CZECH REPUBLIC IN PERSPECTIVE
An Orientation Guide

Technology Integration Division
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CHAPTER 1: GEOGRAPHY

Introduction

The Czech Republic encompasses the regions of Bohemia and Moravia, which together with Slovakia constituted the former Czechoslovakia.1 Bohemia sits on a diamond-shaped plateau known as the Bohemian Massif.2 It has an elevation of about 500 m (1,640 ft) and is ringed by mountains that mark the Czech Republic’s borders with Poland to the north, Germany to the west, and Austria to the south.3 The plateau stretches 158,000 sq km (61,000 sq mi) and is mostly flat, with gently rolling hills and broad valleys.4

Moravia lies between the Bohemian Massif on the west and the Carpathian Mountains on the east. This relatively low-lying area was an important channel for commerce and communications during the Austro-Hungarian Empire, connecting its capital, Vienna, with Poland and Ukraine to the north and east.5

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.6

Silver mining began in the mountains as early as the 12th century. Tin, iron, copper, cobalt, zinc, and uranium have been

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mined in the area.\textsuperscript{7} The mining industry attracted large numbers of Germans, influencing the local culture (although ethnic Germans were forced to leave the area after World War II).\textsuperscript{8} Fortifications, including several castles, were built in the mountains to protect trade routes between Germany and Bohemia.\textsuperscript{9} After the Thirty Years’ War in the 17th century, mining gave way to other industries, including the production of lace, linen, and buttons.\textsuperscript{10}

\textit{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 in the area in the 18th century. The mountains are made of sandstone, a relatively soft sedimentary rock that has eroded over time to create dramatic rock formations for which the area is known.\textsuperscript{11}

\textit{Sudety Mountain Chain}

The Sudety chain runs east-west along the border between the Czech Republic and Poland.\textsuperscript{12} The Jizerské Hory (Jizera Mountains) and the Krkonoše Hory (Giant Mountains) make up the West Sudeten range.\textsuperscript{13} The Jizerské Hory, a small group of high peaks at the western end of the chain, are a major source of granite.\textsuperscript{14} The Krkonoše Hory, east of the Jizerské Hory, contain the highest peak in the Sudety chain, Mount Sněžka, which rises 1,602 m (5,256 ft). Quartz mined from the mountains supported the development of the famous Bohemian glass-making industry. The mountains were a center of the textile and lumber industries. Today, parts of the area are protected as nature preserves and support a year-round tourist industry.

The 40-km (25-mi) Orlické Hory (Eagle Mountains) range and the Jeseník Mountains form the eastern part of the Sudety chain.\textsuperscript{15, 16} The Jeseník Mountains, which mark the northern boundary

\textsuperscript{7} Sachsen, “Ore Mountains,” n.d., \url{http://www.sachsen.de/en/265.htm}
\textsuperscript{8} Encyclopædia Britannica Online, “Ore Mountains,” 2011, \url{www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/192171/Ore-Mountains}
\textsuperscript{9} Czech Mountains, “History of the Ore Mountains,” n.d., \url{http://www.czech-mountains.eu/ore-mountains/history.html}
\textsuperscript{10} Sachsen, “Ore Mountains,” n.d., \url{http://www.sachsen.de/en/265.htm}
\textsuperscript{12} Lisa Dunford, \textit{Lonely Planet: Central Europe} (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2009), 417.
\textsuperscript{13} Encyclopædia Britannica Online, “Sudeten,” 2011, \url{http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/571562/Sudeten}
\textsuperscript{14} Encyclopædia Britannica Online, “Jizera Mountains,” 2011, \url{http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/304118/Jizera-Mountains}
\textsuperscript{15} Encyclopædia Britannica Online, “Sudeten,” 2011, \url{http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/571562/Sudeten}
between Moravia and Poland, are divided into two ranges. The Hrubý Jeseník on the west rise to a height of 1,491 m (4,892 ft), while the Nízký Jeseník to the southeast are rolling foothills. 

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). This forest lies north of a depression in the Domažlice area. 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. The highest peak on the Czech side is Přelhů, at 1,378 m (4,521 ft), with peaks on the German side rising slightly higher. 

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).

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, is dotted with small historic towns and castles.

Outer Western Carpathians (Beskids)

The Carpathian Mountains begin in Romania and curve through much of Eastern Europe before petering out in southern Poland. The Beskids (Beskydy), Javorníky, and Malé Karpaty (Little

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Carpathians) are the tail end of the Outer Western Carpathians range and mark the border between the Czech Republic and Slovakia.\(^{24}\)

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.\(^{25}\)

Iron and coal deposits near the town of Ostrava have made it a center of heavy industry, including iron and steel manufacturing.\(^{26}\)

**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.\(^{27}\)

The river’s upper course flows through the peat bogs of the Vltava Valley. After leaving the mountains, it meanders through the lake country of central Bohemia. Before entering Prague, the river passes through a series of rapids.\(^{28}\) Between Prague and its confluence with the Elbe, the Vltava is navigable by large barges, making it an important shipping channel.\(^{29}\)

