



CZECH REPUBLIC

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Traditional clothing of the Haná region
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Geographic map of the Czech Republic
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Chapter 1 | Geography



The Malá Strana district, Prague
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Introduction

The Czech Republic includes the regions of Bohemia, Moravia, and Czech Silesia, which, together with Slovakia, constituted the former Czechoslovakia. The country is landlocked, with the Slovak Republic to the southeast, Poland to the northeast, Germany to the west, and Austria to the south. However, the country also occupies several lots in the Hamburg docks on a 99-year lease with the German government, which gives it trade access to the sea.¹ The lease is set to expire in 2028.

The Czech Republic occupies an area of 78,867 sq km (30,451 sq mi), slightly smaller than South Carolina.² It is the 21st-largest country in Europe, slightly larger than Serbia and slightly smaller than Austria.³ Most of the country sits on the Bohemian Massif, a diamond-shaped plateau ringed by mountains that make up most of its borders. The plateau stretches 158,000 sq km (61,000 sq mi) and is mostly filled with rolling hills and broad valleys. Moravia lies between Bohemia on the west and the Carpathian Mountains in the east. This relatively low-lying area was an important channel for commerce and communications during the Austro-Hungarian Empire, connecting its capital,

- 1 Ian Willoughby, "What next for Czech port lot after Hamburg's rejection of Olympics?" *Radio Prague International*, December 2, 2015, <https://english.radio.cz/what-next-czech-port-lot-after-hamburgs-rejection-olympics-8240796>.
- 2 Central Intelligence Agency, "Czechia," *World Factbook*, 19 September 2022, retrieved on 22 September 2022, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/czechia/>
- 3 Amanda Briney, "Ranking Europe Countries by Area," ThoughtCo, 7 August 2019, retrieved on 22 September 2022, <https://www.thoughtco.com/countries-of-europe-by-area-1434587>

Vienna, with Poland and Ukraine to the north and east.⁴ Czech Silesia is between Moravia to the southwest and Poland to the north. About a third of the country is forested land.

Topographical Features

Krušné Hory (Ore Mountains)

The Krušné Hory, or Ore Mountains, run for 160 km (99 mi) along the Czech Republic's northwest border with Germany. The mountains rise suddenly from the Bohemian Massif, reaching heights of 1,244 m (4,081 ft), but slope gradually away into Germany.

Lužické Hory (Elbe Sandstone Area)

Separated from the Krušné Hory by the Elbe River Gorge, the Lužické Hory (Lusatian Mountains) cover the northern corner of the Bohemian Massif and extend into Poland and Germany. This area is sometimes referred to as Czech Switzerland or Saxon Switzerland, in honor of two Swiss artists who resided there in the 18th century.⁵ The mountains are made of sandstone, a relatively soft sedimentary rock that has eroded over time to create the dramatic rock formations for which the area is known.

Sudety Mountain Chain

The Sudety chain runs east-west along the border between the Czech Republic and Poland. The Jizerské Hory (Jizera Mountains) and the Krkonoše Hory (Giant Mountains) make up the West Sudeten range. Quartz mined from the mountains supported the development of the famous Bohemian glass-making industry.⁶ The mountains were also a center of the textile and lumber industries. Today, parts of the area are protected as nature preserves, but are nevertheless used for tourist activities such as hiking and skiing.⁷ Mount Sněžka, the country's highest peak at 1,603 m (5,259 ft), lies in the Krkonoše Hory.⁸

Šumava Mountains

The Šumava Mountains run 120 km (75 mi) along the Czech Republic's southwest border with Germany. The southern branch of the range includes the Český Les (Bohemian Forest). The gentler slopes of the low mountains and hills are suitable for upland farming. Although mining and lumber-milling have taken place in the Šumava Mountains, they are less populated than the mountains of Northern Bohemia.⁹ The highest peak on the Czech side is Plechý, at 1,378 m (4,521 ft), with peaks on the German side rising slightly higher.

4 Helen Fedor and Mark W. Gould, "Geography and Environment," in *Czechoslovakia: A Country Study*, 3rd ed., ed. Ihor Gawdiak, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 77, <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/master/frd/frdcstdy/cz/czechoslovakiaco00gawd/czechoslovakiaco00gawd.pdf>.

5 Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, *Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics* (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 59, 178.

6 Daniela Lazarová, Martina Schneibergová, "Museum in Jablonec tells story of world-renowned Bohemian crystal glass and jewelry," *Radio Prague International*, November 19, 2021, <https://english.radio.cz/10-czech-museums-you-should-visit-8731249/6>.

7 František Pelc, "Restoration of forests damaged by air pollution in the Jizera Mountains," in *Ecological Restoration in the Czech Republic*, eds. Ivana Jongepierová, Pavel Pešout, Jan Willem Jongepier, and Karel Prach (Prague: Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic, 2012), 27 – 30, <http://chapter.ser.org/europe/files/2012/12/Ecological-Restoration-in-the-Czech-Republic1.pdf>.

8 Czech Mountains, "Mountain Sněžka," n.d., retrieved on 21 September 2022, <https://mountain-snezka.czech-mountains.eu/>

9 Alena Matuskova and Magdalena Rousova, "The Impact of Marginalization and Globalization in the Czech-German-Austrian Mountain Borderland in the Former Iron Curtain Area," in *Globalization and Marginalization in Mountain Regions: Assets and Challenges in Marginal Regions*, eds. Raghbir Chand and Walter Leimgruber (New York: Springer, 2016), 55 – 74.

The area is dotted with small glacial lakes, peat bogs, and springs, including the headwaters of the Vltava River, which runs southeast through the range to the Lipno Dam. The range is in the Protected Area of Natural Water Accumulation (CHOPAV).¹⁰

Českomoravská Vysočina (Bohemian-Moravian Highlands)

The Bohemian Massif is bounded on the southeast by the Českomoravská Vysočina, an expanse of hill country measuring 11,750 sq km (4,537 sq mi). The highlands sprawl north from the Austrian border and separate East Bohemia from Moravia. The average altitude of the area is between 600–750 m (1,969–2,460 ft). The rugged terrain, which has favored mining and industry over agriculture since the medieval period, is dotted with small historic towns and castles.¹¹

Outer Western Carpathians (Beskids)

The Carpathian Mountains begin in Romania and curve through much of Eastern Europe before dwindling out in southern Poland. The Beskids (Beskydy), Javorníky, and Malé Karpaty (Little Carpathians) are the tail end of the Outer Western Carpathians range and mark the border between the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The Javorníky range is separated from the Jeseník Mountains by a depression known as the Moravská Brána (Moravian Gate). The highest peaks in this range lie in Poland, while on the Czech side the landscape is gentler, with rolling hills. The drier climate of these mountains makes them suitable for sheep pastures.¹²

Bodies of Water

Vltava River

The Vltava is the Czech Republic's longest river, flowing east through the Šumava Mountains before turning north toward Prague. The river empties into the Elbe at Mělník, 29 km (18 mi) north of Prague. Its major tributaries are the Otava and Berounka from the west and the Lužnice and Sázava from the east. Between Prague and its confluence with the Elbe, the Vltava is navigable by large barges, and was once an important shipping channel.¹³ It is now used mostly by tourists, but there are renewed efforts to make the waterway commercially active again. Several major hydropower stations are located along the 435-km (270-mi) course of the Vltava, including the Lipno and Orlík dams. Reservoirs near the dams are popular recreational areas, while the river itself flows through some of Bohemia's most popular tourist villages.

Elbe River (Labe River)

Less than a third of the 1,165-km (724-mi) long Elbe River—362 km (225 mi)—flows through the Czech Republic before crossing into Germany near Dresden. From there the river flows northwest to Hamburg, where it empties into the North Sea. The Elbe is one of Europe's major waterways, servicing several of Germany's major inland ports and

10 Polina Lemenkova, "Spatial Analysis for the Environmental Mapping of the Šumava National Park," *Social Science Research Network*, January 27, 2015, <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02447144/file/Lemenkova-Prague.pdf>.

11 Eva Semotanová, "Territorial Development and the Transformation of Landscape," in *A History of the Czech Lands*, eds. Jaroslav Pánek and Oldřich Tůma (Prague: Karolinum Press, Charles University, 2018), 41.

12 Petr Kovarík, Miroslav Kutal, and Ivo Machar, "Sheep and wolves: Is the occurrence of large predators a limiting factor for sheep grazing in the Czech Carpathians?" *Journal for Nature Conservation* 22, (2014): 479.

13 Christ Johnstone, "Prague investigates making Vltava a working waterway again," *Radio Prague International*, July 20, 2017, <https://english.radio.cz/prague-investigates-making-vltava-a-working-waterway-again-8187019>.

providing the landlocked Czech Republic with access to the ocean.¹⁴ Depending on precipitation, water levels of the Elbe vary widely, which can hinder navigation of the river.

Morava River

Flowing south from its source in the Jeseník Mountains near the Polish border, the Morava River cuts through eastern Moravia. Its southern course forms part of Slovakia's border with the Czech Republic and Austria. At 365 km (227 mi) in length, the river is a major tributary of the Danube, which it meets near Bratislava, Slovakia. The Morava reaches its peak flow in the spring (March–April), with water levels remaining high for several months.

Currently about 30% of the Morava is navigable, although recent efforts have been made to make it a more viable source of transportation between Austria and Central Europe.¹⁵ The Baťa Canal, built along the river in 1938 and abandoned in 1960, was used to transport lignite 58 km (36 mi) from mines near Ratíškovice to factories in Otrokovice.¹⁶ Although the canal was rehabilitated in the mid-1990s, it is currently only used for recreational vessels.

Oder (Odra)

The Oder River begins in the Czech Republic, 113 km (70 mi) from the country's eastern border with Poland. With a length of 854 km (531 mi), the Oder is one of the major rivers draining into the Baltic Sea as well as one of Europe's most important waterways.

The Oder's volume fluctuates seasonally depending on the amount of precipitation near its source in the Jeseník Mountains. Most of the river remains navigable for up to 230 days a year. But the Oder can freeze over in the winter, with ice covering the surface for more than 30 days a year. The Olše and Opava rivers are the Oder's main tributaries in the Czech Republic. The Oder runs through Ostrava, one of the Czech Republic's most industrialized areas, and pollution in the river is a persistent problem.¹⁷

Climate

The climate of the Czech Republic is fairly uniform throughout the country—warm summers and cold winters. Summer temperatures reach as high as 32°C (90°F) in Central Bohemia. Rain is heavy, but sporadic, during the summer. Winters are cold and more humid than summers, especially at lower elevations, with temperatures of -5°C (23°F) in cities and -10°C–-15°C (14°F–5°F) in the mountains. Snow covers the mountains from November–April, with deep accumulations in some areas. In valleys and low-lying areas, snow accumulations rarely exceed 15 cm (6 in). Central Bohemia lies in a rain shadow, receiving only 46 cm (18 in) of rain each year, but the windward slopes of the Krkonoše Hory can receive up to 150 cm (59 in) of precipitation a year.

14 "The Czech Republic and Germany signed an agreement on navigability of Elbe River," *Port of Hamburg*, July 22, 2021, <https://www.hafen-hamburg.de/en/press/news/the-czech-republic-and-germany-signed-an-agreement-on-navigability-of-elbe-river/>.

15 Nike Sommerwerk et al., "Chapter 3: The Danube River Basin: Danube," in *Rivers of Europe*, eds. Klement Tockner, Christopher T. Robinson, and Urs Uehlinger (London: Elsevier Ltd., 2009), 120 – 121.

16 Martin Klempa, Petr Bujok, Michal Porzer, and Petr Skupien, "Industrial Complexes and Their Role in Industrial Tourism – Example of Conversion," *GeoScience Engineering* 62, (2016): 45 – 50.

17 Jan Sedláček et al., "Regional Contamination History Revealed in Coal-Mining-Impacted Oxbow Lake Sediments," *Water, Air, & Soil Pollution* 231, no. 208 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11270-020-04583-1>.

Major Cities

City	Population ¹⁸
Prague (capital)	1,301,432
Brno	389,510
Ostrava	282,450
Plzeň	174,007

Prague (*Praha*)

Prague is the capital of the Czech Republic and the administrative seat of Central Bohemia, with the urban areas taking up 298 sq km (115 sq mi). The city has several historic areas: Old Town (which includes Josefov, the Jewish Quarter), New Town, the Castle District, and the Lesser Quarter.¹⁹ The official population count is just over 1.3 million—higher than the next 7-largest Czech cities combined. However, studies show that almost a quarter million more people live in Prague without holding official residency.²⁰ This makes for a population density of almost 5,000 people per sq km (about 13,000 per sq mi).

