 1980s, Czechoslovakia invested heavily in Nigeria's agricultural sector, and Nigeria has also invested in Czechoslovakia's automotive and manufacturing sectors. Making both countries to benefit. The two countries have signed several economic cooperation agreements, including the Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation in 1974 and the Agreement on Promotion and Protection of Investments in 1993. These agreements have aimed to promote trade and investment between both countries and provide a framework for economic cooperation. The global economic trends of the past century, such as the oil price shocks of the 1970s and the collapse of communism in 1989, have had a significant impact on the trade relations between Nigeria and Czechoslovakia (Dawood, 2021). The collapse of communism led to the establishment of democratic governments in East and Central Europe, including the Czech Republic, which has led to increased trade and investment between the regions (Jaroslav and Oldřich, 2018).

Nigeria and Czechoslovakia and later the Czech Republic have engaged in various educational exchanges. These exchanges have taken different forms, including student exchanges, academic

collaborations, scholarships, and training programs. Another key aspect of Nigeria-Czech relations has been education. Over the years, Nigerian students have been opportuned to study in Czech universities. Nigerian students studying in Czech universities have benefited from quality education and exposure to a different academic environment. They have gained knowledge and skills that they can apply back in Nigeria upon their return. There have also been academic collaborations between Nigerian and Czech institutions and this has played crucial roles in fostering educational development. These collaborations have involved joint research projects, faculty exchanges, curriculum development, and sharing of best practices. Through these academic collaborations, both countries have been able benefit from each other's expertise and resources. Nigerian institutions have benefited from the knowledge and experience of Czech academics, while Czech institutions have gained insights into the unique challenges and opportunities in the Nigerian educational system (Ondřej and Rudincová 2012).

Scholarships and training programs have been instrumental in promoting educational relations between Nigeria and Czechoslovakia/Czech Republic. The Czech government, through its Ministry of Education, has offered scholarships to Nigerian students to pursue higher education in Czech universities. These scholarships have provided opportunities for Nigerian students who may not have had access to quality education otherwise. Training programs have also been organized by both countries to enhance the skills of educators and administrators. These programs have focused on areas such as curriculum development, pedagogy, educational leadership, and management. By investing in the professional development of educators, Nigeria and Czech Republic have aimed to improve the quality of education in their respective countries (Obomeghi, 2021).

Since the early 20th century, Czechoslovakia was a major player in the global scientific community, with many prominent scientists and researchers while Nigeria is just beginning to develop its own scientific infrastructure and capacity. Over the years, Nigeria and Czechoslovakia, now known as the Czech Republic, have had collaborations on several scientific and technological initiatives, including agriculture, mining, and energy. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Czechoslovak Government provided technical assistance to Nigeria on the development of its agricultural sector, which helped to improve food production and reduce hunger in the country (Obomeghie, 2021). Nigeria and the Czech Republic signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for technology transfer and assistance to Nigeria. Nigeria's interest in the partnership deal was represented by the National Agency for Science and Engineering Infrastructure (NASeni) while Czech Republic was represented by the Technology Agency of Czech Republic. The Czech Republic was chosen because it was noted for its advanced technology while Nigeria had the much needed huge population that the Czech Republic could explore and derive lots of profits and gains (NIPC, 2020).



In addition, Czechoslovak scientists and researchers have made significant contributions to Nigeria's scientific development, particularly in the fields of medicine and engineering. For instance, during the 1970s and 1980s, Czechoslovak doctors and medical researchers worked alongside their Nigerian counterparts to develop new treatments for diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis. Moreover, the two countries have also collaborated on a number of joint research projects, including the development of new technologies for the exploitation of Nigeria's vast mineral resources. These collaborations have not only helped to improve the scientific capacity of both countries but have also fostered greater understanding and cooperation between them (Dawood, 2021).

In the sphere of Military technology, training and weapons of warfare, the Nigerian government has related with the Czech government and benefitted greatly from it. The kind of relationship between Nigeria and Czechoslovakia in terms of military training and weapons relations can be said to be one of cooperation and mutual benefit. Over the years, both countries have engaged in various forms of military collaboration, including training programs, exchange visits, and arms sales (Raji, 2021). One significant aspect of the Nigeria-Czechoslovakia military relationship has been the provision of military training to Nigerian personnel. Czechoslovakia offered specialized training programs to Nigerian military officers, covering a wide range of areas such as infantry tactics, artillery operations, armoured warfare, aviation, and logistics. These training programs aimed to enhance the professional skills and capabilities of Nigerian armed forces personnel. The training programs provided by Czechoslovakia have helped to enhance the professionalism and operational effectiveness of Nigerian armed forces personnel. This has contributed to the overall readiness and combat capabilities of Nigerian military forces (Abdulmalik, 2021).