Founded in the 9th century, the city absorbed smaller towns and settlements as it expanded. The most notable expansion took place in the 14th century when Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV, who was also King of Bohemia, made the city his capital. Traces of this expansion can still be seen today, in the outgrowth of the different historic districts into the modern suburban extensions of the city. After the fall of communism in 1989, the city became a destination for tourists because of its extensive collection of historic architecture (the historic center of Prague is a UNESCO World Heritage site) and inexpensive prices.²¹

Prague is a major economic and transportation hub for the country. The city has 3 train stations, 600 tram stations, freight transport circuits, an international airport, and a port on the Vltava that facilitates international trade. The public transport system in Prague is considered one of the best in Europe.²² Prague's hilly topography often makes public transportation an attractive option, with more journeys in the city being made using public transport than by car, bicycle, and walking combined.

Brno

Brno is the Czech Republic's second-largest city and the traditional capital of Moravia.²³ It lies below the eastern foothills of the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands. The city was founded at the confluence of the Svatka and Svitava rivers in the 11th century. Brno developed into a major industrial center after the completion of the Brno-Vienna

¹⁸ City Population, "Czech Republic: Regions and Major Cities," 7 April 2022, retrieved on 21 September 2022, <https://www.citypopulation.de/en/czechrep/cities/>

¹⁹ Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, *Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics* (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 84.

²⁰ Raymond Johnston, "How many people live in Prague? About a quarter million more than are permanently registered," *Expats CZ*, January 26, 2021, <https://www.expats.cz/czech-news/article/a-quarter-million-more-people-live-in-prague-than-are-permanently-registered>.

²¹ Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, *Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics* (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 82.

²² Alex Marshall, "Why Prague Has One of the Best Tram Systems in the World," *Governing*, October 22, 2021, <https://www.governing.com/community/why-prague-has-one-of-the-best-tram-systems-in-the-world>.

²³ Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, *Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics* (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 289.

railway in 1839. As a fortified city, it has withstood sieges over the centuries, but was badly damaged in World War II. After the war, the economy stagnated under communist rule and the city had difficulty rebuilding. Still, several historic buildings survived—including Tugendhat Villa, another UNESCO World Heritage site.

There are 29 administrative districts in Brno, ranging in population from as few as 500 to as many as 91,000—with population density increasing toward the city center. With only 12 tram lines, 14 trolleybus lines, and 51 bus lines, public transport tends to be more crowded than in Prague.²⁴ Cycling is far more widespread in Brno due to its flatter, lowland terrain. There are around 38km (24 mi) of cycling track throughout the city, as well as a 130 km (81 mi) bikeway to neighboring Vienna, Austria. The city has two airports—one international and one domestic—as well as access to two major motorways to the south.

Ostrava

At the northeast corner of the Czech Republic, Ostrava lies in one of the most heavily industrialized areas of the country, at the confluence of the Oder, Opava, Ostravice, and Lučina rivers. It has a shrinking population—280,000 in 2022, down from 327,000 in 1991. The town is surrounded by coalfields, which have fed local heavy industry since the 1830s. Until 1998, the town produced steel, but it has since refocused on high-tech, service-oriented industries.²⁵ Like many post-industrial cities, it hopes to turn former industrial areas into heritage sites, with one site's application for UNESCO inclusion already pending.²⁶

Transport in Ostrava includes an international airport, one major motorway, rail, trams, buses, and trolleybuses. Owing to its mostly flat terrain, cycling is also a major part of the transport infrastructure, with a route network of around 255 km (155 mi).²⁷

Plzeň (Pilsen)

Plzeň is the Czech Republic's fourth-largest city and sits at the confluence of four rivers that form the Berounka River (a tributary to the Vltava) in Western Bohemia. The area is rich in coal and iron ore deposits, which aided in the development of heavy industry in the 19th century, including the founding of Škoda Works in 1859.²⁸

The city center sits in a basin, so it is relatively flat, but is surrounded by highlands. This makes cycling ideal, with bike-sharing options throughout the city center.²⁹ Public transportation includes the standard trams, trolleybuses, buses, and rail. A small domestic airport serves the region, and the city is linked to one major motorway.

24 "‘Triplet’ Tram Running in Brno Is the Longest in the Czech Republic," *BRNO Daily*, August 1, 2019, <https://brnodaily.com/2019/08/01/news/transport/triplet-tram-running-in-brno-is-the-longest-in-the-czech-republic/>.

25 Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, *Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics* (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 278.

26 Ronan J. O'Shea, "Ostrava: How the Industrial Czech City Is Using Its Heritage to Attract Tourists," *The Independent*, January 26, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/europe/ostrava-czech-republic-prague-nightlife-things-to-do-best-industrial-city-dolni-vitkovice-landek-park-view-a8178181.html>.

27 For a map of current cycling routes, see <https://mapy.ostrava.cz/cyklotrasy/mapa/>.

28 "On the Industrial History of the Czech Republic," *European Route of Industrial Heritage* (Council of Europe), <https://www.erih.net/how-it-started/industrial-history-of-european-countries/czech-republic>.

29 For more information, see <https://www.kolemplzne.cz/>.

Environmental Issues

At the time of the Republic's founding in 1993, it was one of the world's biggest exporters of pollution to neighboring countries.³⁰ Decades of intensive industrial development had left the country pockmarked with villages and industrial sites (sometimes called "brownfields") that were abandoned because of high levels of toxic contamination.³¹ Under communism fuel was subsidized, and environmental standards were poorly enforced. Brown coal (high in ash and sulfur content) was abundant and easily extracted by surface mining, making it an attractive, cheap fuel source for both heavy industry and domestic use. Throughout 1982, Prague measured sulfur dioxide levels that reached a concentration linked to severe respiratory illness and death.³² The life expectancy in Czechoslovakia was 3–6 years below the European average. High levels of sulfur dioxide also created acid rain, which ravaged Czechoslovakia's forests and acidified soil and streams, killing fish and reducing agricultural productivity.

In the years since the Velvet Revolution, the Czech Republic has made major efforts to halt and reverse these trends. Renewable energy production increased by 71% between 2009 and 2019, with biofuels accounting for most gains.³³ Pollution of rivers and streams has decreased, and most households are connected to waste treatment plants, cutting the amount of untreated waste flowing into rivers. Czech farmers have adopted organic practices (growing from 3 organic farms in 1990 to 3,926 in 2013), decreasing the level of nitrates entering waterways through runoff.³⁴ But air quality remains poor in some areas, and defoliation of forests and soil acidification from acid rain continues, although at much lower rates. Rapid urbanization is causing the loss of agricultural land and is still threatening the habitats of vulnerable species.

Natural Hazards

Flooding is a regular phenomenon in the Czech Republic. Major rivers have dams and other flood controls, but these are occasionally overwhelmed. In 2002, floodwaters swept through Prague, seriously damaging the underground transportation system and destroying several important underground archives. The Vltava River rose 7 m (23 ft) above its normal level, threatening the Charles Bridge and Old Town. The flooding killed 18 people and caused extensive damage.³⁵ Flooding throughout Central Europe in 2006, 2009, and 2010 affected parts of the Czech Republic, resulting in the loss of homes and other property, but causing few fatalities.³⁶

30 Iva Hůnová, "Ambient Air Quality in the Czech Republic: Past and Present," *Atmosphere* 12, no. 6 (2021): 770, <https://www.mdpi.com/2073-4433/12/6/770>.

31 Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, *Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics* (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 53, 175.

32 Environmental and Natural Resources Policy and Training Project (EPAT), "The Czech Republic: Environmental Problems in Eastern Europe" (paper, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1993), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/23510274_THE_CZECH_REPUBLIC_ENVIRONMENTAL_PROBLEMS_IN_EASTERN_EUROPE.

33 "Czech Republic 2021: Energy Policy Review," *International Energy Agency*, 2021, <https://www.iea.org/reports/czech-republic-2021>.

34 "Yearbook 2013: Organic Agriculture in the Czech Republic," *Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic*, 2013, https://www.organic-europe.net/fileadmin/documents/country_information/czech-republic/mze-2013-yearbook-2013.pdf.

35 Lindy Roux, "The Angry Vltava," in *Countries of the World: Czech Republic* (Milwaukee, WI: Gareth Stevens Publishing, 2004), 46–47.

36 See BBC News, "Europe Flooding Death Toll Rises," 4 April 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4877970.stm>; BBC News, "Ten Killed in Czech Flash Floods," 25 June 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8119541.stm>; and BBC News, "Clean-Up Begins in Flood-Hit Central Europe," 10 August 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-10924581>.

Czech in Perspective

Geography Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- | | | | |
|----|--|------|-------|
| 1. | The Elbe River gives the Czech Republic access to the ocean. | True | False |
| 2. | The Czech Republic shares a border with Ukraine. | True | False |
| 3. | Ostrava is a major agricultural center in Moravia. | True | False |
| 4. | The Vltava River is the longest river in the Czech Republic. | True | False |
| 5. | Although Prague is the capital of the country, its economic impact is minimal. | True | False |

Czech in Perspective

Geography Assessment Answers

1. True:
The landlocked Czech Republic has historically relied on waterways for foreign trade. The Elbe flows south toward Prague and then west toward Germany, eventually emptying into the North Sea.
2. False:
The Czech Republic borders on Germany, Slovakia, Poland, and Austria.
3. False:
Ostrava is one of the Czech Republic's major industrial centers. The town still produces heavy machinery and automobiles.
4. True:
At 435-km (270-mi), the Vltava is the longest river entirely within the borders of the Czech Republic.
5. False:
Prague is the capital city and a major economic hub for the country. The city has three train stations, freight transport circuits, an international airport, and a port on the Vltava that facilitates international trade.

Chapter 2 | History



National Museum, Prague
Wikimedia/Bahnfreund

Introduction

Despite the relative youth of the Czech Republic as a country, its history extends beyond its founding, and incorporates both the land and people surrounding it. Its geopolitical boundaries have, over the centuries, ebbed and flowed with the times – expanding in conquest and shrinking in times of vulnerability, or to accommodate the rise of other national and ethnic identities.

Most recently a national and ethnic Slovak identity has given rise to the separation of the former Czechoslovakia into two republics: one Czech and one Slovak, but the shape of the country has changed several times before. The history of the Czech people is an amalgam of their current national iteration and several predecessors' histories. This chapter will focus on three major historical drivers of change in the Czech region – religious contention and ethno-political movements, the rise and fall of communism, and recent developments in relation to the rest of Europe.

Religious Contention and Ethno-Political Movements

The Slavic Tribes and The Holy Roman Emperors

In the 8th century, the Slavic tribes of Bohemia and Moravia fought alongside Charlemagne's forces to push Avar (Eurasian nomads) invaders out of Europe. In return, they were granted the right of self-rule in his empire.¹ In 800, Charlemagne was crowned Emperor of the Romans by Pope Leo III in Rome. When Charlemagne's empire split, the German kingdoms continued the tradition of designating an emperor. What evolved over the next few centuries was a loose configuration of kingdoms with common interests. The power of Holy Roman Emperors, who were elected, was limited by the Imperial Diet, a council of representatives from states within the empire. Bohemian kings were chosen through a similar process.

In the early 10th century, political power among the Slavic tribes in the Czech landscape began to coalesce in Bohemia around Prague. For several hundred years, an uneasy alliance among Slavic tribes had laid the groundwork for unification – including one notable attempt in which a Frankish merchant named Samo had allied with the Slavs to fend off the Avars from invading Slavic lands. His empire was successful at unifying several of the tribes and was likely centered around Moravia (see the chapter on Geography for more on traditional Czech regions).² The Přemyslid dynasty emerged shortly after, and by the early 11th century had unified almost all of Bohemia. Although the Přemyslids initially resisted incorporation into the Holy Roman Empire, they eventually became one of its major forces. Vladislav I became an elector (a member of an electoral college charged with selecting the emperor) in 1114. The electorship was permanently assigned to the Bohemian king by the Pope in 1356.

The Bohemian Kingdom

After the death of Bohemia's last Přemyslid king in 1306, as well as a brief period of conflict over succession, the throne was granted to John of Luxembourg, son of the reigning Holy Roman Emperor. John's son, Charles IV, succeeded his father to the Bohemian throne in 1346 and began what many consider the golden age of Bohemia.³ Charles invested heavily in his kingdom; he rebuilt the old Vyšehrad Castle, developed the New Town, built Charles Bridge over the Vltava River, and founded the University of Prague – the first university in the Holy Roman Empire. In 1356, he was elected Holy Roman Emperor and retained Prague as his capital.

The Hussite Wars

By the time of Charles IV's death in 1378, English preacher John Wycliffe had gained notoriety for his sharp criticisms of the Roman Catholic Church. Some of Wycliffe's writings reached Bohemia, where they came to the attention of Jan Hus at the University of Prague. Hus continued to preach reform even after Wycliffe's works had been deemed heretical by the German members of the university faculty. Moreover, preaching against indulgences (forgiveness of sins for money) in 1412, Hus lost the support of King Wenceslas, who had initially been receptive to his teachings. Hus left Prague and spent two years traveling the country, publishing numerous treatises and sermons. In 1414, the Council of Constance summoned Hus to expound his views. Despite assurances of safe conduct, Hus was arrested and tried for heresy. He was found guilty and burned at the stake on 6 July 1415.⁴

1 Ihor Gawdiak, ed., *Czechoslovakia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 6.

2 Eva Semotanová, "The Formation of the Geographical Core of the Czech State," in *A History of the Czech Lands*, eds. Jaroslav Penák and Oldřich Tůma (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2018), 26 – 27.

3 Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 29.

4 For an in-depth treatment of the Hussites, see Howard Kiminsky, *A History of the Hussite Revolution* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2004).

Anger over Hus's death caused widespread unrest throughout Bohemia, with the Hussites massacring Catholics, storming churches, expelling the clergy, and seizing church property.⁵ Unable to subdue the Hussite population of Prague, King Sigismund (Wenceslas' successor) declared a crusade against the reformers. But even Sigismund's combined German and Hungarian forces failed to bring Bohemia under control. The Tabors (a radical faction of Hussites) were eventually subdued, but the king was forced to offer the more moderate Utraquist wing significant concessions, including the establishment of an independent church in Bohemia.

The Habsburg Ascension

In 1526, after nearly a hundred years of absentee kings, Ferdinand I of Habsburg ascended the Bohemian throne. The Habsburg family of Austria was rapidly expanding its power in the empire; nineteen Habsburgs would serve as Holy Roman Emperor, and from 1486 until the empire was dissolved in 1806, the title was the exclusive hereditary right of the Habsburgs.⁶ After 1806, the Habsburgs would continue to rule the Austrian Empire (later the Austro-Hungarian Empire), including Bohemia and Moravia, until the end of World War I in 1918.

The Reformation and the Thirty Years' War

Despite their misgivings about the growing Protestant movement, the Habsburgs needed the cooperation of the Czech nobles to raise taxes and supply soldiers. This cooperation was most easily secured by allowing Czechs their religious freedom. When Rudolf II issued a decree against the *Unitas Fratrum* (a Protestant religious order) in 1602, the Protestant nobles closed ranks and turned on the emperor. In 1609, he was forced to issue a Letter of Majesty officially granting religious freedom to the Czechs. But tensions between the Protestant Czech nobility and the ruling Catholic Habsburgs continued to rise. Events came to a head in 1618 when two of the emperor's regents were thrown from a window in Prague Castle after being accused of violating the Letter of Majesty. The incident, known as the Defenestration of Prague, opened the Thirty Years' War.⁷

As war raged between Protestants and Catholics throughout the rest of Europe, Czechs faced harsh retribution. Ferdinand revoked the right of the Bohemian electors to meet without his consent, and the Bohemian crown (with its accompanying electorship) became the hereditary property of the Habsburg family. By royal decree, Catholicism became the only Christian faith allowed in Bohemia. Protestants, including much of the Czech nobility, were invited to convert or leave. A mass exodus of Protestants followed, and Bohemia and Moravia lost nearly half their population, as well as three-quarters of their native nobility. Habsburgs filled the vacancies by granting land and titles to Germans in exchange for military service. By the end of the 17th century, German had become the language of government and high culture, creating a language barrier between the ruling class and those they governed. These social pressures almost caused the eradication of the Czech language. The language was fortunately preserved through street performances of folk tales in the Czech language, using puppets as instruments of cultural protest.⁸

Enlightenment and the Dissolution of the Empire

The Habsburgs spent the 18th century further consolidating their power. But the Czech social landscape, like the rest of the Western world, was also being affected by the Enlightenment (a movement that emphasized rational

5 Ihor Gawdiak, ed., *Czechoslovakia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 11–12.

6 R. J. W. Evans, *Austria, Hungary, and the Habsburgs: Central Europe c. 1683 – 1867* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006), 80 – 86.

7 For an in-depth treatment of the war, its origins, and its effects, see *The Thirty Years' War*, ed. Geoffrey Parker (London: Routledge, 1997).

8 Jacklyn Janeksela, "Why Czechs don't speak German," *BBC Travel*, August 21, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20180820-why-czechs-dont-speak-german>.

thinking and relying upon evidence of the senses).⁹ Empress Maria Theresa instituted a series of ambitious reforms meant to improve fiscal efficiency. She nationalized the education system and granted broader freedoms to serfs. Maria Theresa's son and successor, Joseph II, was inspired by the ideas of the Enlightenment and extended reforms by promoting greater religious tolerance, issuing the Edict of Tolerance in 1781, which granted Protestants some religious freedoms, as well as removed some of their civil restrictions.

Under the rule of Maria Theresa and Joseph II, Bohemia became even more Germanized and subordinate to Austria. At the same time, Joseph II's abolition of serfdom liberated a labor force that fueled industrialization, while the expansion of educational opportunities laid the groundwork for the rise of Czech nationalism.¹⁰ The deaths of King Louis XVI of France and his wife, Marie Antoinette (the youngest sister of Joseph II), at the hands of French revolutionaries provoked a series of wars between Austria and France. In 1805, French troops defeated the combined armies of Austria and Russia at the Battle of Austerlitz in Moravia. To prevent new French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte from crowning himself Holy Roman Emperor, Habsburg ruler Franz II adopted the title Emperor of Austria and dissolved the Holy Roman Empire.¹¹

The Czech Nationalist Movement

A rising tide of nationalism engulfed much of Europe in the 19th century. For the Habsburgs, the rise of nationalism threatened their wide-ranging power and precipitated the end of their empire. In Bohemia and Moravia, it manifested as a revival of the Czech language and the development of distinctly Czech literature, music, and art. In 1848, a wave of revolutions swept across Europe, inspiring Czechs to take political action.

The growing opposition to Czech nationalism created ethnic friction between Germans and Czechs in Bohemia.¹² The failure of the Old Czech faction to win concessions from Austria also split the Czech National Party. As the faction continued to push for a restoration of Bohemia's historic place in the Austrian Empire, they were eclipsed by the Young Czech Party, who were focused primarily on social progress instead of historic rights. Czechs began to look to their eastern Slavic cousins for support, as they were involved in a similar struggle for autonomy from Hungarian rule. As World War I approached, the nationalist movements of the Czechs and Slovaks drew closer together.

World War I

The assassination of the heir to the Habsburg throne in 1914 by a Serbian separatist launched World War I. Czechs were less than enthusiastic about being called on to fight alongside Germans against their fellow Slavs—Russians and Serbs—and many defected to Russia.¹³ Others, including Czech nationalist Tomáš Masaryk, chose exile. During the war, Masaryk and his protégé Edvard Beneš worked to gain international support for a joint Czech-Slovak state. In 1916, he oversaw the formation of the Czechoslovak National Council in Paris, and in 1918 he visited the United States seeking recognition for Czechoslovakia. The Allied powers formally recognized the Czechoslovak National Council in the summer of 1918. In October, the council formed a provisional government and issued a declaration of independence. On 14 November, Masaryk was elected the first president of Czechoslovakia.

9 For an in-depth treatment of the Enlightenment, see Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

10 Ihor Gawdiak, ed., *Czechoslovakia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 19–21.

11 Eric Solsten and David E. McClave, eds., *Austria: A Country Study*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994), 19.

12 Ihor Gawdiak, ed., *Czechoslovakia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 27.

13 Ihor Gawdiak, ed., *Czechoslovakia: A Country Study*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 28, 33.

The Inter-War Period

After World War I, Sudeten Germans (ethnic Germans living in Czechoslovakia) nursed several grievances against the Czechs. In 1919, the Czechoslovakian government confiscated one-fifth of all individual landholdings and paper currency for redistribution. As Germans made up the bulk of the upper class, they were disproportionately affected by the policy; after 1929 the Great Depression hit Sudeten areas harder than other areas in Czechoslovakia. Sudeten Germans occupied some of the most industrialized regions of the country and relied heavily on foreign trade, especially with Germany. Economic aid to these areas came with strings attached, most significantly the requirement to hire more ethnic Czechs, who had begun moving into German regions in larger numbers.¹⁴

Although most Germans had accepted being part of Czechoslovakia, by 1929 a small minority was pursuing a separatist agenda, inspired largely by Adolf Hitler's growing influence in Germany. Alarmed by Hitler's election as chancellor in 1933, Czechoslovakia expelled all members of the Sudeten Nazi Party from government positions. The German Home Front, later known as the Sudeten German Party (SdP), soon replaced the Sudeten Nazi Party. Headed by Konrad Henlein, the party claimed that its objective was greater autonomy for the Sudeten Germans. But Henlein, secretly in contact with Hitler, was taking directives from Berlin aimed at blocking reforms and destabilizing the Czechoslovakian government.¹⁵

Following the annexation of Austria in March 1938, Hitler began a public campaign to annex the Sudetenland, or western Bohemia. He delivered anti-Czech speeches, demanding that "oppressed" Sudeten Germans be united with their "homeland." Anxious to avoid another war, the British offered to act as a mediator between the Germans and the Czechoslovakians. France, Great Britain, and Germany met and drew up a proposal that stipulated all areas of Bohemia with a German majority be given to Germany. Although France had a defense agreement with Czechoslovakia, the French also wanted to avoid another war and pressured Czechoslovakia to accept the agreement.¹⁶ The Czechoslovakian government rejected the proposal. The Sudetenland contained a significant portion of the country's industry and most of its border defenses, and without it Czechoslovakia would have been economically crippled and vulnerable to invasion. In September, the SdP secretly orchestrated a series of violent protests, forcing the government to call in troops to restore order.¹⁷ Feigning indignation, Henlein demanded that the Sudetenland be handed over to Germany.

Once Czechoslovakia appeared ready to agree to the proposal, Germany began to make additional stipulations, demanding that Czechs be evacuated from German areas by the end of September. Hitler's demands were rejected by the Czechoslovakians and the French, both of whom began mobilizing their armies. Desperate to avoid war, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain proposed one last conference in Munich on 29 September 1938. The agreement drawn up at the meeting basically conceded to all of Germany's demands, and the British and French backed it with an ultimatum: the Czechoslovakians could accept the agreement or face war with Germany alone. The Czechs capitulated, and German troops began moving into the Sudetenland.

After the Munich Agreement, Poland moved troops into the contested Teschen region, while Hungary reclaimed parts of Slovakia and the Ruthenian territories, costing Czechoslovakia nearly one-third of its population and most of its defenses. Jozef Tiso, the leader of the Slovak People's Party, began secret negotiations with Hitler to guarantee

14 Ihor Gawdiak, ed., *Czechoslovakia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 39–40.

15 Ihor Gawdiak, ed., *Czechoslovakia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 40–41.

16 Daniel Hucker, "Public Opinion Between Munich and Prague: The View from the French Embassy," *Contemporary British History* 25, no. 3 (September 2011): 407–427.

17 Ihor Gawdiak, ed., *Czechoslovakia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 43.

Slovakian autonomy in the event of an invasion.¹⁸ On 15 March 1939, Germany threatened to strike Prague unless the Czechoslovakian government surrendered the country to German control. The government capitulated, and the next day German troops moved into the country. Hitler declared Bohemia and Moravia German protectorates, but maintained his agreement with the Slovaks, allowing them to retain autonomy.¹⁹

World War II

Although Czechoslovakia witnessed little military action during the war, the Nazi occupation was marked by oppression and brutality. The death of Jan Opletal (a politically active medical student) during a peaceful demonstration provoked widespread protests, which were met with harsh reprisals. Nearly 2,000 students were arrested, universities were closed, and students were sent to work in mines and armament factories.²⁰ In 1941 Reinhard Heydrich, appointed as the Reich protector of Bohemia and Moravia, quickly lived up to his moniker as “The Hangman.” Heydrich organized the deportation of Czech Jews, converting the town of Terezin into a holding pen for Jews on their way to concentration camps before his death at the hands of the Czech resistance in 1942.