One significant aspect of the Nigeria-Czechoslovakia military relationship has been the provision of military training to Nigerian personnel. Czechoslovakia offered specialized training programs to Nigerian military officers, especially the Nigerian Airforce, covering a wide range of areas such as infantry tactics, artillery operations, armored warfare, aviation, and logistics. These training programs aimed to enhance the professional skills and capabilities of Nigerian armed forces personnel (Abdulmalik, 2021). There are various kinds of training programmes that were organized by the Czech government for the Nigerian Airforce which range from three to twelve months depending on the kind of arrangement that was made. Selection of officers for training was based on the performance of the officers. There were training programmes for both junior and senior officers which was usually paid for by Nigerian authorities (Raji, 2021).

The Czech Republic also sold and rendered after sale services and repairs of Nigerian military aircrafts and jets. Some of the military jets that are manufactured by the Czech Republic includes Aero L-39 Albatros, L-159 etc (Nigeria Czech Fighters, 2007). Helicopters were purchased by the Nigerian

government from the Czech authorities. From time to time, Nigerian Airforce officers are also selected and sent on training to the Czech Republic to learn how to fly and repair the Helicopters which is also paid for by the Nigerian government. Aero Vodochody is the name of the Czech Republic owned company that manufactures and services and sometimes delivers military jets from the Czech Republic to Nigeria after special arrangements between the governments of both countries (Rojoef, 2022).

Also, cultural influence has also impacted greatly between Nigeria and Czechoslovakia. It can be observed in various aspects such as arts, music, literature, and sports. Nigerian literature has gained recognition in Czech literary circles, with translations of Nigerian novels and movies into Czech language contributing to cultural exchange. Additionally, Nigerian music and dance have found their way into Czech cultural events and festivals, showcasing the richness and diversity of Nigerian culture. Cultural events such as exhibitions, film festivals, and art shows have provided platforms for Nigerians and Czechs to appreciate each other's cultural heritage. These interactions have fostered mutual respect, understanding, and appreciation for the cultural diversity of both nations. In recent years, Nigeria-Czech cultural relations have continued to evolve with the creation of cultural centers and organizations promoting cultural exchange programs. These initiatives aim to deepen the understanding of each other's cultures through language courses, workshops, seminars, and artistic collaborations (Muehlenbeck, 2016). This to a very extent has impacted positively on both countries.

lastly, in 2023, the Nigeria Institute of International Affairs (NIIA), and the Czech Republic embassy in Nigeria partnered to discuss Africa's global relevance. The NIIA Director General stated that the Czech Republic has always been an important and notable player in the global space, noting that the country's perspectives was very valuable in discussions about Africa's role in the international scene. Zdenek Krejci, the Czech Republic ambassador to Nigeria, in his comments appreciated the NIIA for bringing together academics, scholars and industry leaders together to discuss Africa at the world stage. He also recommended that Nigeria should invest in quality education to develop its citizen's capacity and capabilities to reduce Nigerians' emigration to other foreign nations (Ileyemi, 2023).

## **8. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this article has brought to light several facts that indicate that Nigeria and Czechoslovakia had relations before and after the split of Czechoslovakia. The relations, which encompasses politics, trade and commerce, education, cultural exchange and military assistance, have had significant impact on both nations. This study also provides a comprehensive overview of the relations between Nigeria and Czechoslovakia during the period under study. Prior to the split of Czechoslovakia in 1993, Nigeria and Czechoslovakia had established formal diplomatic relations before World War II and in the early 1960s, shortly after Nigeria gained independence from their colonial masters. During this period,

both nations focused on building economic and cultural ties, with Czechoslovakia providing technical assistance and investment in Nigeria's infrastructure and industries, particularly in the areas of agriculture, transportation, and energy.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Nigeria and Czechoslovakia strengthened their relations through the signing of several bilateral agreements, including an agreement on trade and economic cooperation, an agreement on cultural exchange, and on scientific and technical cooperation. These agreements facilitated the exchange of goods, services, and knowledge between both nations and promoted mutual understanding and respect. Following the split of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993, Nigeria continued to maintain strong diplomatic relations with the Czech Republic. The relations continued to evolve and contribute to the mutual understanding and appreciation of each other's cultures. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the Czech Republic, after the split, focused on strengthening their economic ties with Nigeria, particularly in the areas of trade, investment, and technology transfer. In recent years, Nigeria-Czech Republic relations have continued to evolve, with both countries cooperating in areas such as education, science, inter marriages, military, and culture. The Czech Republic have also provided technical assistance and investment in Nigeria's infrastructure and industries, particularly in the areas of military technology, transportation, energy, and agriculture. Both countries have benefited from these relations and there is the desire for even more strengthened relations in the future despite all the problems and challenges that threatens their diplomatic relations.

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