In London the Czechoslovakian government-in-exile, led by President Edvard Beneš, organized the Czech resistance. Following Heydrich’s death in 1942, resistance forces were ruthlessly hunted down and exterminated. But in 1943 the resistance regrouped and launched a campaign of guerrilla warfare that successfully expelled German forces from several towns.²¹ On 5 May 1945, a massive uprising erupted in Prague. For 3 days around 30,000 Czech men and women fought nearly 40,000 well-armed German troops on the streets of Prague, forcing them to give up the city on 8 May. A day later, Soviet troops arrived in the city, officially liberating it from the Germans.

The Rise and Fall of Communism

Reconstruction

On 16 May 1945, Edvard Beneš returned to Prague to oversee the reconstruction of Czechoslovakia. The country was a very different one from the one he had left. Of the almost 120,000 Jews in prewar Czechoslovakia, only 8,000 survived the Terezin camp. With the reestablishment of prewar borders, millions of Sudeten Germans found themselves at the mercy of an outraged Czech population. Czechoslovakian troops occupied the Sudetenland, and Germans were conscripted for hard labor. In July, the Czechoslovakian government announced its intention to “repatriate” Sudeten Germans to Germany, and by 1947 2.5 million Germans had been expelled from Czech territory.²² Large numbers of Hungarians were also expelled. Czechs were also less Western-oriented than they had been before the war. Many felt abandoned by their allies in Western Europe and now looked to the Soviet Union for support in rebuilding. In 1946, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) won 38% of the vote.

Although Communists were still in the minority, they were able to secure control over several key ministries, including the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of the Interior, which controlled the national police. In 1948, the Ministry of the Interior began purging non-Communists from the security forces and using the police to suppress non-Communist political activities. On 20 February, most non-Communist ministers resigned in protest, hoping to force Beneš to call a new election. But the Communists staged a coup d’état and formed a new, Communist-dominated

18 Peter Davies and Derek Lynch, *The Routledge Companion to Fascism and the Far Right* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 243.

19 Ihor Gawdiak, ed., *Czechoslovakia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 45.

20 Ihor Gawdiak, ed., *Czechoslovakia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 46–47.

21 Ihor Gawdiak, ed., *Czechoslovakia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 49–50.

22 Ihor Gawdiak, ed., *Czechoslovakia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 48, 54.

government. They drew up a new constitution, calling for the nationalization of all business and industry.²³ Beneš refused to sign the constitution and resigned as president. A few weeks later, the National Assembly elected Communist leader Klement Gottwald as president.

Communist Rule

The years following the Communist coup were marked by political instability and paranoia as the Communists moved to consolidate their power. The armed forces were purged of “pro-Western” officers, and non-Communists in the government were removed from power by various means, including charges of treason and executions. The Communists then turned on each other, seeking to eliminate anyone who did not adhere to the party line. Many politicians, including high-ranking party officials, were arrested and executed, and thousands of others were sent to prison or labor camps. By the time Czechoslovakia joined the Warsaw Pact in 1955, the country had been transformed into a Soviet satellite state.²⁴

The government rapidly expanded heavy industry, increasing output between 1948–1959. Farmers were forced to collectivize their operations to facilitate the use of new farm machinery in meeting high quotas. Although the Czechoslovakian economy seemed to be growing at an extraordinary pace, its growth lagged behind that of many other countries in the postwar period, including Japan and Germany. Despite the increased use of modern farming methods, agricultural production fell dramatically; Czechoslovakia was producing less food in 1960 than it had before the war.²⁵

By the 1960s it was clear that the Czechoslovakian economy was in trouble. In 1965, the Communist Party approved a series of sweeping economic reforms aimed at making the economy more productive and competitive. Central planning would be limited, prices would respond to supply and demand, and wage differentials were to be introduced. Older Stalinists found themselves replaced by younger liberal Communists, and political reforms were proposed to grant regional and local committees more autonomy.²⁶ When President Antonin Novotný, an old-school Stalinist, failed to implement the changes in January 1967, critics of the regime became even more vocal. In October, protests broke out in Prague. Novotný stepped down as leader of the Central Committee in January 1968, replaced by moderate Alexander Dubček.

Dubček, a Slovakian, instituted a series of liberal reforms, providing greater civil liberties and establishing autonomy for Slovakia. He eased censorship, and the press responded by using its newfound freedom to call for even more radical reform.²⁷ The Soviet Union, worrying that the reform movement would soon spiral out of control, began hinting that invasion was an option if Dubček failed to rein in the press. On 3 August 1968, Czechoslovakia’s leaders signed the Bratislava Declaration, reaffirming their fidelity to Marxist Communism. Unconvinced by Dubček’s reassurances, the Soviets invaded the country on 20 August. They would remain in Czechoslovakia until 1991. Most of Dubček’s reforms were reversed, and Dubček was eventually stripped of his party membership.

Communist Czechoslovakia was isolated economically and politically from other countries. Foreign policy was set by the Soviet Union, and trade was almost exclusively limited to other countries of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon). The early 1970s saw a rise in the standard of living for Czechoslovakians, but prosperity

23 Ihor Gawdiak, ed., *Czechoslovakia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 56–58.

24 Ihor Gawdiak, ed., *Czechoslovakia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 58.

25 Ihor Gawdiak, ed., *Czechoslovakia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 58–59.

26 Ihor Gawdiak, ed., *Czechoslovakia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 60–62.

27 Ihor Gawdiak, ed., *Czechoslovakia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 61–65.

was short-lived. By the end of the decade the country was in a serious depression.²⁸ After the short-lived reforms, censorship was reimposed as the Communist Party sought control over every aspect of Czechoslovakian life. Writers and artists were expected to copy Soviet styles, and independent thought was discouraged, even in the sciences. Religious activity was strictly monitored.

Czechoslovakia developed a thriving underground culture during this period, with writers publishing hundreds of works of *samizdat*—non-Communist-sanctioned literature—on secret presses each year. Growing discontent finally found public expression in 1977 when a group of intellectuals, including dissident playwright Václav Havel, issued an open letter. Known as Charter 77, the manifesto called the government to task for human rights violations. Despite the signatories' arrests and general persecution, by 1985 nearly 1,200 people had signed the charter.²⁹

The Velvet Revolution

During the late 1980s, several mass demonstrations against the Communist government took place. On 9 November 1989 protestors in neighboring East Germany tore down the Berlin Wall, precipitating the fall of the East German government. A few days later, students from the University of Prague met for a march to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the death of Jan Opletal, the activist medical student. Although the march was peaceful and had been approved by the government, it took an unexpected turn when students began chanting anti-government slogans. Police surrounded the students, and savagely beat hundreds of them with nightsticks.³⁰ Rumors that a student had died as a result of his injuries triggered a series of mass demonstrations in the days that followed, with crowds swelling to more than half a million.³¹ On 19 November, members of several dissident groups joined together to form the Civic Forum with Václav Havel as its leader.³² On 27 November, a general strike brought Prague to a standstill for several hours. The Civic Forum called for the dismissal of top Communist officials and an end to the Communist monopoly in government.³³ Frantic reshuffling of the cabinet and the appointment of non-Communists to minor positions failed to satisfy the Civic Forum's demands for government reform, and more strikes were threatened.³⁴ Over the next few weeks, the protests continued and spread to other cities. The Communist leaders eventually capitulated to the Forum's demands. President Gustáv Husák resigned from office on 10 December 1989, and a transitional government was quickly organized.

The Velvet Divorce and European Union Membership

The Czech and Slovak Republics

In 1990, Havel was elected president of Czechoslovakia in the first free elections held since 1946. The first priorities of the new government were the privatization of property and the transition to a free-market economy.³⁵ Rifts between

28 Ihor Gawdiak, ed., *Czechoslovakia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 67–70, 164.

29 Ihor Gawdiak, ed., *Czechoslovakia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 67, 69–70.

30 Rob McRae, "The November 17 Massacre," in *Resistance and Revolution: Václav Havel's Czechoslovakia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 104–6.

31 Rob McRae, "Workers Unite!" in *Resistance and Revolution: Václav Havel's Czechoslovakia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 137.

32 Rob McRae, "The Birth of Civic Forum," in *Resistance and Revolution: Václav Havel's Czechoslovakia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 111–12.

33 Rob McRae, "The General Strike," in *Resistance and Revolution: Václav Havel's Czechoslovakia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 150.

34 Rob McRae, "The Regime Strikes Back," in *Resistance and Revolution: Václav Havel's Czechoslovakia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 155.

35 Rob McRae, "Thomas Bata's Homecoming," in *Resistance and Revolution: Václav Havel's Czechoslovakia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 176.

the Czechs and the Slovaks surfaced almost immediately as the new government struggled to implement reform within the existing federalist structure, which was riddled with bureaucratic red tape—a legacy of the Communist era.

As economic reforms progressed, it became clear that less-industrialized Slovakia preferred a slower pace of transition.³⁶ Political differences between Slovak and Czech parties ultimately stalled progress toward a new constitution. In 1992, the government decided to end the deadlock by dividing the country. On 1 January 1993 the dissolution of Czechoslovakia took effect, and the Czech and Slovak Republics emerged. Assets between the two countries were divided at a two-to-one ratio, according to the populations of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, respectively. Václav Havel was elected president of the Czech Republic in January 1993 and served two terms. Economic reform remained the highest priority of his administration, and the process of privatization moved forward quickly. Collective farms were broken up, and a voucher system allowed citizens to purchase shares in previously nationalized enterprises.

Joining the EU

The Czech Republic moved to reestablish economic and political ties with the West, but the country's slow-growing economy initially stalled the country's plans to join the European Union. The Czech Republic became a member of NATO in 1999 and, with a more viable economic system in place, succeeded in gaining membership in the European Union in 2004. Its transition from a post-communist state to integrated European nation has not been without challenges, but unlike its experience receiving policy orders as a satellite Soviet state, the Republic has shown itself a capable partner in EU policymaking.³⁷

36 Rob McRae, "Slovak Nationalism," in *Resistance and Revolution: Václav Havel's Czechoslovakia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 243.

37 See Dan Marek and Michael Baun, *The Czech Republic and the European Union* (Abington: Routledge, 2010).

Czech in Perspective

History Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- | | | | |
|----|---|------|-------|
| 1. | Empress Maria-Theresa nationalized the education system and granted broader freedoms to serfs. | True | False |
| 2. | The Defenestration of Prague in 1618 sparked a religious war. | True | False |
| 3. | The First Republic was marked by instability. | True | False |
| 4. | In 1938, the majority of Germans living in Czechoslovakia supported the idea of becoming part of Germany. | True | False |
| 5. | Playwright Václav Havel was the first elected president of Czechoslovakia. | True | False |

Czech in Perspective

History Assessment Answers

1. True:
Maria-Theresa's son, Joseph II, continued these reforms by issuing the Edict of Tolerance in 1781, which granted some religious freedom to Protestants.
2. True:
The 1618 Defenestration of Prague ushered in the Thirty Years' War, which eventually engulfed much of Europe. At issue was the right of the Czechs to practice their own religion.
3. False:
Tomáš Masaryk worked to gain consensus among the five political parties (the Pětka) that formed the Czechoslovakian government, which brought a high degree of political stability to the diverse new nation.
4. True:
Leaders of the popular Sudeten German Party actively worked against the Czechoslovakian government to ensure that Germany would annex the Sudetenland.
5. True:
After Slovakia and the Czech Republic split, Havel was elected president of the Czech Republic in January 1993. He served two terms.

Chapter 3 | Economy



Velvet Revolution, Prague 1989
Wikimedia/Josef Sránek ml

Introduction

After the fall of communism in then-Czechoslovakia, the country attracted new tourists and business enterprises, spawning a rapidly expanding service industry. In the aftermath of the Velvet Revolution of 1989, the growth of this sector helped keep unemployment low while the new government tackled the joint tasks of privatizing industries and dividing assets as the country split into the now-Czech Republic (also Czechia) and Slovak Republic (also Slovakia) in 1993. The growth of the service industry is now aiding in the Republic's efforts to wean itself from heavy industries that have contributed to widespread environmental degradation.¹

Despite its membership in the European Union, the Czech Republic has not yet adopted the euro – opting instead to maintain its own currency, the koruna (meaning “crown”). The current coalition government, elected in 2021, had re-affirmed the non-adoption of the euro, with the current Minister of Finance quoted as saying, “we have to adopt the euro when it will be advantageous for the Czech Republic, and it is not yet.”² Sentiment may be wavering, however, as the recent invasion of Ukraine by Russia has caused many businesses to favor the euro, including

- 1 “Czech Republic: Tourism Policies and Programmes,” *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development: OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2020*, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/aeb88d52-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/aeb88d52-en>.
- 2 “The adoption of the euro has been postponed for four years. According to the emerging government, this would ‘not be advantageous,’” *Aktuálně.cz*, November 2, 2021, <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/ekonomika/euro-zatim-nebude-nova-vlada/r~e22aa5023bc711ecad06ac1f6b220ee8/>.

manufacturing giant Skoda Auto.³ Many businesses are now lobbying the government to consider plans to adopt the euro in the near future.

Agriculture

Agriculture accounts for a small portion of the Czech Republic's economy—only 1.9% of GDP—and employs just 2.6% of the workforce.⁴ Major crops include grains, rapeseed, and fodder crops (used for animal feed).⁵ While the country has enjoyed a long reputation for high-quality beer, a flourishing wine industry has also been possible since the Velvet Revolution. Two world wars, Soviet occupation, and tightly-controlled land use under communism hindered the development of modern wineries, but the past thirty years have seen substantial efforts to revitalize the vineyards, and the Czech wine industry itself, in the Moravia region.⁶

The Czech Republic has recently seen a substantial drop in arable land, from 41.3% in 2008 to 32.2% in 2018.⁷ Studies indicate that the largest cities, which tend to be built upon the best soil, are expanding quicker than smaller cities, with suburban sprawl overtaking agricultural zones.⁸ In remote areas, arable land is being abandoned and allowed to return to permanent grassland and pasture.

Soil in agricultural areas has also been subject to serious degradation from overuse of heavy machinery, mineral fertilizers, and inadequate cultivation methods. General environmental efforts over the last few decades have yielded a “long-term trend of decline” in harmful emissions, which have been a leading cause of soil acidification.⁹ As of 2015, however, acidification rates were still cause for concern in both agricultural and forested zones.

Industry

In 2020, industry accounted for 30.8% of GDP in the Czech Republic and employed 37.1% of the workforce.¹⁰ Manufacturing accounts for two-thirds of the country's industrial GDP. Major industrial areas include the aerospace, automotive, and electronics sectors, with emergent markets in advanced engineering, nanotechnology, and information and communications technology.¹¹

In recent decades, the Czech Republic has tried to shift its economy away from industry toward the service sector, largely due to environmental concerns. The Czech Republic has coal in ample amounts, which has provided cheap,

3 Krystof Chamonikolas and Lenka Ponikelska, “War Boosts Euro’s Appeal for Czech Business as Government Stalls,” *Bloomberg*, May 2, 2022, <https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/war-boosts-euro-s-appeal-for-czech-business-as-government-stalls-1.1759986?fr=operanews>.

4 “Czechia: Economy,” *globalEDGE* (Michigan State University), 2020, <https://globaledge.msu.edu/countries/czechia/economy>.

5 “Global Agricultural Information Network Report, Czech Republic: Czech Crop 2018 – Grains Below Average, Rapeseed Up,” *USDA Foreign Agricultural Service*, September 21, 2018, https://apps.fas.usda.gov/newgainapi/api/report/downloadreportbyfilename?filename=Czech%20Crop%202018%20-%20Grains%20Below%20Average%20Rapeseed%20Up_Prague_Czech%20Republic_9-21-2018.pdf.

6 Arielle DeSoucey and Michaela DeSoucey, “Bottle Revolution: The Emerging Importance of the Wine Industry in South Moravia,” *Council for European Studies* (Columbia University), *EuropeNow*, November 9, 2020, <https://www.europenowjournal.org/2020/11/09/bottle-revolution-the-emerging-importance-of-the-wine-industry-in-south-moravia/>.

7 “Arable land (% of land area) – Czech Republic,” *The World Bank*, 2018, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.LND.ARBL.ZS?locations=CZ>.

8 Jaroslava Janků, Josef Kozák, and Adela M. Marhoul, “Estimation of Land Loss in the Czech Republic in the Near Future,” *Soil and Water Research* 11, no. 3 (2016): 1.

9 “Czech Republic country briefing – The European environment – state and outlook 2015,” *European Environment Agency*, 2015, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/soer/2015/countries/czech-republic>.

10 “Czechia: Economy,” *globalEDGE* (Michigan State University), 2020, <https://globaledge.msu.edu/countries/czechia/economy>.

11 “Market Information: Sectors and Products,” *BusinessINFO.cz* (Ministry of Industry and Trade), 2017, <https://www.businessinfo.cz/en/about-the-czech-republic/economic-information/market-information-sectors-and-products/>.

easily-available fuel for industrial development. During the communist era (1945–1989), environmental controls were insufficient and poorly enforced. Decades of unregulated industrial pollution left a legacy of environmental problems, including water pollution, acid rain, and poor air quality. However, with EU membership came aggressive environmental improvement targets, and while the Republic has some way to go in reaching these benchmarks, it has made significant improvements since joining the EU.¹²

Tourism and Service Sectors

The service sector includes many operations, such as tourism, hospitality, transportation, sales, entertainment, and business services. In 2020, services accounted for 58.3% of GDP and 60.2% of employment.¹³

Thanks to a thriving cultural heritage sector, the Czech Republic has had great success in attracting tourists. In 2019, 14.6 million tourists visited the country, following a strong upward trend since the Velvet Revolution.¹⁴ As with nearly every other country, the COVID-19 pandemic badly impacted the tourism sector, and in 2020 the country received only 3.9 million tourists. Estimates from the first quarter of 2022 indicated that after lifting COVID-19 restrictions, accommodation services were “slowly returning to normal.”¹⁵

Business services, which can include operations such as finance and accounting, IT support, customer service, human resources, and consulting services, have experienced substantial growth in the past two decades. Services like data analytics have helped achieve an average annual 13% growth in employment within the sector for the period 2014 – 2021.¹⁶

Energy and Natural Resources

The Czech Republic has vast deposits of coal as well as modest oil and natural gas reserves. In 2020, 41% of the country’s electricity was generated with fossil fuels (down from over 75% in 2010), mostly from coal-powered plants.¹⁷ Bituminous coal is mined in the east, near Ostrava, while brown coal is found in the extreme west near the German border. Because brown coal has a higher ash and sulfur content, it does not burn as cleanly as bituminous coal and its use has contributed to poor air quality and acid rain.

The country is a net importer of oil, importing 97% of its crude oil supply in 2019.¹⁸ The vast majority of these imports have historically come from Russia. However, since the 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Russia, many EU officials have prioritized eliminating dependency on Russian oil. Heavily-dependent countries such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary were given temporary exemptions from bans on Russian oil, giving them time

12 “The Environmental Implementation Review: Czech Republic,” *European Commission*, 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/environment/eir/pdf/factsheet_cz_en.pdf.

13 “Czechia: Economy,” *globalEDGE (Michigan State University)*, 2020, <https://globaledege.msu.edu/countries/czechia/economy>.

14 Tourists defined as non-resident, inbound travelers with overnight stays. “Number of trips and overnights by type of tourism and categories of visitors in the Czech Republic,” *Czech Statistical Office: Public database*, generated June 24, 2022, https://vdb.czso.cz/vdbvo2/faces/en/index.jsf?page=vystup-objekt&pvo=CRUD-TSA-T3&z=T&f=TABULKA&katalog=32813&c=v3~8__RP2019.

15 “Tourism – 1. quarter of 2022,” *Czech Statistical Office*, May 11, 2022, <https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/ari/tourism-1-quarter-of-2022>.

16 “Business Services Sector in the Czech Republic,” *Association of Business Service Leaders in the Czech Republic*, 2022, <https://www.absl.cz/report2022/>.

17 “Czech Republic 2021: Energy Policy Review,” *International Energy Agency*, September 2021: 139 – 140, <https://www.iea.org/reports/czech-republic-2021>.

18 “Czech Republic 2021: Energy Policy Review,” *International Energy Agency*, September 2021: 174, <https://www.iea.org/reports/czech-republic-2021>.

to explore alternative energy initiatives and join the rest of the EU in weaning the bloc off of Russian imports.¹⁹ Government officials in the Republic have been keen to use the EU Council Presidency, which rotates every six months and is set to fall to the Czech Republic in July 2022, to help lead these efforts.

Other major natural resources include coal, graphite, clay, iron, and timber. The timber industry has recently faced environmental setbacks such as drought, a bark beetle outbreak, and the previously mentioned defoliation from acidification brought on by harmful emissions.²⁰

Trade

Germany is the Republic's chief trading partner, receiving 32% of Czech exports, and supplying 23% of imports in 2020.²¹ Other important trading partners include China (18.1% of imports), Poland (7.9% of imports and 6.2% of exports), and the Slovak Republic (7.6% of exports and 4.1% of imports). Major exports include machinery and mechanical appliances, electronics, motor vehicles, plastics, and steel. Major imports include variants of those exported products, as well as mineral goods and pharmaceutical products.

Banking and Finance

The Czech National Bank functions as the central bank for the Czech Republic. According to Article 98 of the Constitution of the Czech Republic, “the primary objective of the CNB is to maintain price stability.”²² The Czech President appoints the bank's governor, but the bank operates independently of the Czech government in setting monetary policy, issuing currency, and providing oversight to the banking industry. It functions as a banker to the government, providing services related to the national budget, social security, and customs. It also oversees foreign exchange.

Banking for non-EU citizens is easily accessible, requiring only valid travel/residency documents and ID. The U.S. Embassy in Poland (which houses the Federal Benefits Unit for Europe) even assists with direct deposit for Americans receiving federal benefits while resident in the Czech Republic.²³ The average exchange rate was CZK 21.69 to USD 1 in 2021.

Although the Czech Republic is part of the European Union, it is not part of the euro area (or Eurozone), an economic merger which includes most of the Union and four non-EU states (San Marino, Andorra, Monaco, and Vatican City) in the adoption of a single, unified currency – the euro. In order to join the Eurozone, the Czech Republic will have to adhere to Eurozone monetary regulations, as well as allow the European Central Bank to assume control over its monetary policy.²⁴ The country may soon adopt the euro as a matter of economic necessity, given the instability caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

19 Jorge Liboreiro, “Ukraine, energy and supply chains: the Czech Republic unveils priorities for EU Council presidency,” *EuroNews*, June 15, 2022, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/06/15/ukraine-energy-and-supply-chains-the-czech-republic-unveils-priorities-for-eu-council-pres>.

20 “Market Statement of the Czech Republic 2020,” *United Nations Commission for Europe: Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry*, 4 – 6 November, 2020: 3 – 4, <https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/timber/country-info/statements/czechia2020-v2.pdf>.

21 “Annual International Trade Statistics by Country: Czech Republic,” *TrendEconomy (United Nations Comtrade Database)*, 2020, https://trendeconomy.com/data/h2?commodity=TOTAL&reporter=CzechRepublic&trade_flow=Export.Import&partner=World&indicator=TV.YoY&time_period=2012.2013.2014.2015.2016.2017.2018.2019.2020.

22 “About the CNB,” *Czech National Bank*, 2022, http://www.cnb.cz/en/about_cnb/.

23 “Methods of Payment in the Czech Republic,” *U.S. Embassy & Consulate in Poland*, 2022, https://pl.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/social-security/eft_czech/.

24 ECB, ESCB and the Eurosystem,” *European Central Bank*, “2022, <http://www.ecb.int/ecb/orga/escb/html/index.en.html>.

Standard of Living

Czechs enjoy a higher standard of living than people in many other former communist states. Although gross national income (GNI) per capita is only about USD 38,000 (the United States is about USD 63,800) the Republic was ranked 27th out of 189 countries in the 2020 Human Development Index (HDI).²⁵ The HDI ranks countries based on life expectancy, health, education, and general quality of life. The 2020 Index placed the Republic higher than several other European countries, including Italy (29th), Greece (32nd), Poland (35th), and Portugal (38th). The poverty rate in the Czech Republic was about 10% in 2020, significantly lower than the average for Europe (16%).²⁶

Employment Trends

In 2021, the Czech Republic's workforce stood at 5.38 million people. Of these, 4.1% were unemployed.²⁷ Those most likely to be employed were between 25 and 40 years of age, working in IT, administration, healthcare, law, and other professional classes. The jobs most in demand were positions in construction and manufacturing.

Gender inequality is a pressing issue for the Republic's workforce. With employment shifting towards higher-skilled jobs, women still make up the majority of science and math graduates.²⁸ In 2016, however, a third of women between 25 and 34 years of age reported not participating in the workforce. The Republic's liberal parental leave policies allow for extended care for children after birth, and many women experience difficulties in re-entering the workforce after a prolonged absence. A 2018 report suggested that increased flexibility regarding part-time work and telework arrangements may help to alleviate the strain on those women who wish to return to work after having a child. A study of work flexibility during COVID-19 supported these suggestions, but also showcased the importance of maintaining investments in childcare for working mothers, as those without this support generally found themselves double-burdened by both work and childcare obligations.²⁹

Public vs. Private Sector

The Czech public sector is relatively new to operating in a free-market economy, but manages to provide the basic public services required of a functioning democracy. As with most countries, the Republic's public sector was recently tested by the COVID-19 pandemic. In identifying ongoing regional disparities in services received, the Republic has continued to follow "a process of consolidation of various administrative functions" while devolving administrative authority to the regions.³⁰

The Czech private sector generates 70–80 percent of GDP.³¹ Given the country's aggressive privatization following the fall of communism, and its pursuit of anti-inflationary monetary policy, it is not surprising that the Czech economy

25 "Human Development Report 2020," *United Nations Development Programme, 2020*, <https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2020>.

26 "Poverty Watch Report 2020 – Czech Republic," European Anti-Poverty Network, October 15, 2020, <https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/EAPN-PW-2020-Czech-Republic-ENG-4746.pdf>.

27 "Labour Market Information: Czechia," *European Commission*

28 "OECD Economic Surveys: Czech Republic," *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, July 2018: 4 – 5*, <https://www.oecd.org/economy/surveys/Czech-Republic-2018-OECD-economic-survey-overview.pdf>.

29 "Productivity gains from teleworking in the post COVID-19 era: How can public policies make it happen?" *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, September 2020*, <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/productivity-gains-from-teleworking-in-the-post-covid-19-era-a5d52e99/>.

30 "Czech Republic Country Report 2022," *Bertelsmann Transformation Index, 2022*, <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/CZE>.

31 "Economy and Privatisation," *Embassy of the Czech Republic in Ottawa, 2022*, https://www.mzv.cz/ottawa/en/general_information_on_the_czech/economy_and_privatisation/index.html.

outpaces all other former Soviet satellite states. In 2020, the World Bank ranked the Czech Republic 41st out of 183 countries in terms of ease of doing business, and in 1993 it was the first post-communist country to receive an investment grade credit rating.³² The country attracts high levels of foreign direct investment (FDI).

Future Outlook

Strong industries and shrewd monetary and fiscal policies have helped the Czech Republic transition to capitalism with relative ease. Inflation and unemployment have remained generally low, and the service economy has grown rapidly.

On a more challenging note, the industrial sector consumes high levels of energy and produces high levels of pollution. The Czech Republic is working to reduce its dependence on coal, part of which includes reducing the role of heavy manufacturing in the national economy. Improvements in this area, while laudable, have been slow, given the seriousness and imminence of global climate-related challenges.

An aging population will likely place a growing burden on younger generations, who are having fewer children and who will likely pay higher taxes to support government social services for the elderly. However, the most influential factor regarding the Czech Republic's near-term economic outlook will be its decision to either adopt the euro, or remain with the koruna.

³² "Doing Business 2020: Comparing Business Regulation in 190 Economies," *The World Bank*, 2020: 4, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/32436/9781464814402.pdf>. See also "The credit rating of the Czech Republic," *Czech National Bank*, 2011, <https://www.cnb.cz/en/monetary-policy/inflation-reports/boxes-and-annexes-contained-in-inflation-reports/The-credit-rating-of-the-Czech-Republic>.

Czech in Perspective

Economy Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- | | | | |
|----|---|------|-------|
| 1. | The Czech Republic's economy is predominantly agricultural. | True | False |
| 2. | More than 70% of the Czech Republic's electricity comes from fossil fuels. | True | False |
| 3. | The Czech Republic adopted the euro as its currency. | True | False |
| 4. | The Czech Republic uses more energy per dollar of GDP than the European Union on average. | True | False |
| 5. | The United States is the Czech Republic's main trading partner. | True | False |

Czech in Perspective

Economy Assessment Answers

1. False:
The service industry makes up the bulk of the Czech economy (60% of GDP), followed by industry (38% of GDP). Agriculture accounts for 2.4% of GDP.
2. True:
Because the Czech Republic has vast deposits of coal as well as modest reserves of oil and natural gas, about 75% of its electricity is derived from fossil fuels.
3. True:
The Czech Republic maintains its own currency, the koruna.
4. True:
The economy of the Czech Republic is energy-intensive, using twice as much energy per dollar of GDP than the European Union average.
5. False:
Germany is the Czech Republic's main trading partner. Poland, Slovakia, and China are also important trading partners.

Chapter 4 | Society



Pedestrian bridge, Prague
Pixabay/GeriArt

Ethnic Groups and Languages

When Czechoslovakia became recognized as an independent nation in 1918, it was a melting pot, with large numbers of ethnic Germans, Hungarians, Poles, Slovaks, and Jews. Today the Czech Republic is a fairly homogenous society.

A backlash against six years of German occupation, as well as centuries of ethnic tension between Germans and Czechs, resulted in nearly 3 million ethnic Germans being expelled from Czechoslovakia following World War II. Many of those expelled had been in Czech lands for generations. Czechoslovakia threatened to expel 800,000 ethnic Hungarians, but the Hungarian government intervened, and only about 200,000 were forced out.¹

As of the most recent 2011 census, Germans, Hungarians, Poles, and Ukrainians collectively accounted for only 1.2% of the population.² Likewise, since the Velvet Divorce—the 1993 separation of Czechoslovakia into the independent nations of the Czech Republic and Slovakia—only 1.4% of the Czech Republic's population is Slovak.

1 Ihor Gawdiak, ed., *Czechoslovakia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 54.

2 "Population by ethnicity by 1921-2011 censuses," *Czech Demographic Handbook – 2020*, Czech Statistical Office, <https://www.czso.cz/documents/10180/142756966/130055210116.pdf/fe80196d-bf7e-47dc-8c07-ef527f264a3f?version=1.1>.

Roma

Despite living in the Czech Republic for more than 500 years, Roma (also known as Romani or gypsy, though the latter is considered pejorative) are still considered outsiders to Czech society. They face a high level of discrimination.

Roma are a tribal people who emigrated from India in the 15th century. They traveled in family groups and made their living through metalworking, construction work, basket weaving, and entertainment. Some converted to Christianity and settled in towns and villages, while persecution forced others to move from place to place. Various attempts to assimilate Roma have been made by the successive authorities in the region over time, but the Roma have been largely successful in preserving their language and culture.

World War II presented the greatest disruption to the Roma's way of life. The Nazis targeted Roma, sending them to concentration camps by the thousands. It is estimated that only a few hundred Czech Roma survived the war. After the war, several thousand Slovakian Roma were resettled in the Sudetenland after Germans were expelled. The rise of Communism placed additional pressure on Roma to settle and assimilate. Unable to force Roma to comply with the Communist system, the government resorted to forced sterilization to curtail the growth of the Roma population.³

Although the Velvet Revolution (the collapse of communism in Czechoslovakia in 1989) brought Roma greater opportunities to participate in government, the Velvet Divorce left many stateless as new citizenship laws led to many Roma slipping through bureaucratic cracks. Roma continue to be at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, suffering from high levels of unemployment, lack of access to education, and general discrimination.

Languages

Czech is the only official language of the Czech Republic, but many Czechs speak a second language. Until Czechoslovakia declared independence from Austria in 1918, German was the language of government. After the Communist takeover in 1948, Russian was compulsory in schools. Consequently, most Czechs speak some German or Russian. Only 27% of Czechs speak English.⁴

Religion

Despite the defining role that religion played in Czech history, Czechs today are largely nonreligious, with nearly half claiming no religious beliefs.⁵ A primary reason for this stems from the suppression of religion under the Communist regime. The government not only encouraged atheism, but it closely monitored all religious activity. During the Communist years (1948–1989), some people practiced their religion secretly to avoid persecution by the Secret Service (StB).⁶

3 Lubos Palata, "Czech Republic considers compensating Roma victims of forced sterilization," *Deutsche Welle*, March 16, 2021, <https://p.dw.com/p/3qhjy>.

4 "Special Eurobarometer 386: Europeans and Their Languages," *European Commission*, June 2012, 21.

5 "Population by religious belief and regions," *Czech Statistical Office*, 2021, <https://vdb.czso.cz/vdbvo2/faces/en/index.jsf?page=vystup-objekt&z=T&f=TABULKA&skupId=4294&katalog=33525&pvo=SLD210092-KR&pvo=SLD210092-KR>.

6 Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, *Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics* (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 36.

Of Czechs who claim a religion, roughly 7% are Catholic. Although the Czechs played a large role in early reformation movements, only about 2% today claim affiliation with a Protestant church, with evangelicals being the largest share. The number of Jews in the Czech Republic is estimated at around 6,500 (0.6%).⁷

Cuisine

Czech cuisine is characterized by large amounts of protein and starch. Beef and pork are often served, fried or roasted, with a side dish of potatoes or dumplings. Chicken and fish are popular dishes. Dumplings are boiled and sliced like bread. Dishes are enlivened with a variety of sauces—dill, paprika, butter, garlic—and are often accompanied with a serving of sauerkraut. Meals typically include soups with meat and potatoes or cabbage, flavored with garlic and onions, as well as cream.⁸

During summer months, seasonal vegetables and fruit are on the menu. Czechs are fond of mushrooms, and often gather and prepare their own mushrooms during the spring and fall. Czechs are proud of their domestic wines and beers and drink them with almost every meal. Fruit-filled dumplings and *palačinky*, a crepe-like pastry filled with jam, are common desserts.

Traditional Dress

The folk dress of the Czech people is called the *kroj*. Women's traditional outfits are elaborate; they were worn as wedding dresses and at festivals, church events, and funerals. Styles vary from region to region, and someone's village could be identified by the style of his or her *kroj*.⁹

The women's *kroj* features a white blouse with puffed sleeves and a lace or ruff collar. A colorful vest is worn over the blouse. Skirts, which vary in length and color, generally fall below the knee and are worn over several stiff petticoats. The kind of footwear and stockings worn depends on the region.

An apron is usually worn over the skirt. Ribbons and elaborate embroidery decorate skirts, aprons, and vests. Women would traditionally embroider their own dresses to showcase their skills. Scarves and ribbons decorate the hair, although in many areas single women wear their hair loose and decorate it with flowers.¹⁰

Men's traditional *kroj* consists of a loose-fitting white shirt with lace cuffs, a colorful vest, and knee-length dark trousers of wool or linen. Men wear feathers in their hat—one for every girlfriend. If the feather in a man's cap is clipped, it means that he is married.¹¹

7 "Czech Republic," Institute for Jewish Policy Research, 2016, <https://www.jpr.org.uk/country?id=64>.

8 Tim Nollen, *Culture Shock! Czech Republic: A Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (London: Kuperard, 1997), 90–91, 95, 98–99.

9 Carmen Langel and Mark Vasko-Bigaouette, "Czech/Slovak Pageant: Contestant Kroj (Folk-Wear) Guidelines," American Czech-Slovak Cultural Club, 20 May 2010, http://acscc.org/Papers/kroj_guidelines.html

10 Jana Vaculik, "Insights on Czech Kroje," Czech Costumes, 20 November 2008, <http://czechcostumes.blogspot.com/2008/11/jana-vaculik-is-pictured-here-with-her.html>

11 Czech and Slovak Heritage, "Folk Costumes (Kroje)," September 2008, <http://www.czechheritage.net/herifolk.html>

Gender Issues

The communist era helped level the playing field for women, since they were expected to do the same work as men. Women worked beside their male counterparts in virtually every profession, from medicine to steel manufacturing, and were generally regarded as equals.¹²

In the current economic climate, however, women still lag behind men. A minority in the workforce, they are generally paid less, are slightly more likely to be unemployed, and are less likely to occupy leadership or managerial positions.¹³

In the home, traditional roles prevail, with men expected to work and women expected to care for the household, cooking, cleaning, and raising children.

Arts and Letters

Under the patronage of Charles IV in the 14th century, Prague was transformed into a cultural center of Europe. But it was not until the rise of Czech nationalism in the 19th century that a distinctive Czech culture emerged. The Czech language, for centuries considered nothing more than an uncouth peasant dialect, was transformed into a high literary language. At the same time, Bohemian folktales became the subjects of some of the best-known works of the Romantic Movement.

Music

For centuries the Czechs were heavily influenced by German and Austrian composers, including Mozart (who wrote a symphony for the city of Prague) and Beethoven.¹⁴ Czech music came into its own during the 19th century when several composers, inspired by nationalist movements and the Romantic Movement, rose to international acclaim. Foremost among these composers were Bedřich Smetana and Antonín Dvořák. One of Smetana's best-known works, *My Fatherland*, celebrates Czech life with portions of the music depicting the Vltava River (known in German as the Moldau) and Vyšehrad Castle in Prague. Smetana's nationalist opera, *Libuše*, depicts the beginning of the Přemyslid dynasty, a line of Czech rulers whose reign lasted from about 800–1306. Dvořák achieved a greater level of international recognition for his symphonic works. His music, less overtly nationalistic, incorporated folk melodies of Moravia and Slovakia.

Today, classical music has a large following in the Czech Republic. The Prague-based Czech Symphony Orchestra is widely considered one of the finest orchestras in the world. The Prague Spring International Music Festival, held annually, attracts top musicians from around the world.¹⁵

Jazz also has an increasing and dedicated following among Czechs. As jazz was repressed under Communism, many Czech jazz musicians immigrated to the United States and achieved international acclaim.¹⁶

12 Tim Nollen, *Culture Shock! Czech Republic: A Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (London: Kuperard, 1997), 54.

13 Petra Jelínková and Jana Radovanovičová (eds.), "Shadow Report on the State of Gender Equality

in the Czech Republic in Years 2016–2020," 2021, https://czlobby.cz/sites/default/files/news_download/shadow_report_on_the_state_of_gender_equality_in_the_czech_republic_in_years_2016-2020.pdf.

14 Christine Gengaro, "Program Notes: Mozart's Prague," Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, May 2011, <http://www.laco.org/performances/151/?program=1>

15 See <https://festival.cz/en/>.

16 Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, *Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics* (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 43–44.

Literature

The survival of Czech as a literary language owes much to the Moravian Church, which translated the Bible into Czech between 1579–1593. This work is known as the Kralice Bible. Other early works of Czech literature include lives of saints, Czech legends, satires, and romances.

For two centuries after the Thirty Years' War, which ended in 1648, Czech fell out of usage as the language of government and literature. Until the revival of the Czech language in the 19th century, Czech literature was written largely in German. Reclaiming the Czech language became central to the nationalist movement. During the 1830s a Czech-German dictionary was published, Czech grammar was standardized, and for the first time the history of the Czech people was written in their own language.

One of the greatest literary works of this period is the epic poem “Máj” (“May”) by Karel Hynek Mácha.¹⁷ The story of two star-crossed lovers shows the heavy influence of other Romantic poets, including Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott, and is still popular with Czechs today. The poem inspired other Czech writers, including poet Jan Neruda, who belonged to a group of nationalist writers who called themselves the Máj, after Mácha’s poem.

Czech literature flourished between the world wars, with the publication of works such as *The Good Soldier Svejk* by Jaroslav Hašek and the early works of poet Jaroslav Seifert, the first Czech to win a Nobel Prize for Literature (1984).¹⁸ After the Communist takeover, all works of art were expected to conform to the Soviet model and adhere to the tenets of socialist realism (a style of realistic art aimed at furthering Communist goals). In the 1960s, because of an easing of Communist restrictions, writers like Milan Kundera and Bohumil Hrabal were able to publish their works, which garnered international acclaim.

The crackdown on freedom of expression that followed the Prague Spring in the late 1960s forced many writers to publish their works as *samizdat*—unofficial literature—on underground presses. *Samizdat* thrived in the 1970s and 1980s. Dissident writers, including former Czech president Václav Havel, played a key role in overthrowing the Communist government and reestablishing democracy.

Theater

Nationalism marked the beginnings of Czech-language theater. For several centuries, Czechs had performed religious plays, and marionette theater was a popular form of entertainment. As Czech gained popularity as a literary language in the early 19th century, Czech writers began generating plays in Czech, many based on Czech fairy tales and legends. But until 1862, venues for the performance of Czech literary drama did not exist.¹⁹ In 1881, the Prague National Theatre opened.

Czech theater rose in prominence during the First Republic (the period between the world wars), with playwrights such as Karel Čapek and František Langer producing comedies and satires that reflected the complexities of modern Czech life. Modern theater was discouraged during the Communist years. Václav Havel was arguably the greatest playwright to work during that period. His plays were performed at the Theater on the Balustrade, where

17 David Vaughan, “Karel Hynek Mácha: The Poet of Lovers,” Radio Prague, 14 November 2010, <http://www.radio.cz/en/section/books/karel-hynek-macha-the-poet-of-lovers>

18 Jo Thomas, “Jaroslav Seifert, Czech Poet, Wins Nobel Literature Prize,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), October 12, 1984, <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/10/12/books/jaroslav-seifert-czech-poet-wins-nobel-literature-prize.html>.

19 Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, *Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics* (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 48–49.

he worked as a stagehand before becoming the theater's resident writer. Early on, his plays received international acclaim. In 1968 he traveled to New York City to see one of his plays performed, the last time he was allowed to leave the country when it was under Communist rule.²⁰

One of the more unusual theatrical institutions is the Jára Cimrman Theater in Prague. Cimrman, a satirical representation of the Czech nation, was a character in a radio show invented in 1967 by Jiří Šebánek and Oscar-winning writer Zdeněk Svěrák. The theater performs plays supposedly written by Cimrman and presents lectures on Cimrman's varied life: among other absurdities, he is credited with inventing the light bulb. For his accomplishments, Cimrman was voted the "Greatest Czech" in history in a national poll, although he was disqualified because he is fictional.²¹

Film

The Czech Republic has a small but thriving film industry. Like most other forms of expression, filmmaking was heavily censored under the Communist regime. Some filmmakers, like Academy Award-winning director Miloš Forman, left the country to make movies elsewhere. Others did their best to sidestep the censors, producing films that received international acclaim.²² Since there is no longer state funding for the film industry, most films produced today are small-budget, independent films.

Animation is popular in the Czech Republic, which is widely regarded as having one of the best animation industries in the world. During the Cold War (1945–1991), some of America's most popular cartoons were being produced in Czechoslovakia, including episodes of "Tom and Jerry" and "Popeye."²³ Czechs produce a unique brand of dark, surreal animation that continues to attract an international following.

Prague is perhaps the Czech Republic's greatest movie asset. The city's vast collection of historic architecture has made it a popular location for making movies, particularly historic and action films, including *Amadeus*, *Shanghai Knights*, and *Mission Impossible*.²⁴

Pop Culture

Rock 'n' roll is popular in Czech culture, perhaps best exemplified by the late Václav Havel, the T-shirt wearing president who spent time with performers like Mick Jagger and Frank Zappa.²⁵ Rock music was banned under the Communist regime due to its American roots, so listening to it was seen as an act of rebellion against government repression.²⁶ Today rock music abounds in the Czech Republic; it is mostly imported from the United States along with movies and fashion, but listening to it lacks the political overtones of the past.

20 Dan Bilefsky and Jane Perlez, "Vaclav Havel, Former Czech President, Dies at 75," *New York Times*, 18 December 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/19/world/europe/vaclav-havel-dissident-playwright-who-led-czechoslovakia-dead-at-75.html?_r=3&pagewanted=all

21 Coilin O'Connor, "Jara Cimrman—the 'greatest ever' Czech?" Radio Prague, 16 February 2005, <http://www.radio.cz/en/section/czechs/jara-cimrman-the-greatest-ever-czech>

22 Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, *Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics* (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 49.

23 Independent Lens, "Still Life with Animated Dogs: Czech Animation," n.d., <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/animateddogs/animation1.html>

24 Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, *Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics* (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 50.

25 Sylvia Poggioli, "Vaclav Havel, Leader of the Velvet Revolution, Dies," National Public Radio, 18 December 2011, <http://www.npr.org/2011/12/18/143915405/vaclav-havel-leader-of-the-velvet-revolution-dies>

26 Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, *Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics* (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 44.

Architecture

Prague has one of the finest collections of historic architecture in Europe, with buildings spanning a wide range of eras and styles. Overlooking the city from the grounds of Prague Castle is the Gothic St. Vitus Cathedral. The original cathedral predates Charles IV; the emperor rebuilt it—and rebuilt and expanded the city as well—in a Gothic building boom.²⁷

At the other end of the spectrum is Frank Gehry's distinctive Dancing Building, an architectural homage to Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. In between are baroque buildings, built largely by the German elite while Bohemia was under Habsburg rule, and art nouveau buildings, which became an expression of the Czechs' growing national pride.²⁸

Unlike many other major cities in Europe, Prague was largely spared the destruction of World War II. Today, preserving and restoring historic buildings takes precedence over making modern additions to the architectural stock of the city.²⁹

Visual Arts

Painting in the Czech Republic has tended to follow the styles of the rest of Europe. But the Czechs have a distinguished history in the graphic arts, dating back to the Middle Ages, when Czech artists produced illuminated copies of the Bible, some of which are on display in museums across the country.³⁰

In the 19th century, paintings inspired by nationalism depicted Czech life, while sculptors focused on figures from Czech history and legend, such as the 15th-century religious martyr Jan Hus and Libuše, a mythical Czech woman with the power to see the future.³¹

The Czechs embraced cubism and surrealism enthusiastically in the early 20th century, with Prague becoming a major center for the avant-garde movement. Communism brought with it a focus on socialist realism, which pushed Czechoslovakia's edgier artists underground.³²

Folk Traditions

Folk traditions are a common part of daily life for many Czechs, with traditional crafts displayed in homes and sold at markets and traditional songs sung in pubs and at family gatherings. These expressions of folk culture not only reveal a connection to a preindustrial past, but are expressions of national identity. Because the ruling class of Bohemia and Moravia was largely of German descent, nationalist artists traditionally looked to the peasant classes for authentic Czech culture.³³

27 Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, *Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics* (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 41–42.

28 Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, *Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics* (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 41.

29 Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, *Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics* (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 42.

30 Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, *Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics* (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 36–37.

31 Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, *Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics* (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 37.

32 Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, *Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics* (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 37–39.

33 Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, *Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics* (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 38.

Today, Czech folk traditions and culture are celebrated at annual festivals and in folk museums. In recent years, the *verbunk*, a traditional Moravian dance, and the “Ride of the Kings,” a spring festival in Moravia, have been designated as Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO.³⁴

Traditional folk handicrafts, such as weaving, woodworking, and embroidery, are still practiced and taught to younger generations. Folk festivals provide Czechs with an opportunity to showcase not only their crafts, but their music, dance, and folk costumes. The largest festivals are held in the summer in southern Moravia. During other parts of the year, open-air “folk life” museums explore Czech social history with displays depicting the daily life of the Czech people.³⁵

Sports and Recreation

National Sports

Hockey and football (soccer) are the two most popular sports in the Czech Republic.³⁶ The Czech Republic’s national hockey team has won six world championships. In 1998, it beat both Canada and Russia to win the gold at the Olympics in Nagano, Japan.³⁷ Many Czech players have been recruited to play in America, including Jaromír Jágř, Patrik Eliáš, and Milan Hejduk.³⁸

Football is popular, but less prestigious than hockey; the national team has only qualified once for the FIFA (International Federation of Association Football) World Cup. Two of the most popular professional teams play in Prague: SK Slavia Praha (red-and-white uniforms) and AC Sparta Praha (crimson). Their season runs September–December and March–June, with games generally played on Sundays. There are women’s leagues for both football and hockey, although they are not as popular and attract few spectators.³⁹

Recreation

Czechs are outdoor enthusiasts. Many have country weekend cottages, where hiking, camping, and rafting or boating are popular summer pastimes. With snowy winters and an abundance of mountains, skiing is also popular.

34 Jan Velinger, “Ride of the Kings Added to UNESCO Heritage List,” Radio Prague, 28 November 2011, <http://www.radio.cz/en/section/curaffrs/ride-of-the-kings-added-to-unesco-heritage-list#0>

35 Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, *Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics* (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 38.

36 Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, *Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics* (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 32–33.

37 František Bouc, “National Ice Hockey Team Is World Champion,” *Prague Post*, 26 May 2010, <http://www.praguepost.com/sports/4545-national-ice-hockey-team-is-world-champion.html>

38 See Philadelphia Flyers, “Jaromir, Jagr,” 2010, <http://flyers.nhl.com/club/player.htm?id=8448208>; New Jersey Devils, “Patrik Elias,” 2012, <http://devils.nhl.com/club/player.htm?id=8460542>; and Colorado Avalanche, “Milan Hejduk,” 2010, <http://avalanche.nhl.com/club/player.htm?id=8460577>.

39 Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, *Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics* (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 32–33.

Czech in Perspective

Society Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- | | | | |
|----|---|------|-------|
| 1. | The majority of Czechs are Catholic. | True | False |
| 2. | Traditional Czech clothing is known as the kroj. | True | False |
| 3. | Before the 19th century, few writers used Czech as a literary language. | True | False |
| 4. | Czechs seldom eat meat, focusing instead on fresh fruit and vegetables. | True | False |
| 5. | The Czech Republic recognizes Romani as an official language alongside Czech. | True | False |

Czech in Perspective

Society Assessment Answers

1. False:
About 27% of Czechs are Catholic and about 40% are atheists. About 2% of Czechs are associated with a Protestant church, the largest being the Hussite Church.
2. True:
The kroj is a source of pride amongst Czechs, and particularly Moravians, who still wear it for festivals and other special events.
3. True:
The Czech language was revived in the 19th century when language became a defining aspect of a nation. In the 1830s, Czech grammar was standardized and became widely adopted by Czech writers.
4. False:
Fruit and vegetables are available seasonally, but meat is ubiquitous. Some form of meat, usually beef, pork, or chicken, is eaten with most meals, accompanied by a side dish of potatoes or dumplings.
5. False:
Czech is the only official language of the Czech Republic, nevertheless, the Roma have been largely successful in preserving their language and culture.

Chapter 5 | Security



Czech Pandur II reconnaissance vehicle
Wikimedia/CS92

Introduction

From the fall of the Soviet Union to the second decade of the 21st century, the Czech Republic has been transformed from a communist state under the control of the Soviet Union to an open democracy with a free-market economy. Despite the drastic changes that have taken place, the country has remained stable. Today, the Czech Republic is downsizing and modernizing its military and working to integrate politically and economically with Europe and the wider world.

Military

Until 2004, all males age 18 and over were required to serve in the military for 2–3 years and were considered reservists until the age of 50.¹ Thus, at the height of the Cold War, Czechoslovakia theoretically had a reserve of more than 3 million men with military training. Under the Warsaw Pact, Czechoslovakia was obligated to maintain a large standing army and air force, subordinate to Soviet control. At the time of the collapse of communism in

¹ Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Czech Republic,” 19 August 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3237.htm>

Czechoslovakia in 1989 (the Velvet Revolution), the country had 200,000 troops in its army and air force, half of which were conscripts.²

Czechoslovakia began drastically downsizing its armed forces after the fall of communism, and the Czech Republic continued that process after the Velvet Divorce, the 1993 breakup of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Military forces were overhauled to create a smaller, more mobile force of professional members. Today the armed forces, which are made up of an army and a small air force, stand at about 30,000 troops. Defense spending currently accounts for less than 2% of GDP (gross domestic product).³ As a member of NATO, the Czech Republic has provided personnel and support for a number of military actions and peacekeeping missions, including ongoing operations in Afghanistan.

Police

A national force, consisting of around 40,000 police officers and employees organized in 14 regional directorates, carries out the Czech Republic's internal security and law enforcement. The Ministry of the Interior oversees the police force as well as border security, vital records and travel documents, road safety, fire protection, and secret services. A special division of the police force deals with resident foreigners and immigration issues, and a branch of the Bureau of Criminal Police and Investigation Service deals directly with Interpol.

Corruption has been a problem; for example, 4 officers were arrested in 2011 for covering up financial crimes.⁴ Recent salary cuts have led to retention problems, particularly among experienced officers and investigators, a situation that impacts the overall effectiveness of the force.

Foreign Relations

After the fall of communism in 1989, the Czech Republic sought to reestablish its economic and political ties with Western Europe. In 1998 it was admitted into NATO, and in 2004 it became a member of the European Union. The Czech Republic is also a member of United Nations and the World Trade Organization.

The Visegrad Group

The leaders of Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia met in Visegrad, Hungary, in 1991. Each country had just emerged from communist rule and needed support in reestablishing democracy. Setting aside their historic differences, the three countries agreed to share resources and work together to shake off the shadow of Communism, strengthen democracy, transition to free-market economies, and integrate politically and economically with the rest of Europe.⁵

The Visegrad Group is still active, conducting joint projects in defense, education, tourism, and energy, as well as providing general cooperation. Because the group lacks a central administration, each of the four countries

2 Ihor Gawdiak, ed., *Czechoslovakia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 217, 235–39.

3 Martin Šiška, "Czech Republic to add a billion to defence budget, but growth rate of defence spending is low compared to other countries," *CZDefense*, March 15, 2022, <https://www.czdefense.com/article/czech-republic-to-add-a-billion-to-defence-budget-but-growth-rate-of-defence-spending-is-low-compared-to-other-countries>.

4 Sarah Borufka, "Amidst Corruption Scandal, High-Ranking Police Officials Vow to Clean Up Force," *Radio Prague*, 5 August 2011, www.radio.cz/en/section/curraffrs/amidst-corruption-scandal-high-ranking-police-officials-vow-to-clean-up-force

5 Visegrad Group, "History of the Visegrad Group," 2012, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/about/history>

(Hungary, Poland, and, since the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia) takes a turn providing a president, drafting an action plan and annual report and organizing the annual meeting of the countries' prime ministers. All four members were accepted into the European Union in 2004.

Germany and Austria

The Czech Republic's relations with Germany and Austria are generally good despite complications. Before the Czech Republic's admission to NATO in 1998, the country signed a joint declaration with Germany. The German government apologized for the invasion of Czechoslovakia during World War II, and the Czech Republic expressed regret concerning the expulsion of 3 million Sudeten Germans from Czechoslovakia.⁶

The issue of Sudeten Germans was hardly laid to rest by the declaration. In 2002, the issue came up again as the European Union debated the Czech Republic's application for membership. Groups representing Sudeten Germans are still calling for a formal apology and want the Benes Decrees, which authorized the expulsions, to be repealed. The Czechs are reluctant to issue any such apology, citing Nazi atrocities committed by Germans during the war as justification for the decrees. Czechs further worry that repealing the decrees will open the door for the families of those expelled to seek reparations from the government or reclaim property that has been occupied for decades. At the same time, Germany is the Czech Republic's largest trading partner, so there is little motivation on either side to push the issue to a point that would affect business.

Austria, as a trading partner with the Czech Republic, enjoys a generally good working relationship with the country. Twice in the past decade, the countries have met to negotiate minor border alterations aimed at making flood mitigation easier along the Dyje River.⁷

U.S.-Czech Relations

The United States has historically had a good relationship with Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic. President Woodrow Wilson, whose Fourteen Points called for the creation of countries based on ethnicity, was an early supporter of an independent Czechoslovakia. During World War I Tomáš Masaryk (who would later become the first president of Czechoslovakia) spent time in the United States campaigning for support, appealing especially to those of Czech descent living in America.⁸ The United States has a sizable Czech-American population, particularly in the Midwest.

Relations between the two countries cooled during communist rule, but warmed rapidly after the Velvet Revolution brought pro-American Václav Havel to office, and remained strong during the formation of the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993. Since the Czech Republic's transition to a free-market economy, the United States has been one of the top foreign investors in the country. During the Bush administration, the Czech Republic was one of the United States' closest allies in Europe, offering support in the War on Terror.

6 Alan Cowell, "A German-Czech Pact on Wartime Abuses," *New York Times*, 11 December 1996, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/12/11/world/a-german-czech-pact-on-wartime-abuses.html?src=pm>

7 Christian Falvey, "News: Government Discussing Contract Adjusting Czech-Austrian Border," Radio Prague, 5 October 2011, <http://www.radio.cz/en/section/news/news-2011-10-05#6>

8 Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Czech Republic," 19 August 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3237.htm>

Recent Relations

Since the late 2000s, the U.S.-Czech, relationship has been slightly strained. One sore spot was alleviated when visa requirements for Czechs entering the United States were relaxed, bringing them in line with those for other major European countries.⁹ But political maneuvering in Washington left Prague without a U.S. ambassador for nearly two years, an especially critical time in U.S.-Czech relations due to ongoing discussions of a possible missile defense partnership.¹⁰ Proposals to locate a key component of the U.S. missile defense system in the Czech Republic were shelved in 2009 when plans for the European portion of the system changed.

Issues Affecting Stability

The Czech Republic enjoys a stable social and governmental infrastructure, despite the political and economic upheavals that have marked its recent history. Early and decisive actions taken by the governments of Czechoslovakia and then the Czech Republic in the wake of the Velvet Revolution and Velvet Divorce helped bring inflation under control and spared the country many problems that hampered other post-Communist countries in the 1990s.¹¹ The 2008 worldwide recession had a limited negative effect on the country, which has been able to hold inflation and unemployment in check via sound monetary policy.¹² Although government corruption is an ongoing concern, complaints continue to be investigated by the police, and the arrest and conviction of perpetrators at all levels of government has occurred.¹³

Water and Food Security

As of 2022, the Czech Republic has enough water to meet its short-term needs. But water quality continues to be an issue, as the country strives to upgrade water processing facilities.¹⁴ It has been suggested that because of a decrease in the amount of rain the country receives, groundwater shortages may become a problem in the future.

Food security is high. Although the Czech Republic relies on imports of some agricultural products, the country overall produces enough food to be nearly self-sufficient. But the amount of land under cultivation is shrinking, a situation that, along with labor shortages, outdated farming practices, and overall inefficiency, is leading to a decline in agricultural output.

Outlook

The greatest challenges to the stability of the Czech Republic likely come from larger uncertainties facing the European Union as it grapples with the fallout of the United Kingdom's exit from the EU. Additional concerns

9 Jan Richter, "Czech-U.S. Relations: Like a 20-Year-Old Marriage Without Sex, Envoys Say," Radio Prague, 11 October 2011, <http://www.radio.cz/en/section/czech-history/czech-us-relations-like-a-20-year-old-marriage-without-sex-envoys-say>

10 Ian Willoughby, "U.S. Ambassador's Post to Remain Vacant Even Longer After Nomination Vetoed," Prague Radio, 1 October 2010, <http://www.radio.cz/en/section/curraffrs/us-ambassadors-post-to-remain-vacant-even-longer-after-nomination-vetoed>

11 Václav Klaus, "The Economic Transformation of the Czech Republic: Challenges Faced and Lessons Learned," Cato Institute, 14 February 2006, http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=9296

12 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Country Statistical Profiles: Key Tables from OECD: Czech Republic 2011–2012," 18 January 2012, <http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/download/fulltext/191100051e1t003.pdf?expires=1327428392&id=id&accname=freeContent&checksum=ECFCF95CDCF3B7DC2FF8BC6196A2CD13>

13 U.S. Department of State, "Czech Republic," n.d., <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/160185.pdf>

14 "Second Voluntary National Review of the 2030 Agenda in the Czech Republic," *Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic*, 2021, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/279492021_VNR_Report_Czech_Republic.pdf

Czech in Perspective

Security Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- | | | | |
|----|--|------|-------|
| 1. | All males aged 18 and over are required to serve in the military. | True | False |
| 2. | The Ministry of the Interior administers the police force of the Czech Republic. | True | False |
| 3. | One of the missions of the Visegrad Group was to help its members enter the European Union. | True | False |
| 4. | The United States did not support the creation of Czechoslovakia following World War I. | True | False |
| 5. | The Czech Republic experienced fewer problems with the transition to a free-market economy than did other post-Communist states. | True | False |

Czech in Perspective

Security Assessment Answers

1. False:
Conscription was discontinued in 2004 as part of the Czech Republic's overhaul of the armed forces. Today, the military has been drastically downsized and is composed entirely of professional members.
2. True:
The Ministry of the Interior administers the police force at a national level. The force consists of 47,000 police officers and 11,000 police employees.
3. True:
The Visegrad Group was made up of Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia (later the Czech Republic and Slovakia). The European Union admitted all four countries in 2004.
4. False:
President Woodrow Wilson was an enthusiastic supporter of the creation of a joint Czech-Slovak state. His Fourteen Points, the basis for the League of Nations, supported the notion of ethnic groups forming their own countries.
5. True:
Sound monetary policy helped the Czech Republic maintain stability as it transitioned from Communism to a free-market economy.

Czech in Perspective

Further Readings and Resources

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Czech in Perspective

Final Assessment

“To receive a certificate of completion for this course, please complete the final assessment on the DLIFLC website.”