Several major hydropower stations are located along the 435-km (270-mi) course of the Vltava, including the Lipno and Orlík Dams.\(^{30}\) Reservoirs near the dams are popular recreational areas, while the river itself flows through some of Bohemia’s most popular tourist villages.\(^{31}\)

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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 providing the landlocked Czech Republic with access to the ocean.32

The river’s source is in the Krkonoše Hory along the Czech Republic’s northern border. It cuts a wide arch through northern Bohemia, flowing south toward Prague then west toward Germany. Besides the Vltava, the main tributaries flowing into the Elbe on the Czech side of the border are the Jizera, which flows south from the Krkonoše Hory, and the Ohře (Eger), which flows northeast from the German border.33, 34

Depending on precipitation, the water levels of the Elbe vary widely, which can hinder navigation of the river. Reservoirs on the upper Elbe and several of its tributaries have limited capacity to regulate the flow of the river.35

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.36 The Morava reaches its peak flow in the spring (March–April), with river levels remaining high for several months.37

Currently about 30% of the river is navigable, although recent efforts have been made to make it a more viable source of transportation between Austria and Central Europe.38 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. Although the canal was rehabilitated in the mid-1990s, it is only used for recreational vessels.  

Various plans to make the entire river navigable and to link it to the Oder River have been proposed for centuries, but nothing has been completed.

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 being 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.

Climate

The climate of the Czech Republic is fairly uniform throughout the country—warm summers and cold winters. Temperatures are usually lower at higher elevations.

Summer is from June–August, with temperatures reaching as high as 32°C (90°F) in Central Bohemia during the day, although

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evenings tend to be cooler.\textsuperscript{45} Rain is heavy, but sporadic, during the summer.\textsuperscript{46}

Winters are cold and more humid than summers, especially at lower elevations.\textsuperscript{47} December, January, and February are the coldest months of the year, with low temperatures of -5°C (23°F) in cities and -10°C—15°C (14°F—5°F) in the mountains.\textsuperscript{48} 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).\textsuperscript{49}

Prevailing winds from the west bring storm systems from the North Sea.\textsuperscript{50} Central Bohemia lies in a rain shadow, receiving only 46 cm (18 in) of rain each year. The windward slopes of the Krkonoše Hory can receive up to 150 cm (59 in) of precipitation a year.\textsuperscript{51}

**Major Cities**

**Prague (Praha)**

Prague is the capital of the Czech Republic and the administrative seat of Central Bohemia.\textsuperscript{52} The city has several historic areas: Old Town (which includes Josefov, the former Jewish ghetto), New Town, the Castle District, and the Lesser Quarter.\textsuperscript{53} Administratively, the city is divided into districts, each served by an elected committee.\textsuperscript{54} The population is just over 1.2 million.\textsuperscript{55}

Prague is a major economic and transportation 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.56

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. He oversaw the construction of New Town (Nové Město), the Charles Bridge, and Charles University—the first university in Central Europe.57

Prague played a part in the religious Reformation movement. Four years after Jan Hus, a religious reformer, was burned at the stake in 1415, an angry group of supporters threw city councilors from the windows of the New Town Hall, an event known as the First Defenestration of Prague and the impetus for the anti-Catholic Hussite Wars. In the early 1600s, the Thirty Years’ War was sparked by a similar incident (the Second Defenestration of Prague) in which Protestant leaders threw representatives of the Catholic ruling family out the castle windows.58

During World War II, Prague was occupied by the Nazis, although it suffered relatively little damage. In the late 1940s, the Communists seized control. In 1968 Soviet tanks rolled into the city to crush the Prague Spring—an attempt by Czechoslovakia to loosen censorship and liberalize the government.59

After the fall of Communism in 1989, the city became a destination for tourists because of its extensive collection of historic architecture (Prague is a UNESCO World Heritage Site) and inexpensive prices. Tourism revived the economy, and Prague quickly became one of the wealthiest cities in Central Europe.60

Brno

Brno (population 371,400) is the Czech Republic’s second-largest city and the traditional capital of Moravia.61, 62 It lies below the eastern foothills of the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands. The city was founded on the banks of the Svratka

60 Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 82.
River in the 11th century. Germans began settling in the area in the 13th century and constituted a major part of the population until they were expelled at the end of World War II.

The fortified city has withstood sieges over the centuries, but it was badly damaged in World War II. After the war, with the economy stagnating under Communist rule, the city had difficulty rebuilding. Still, several historic buildings survived including Tugendhat House, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Brno developed into a major industrial center after the completion of the Brno-Vienna railway in 1839. Today, the city manufactures textiles and metallurgical products.

Ostrava

At the eastern edge of the Czech Republic, Ostrava (population 303,600) lies in one of the most heavily industrialized areas of the country. The town is surrounded by coalfields that have fed local heavy industry since the 1830s. Until 1998, the town produced steel, but it is now focusing on high-tech, service-oriented industries. The area also produces mining machinery, railway cars, and automobiles.

Plzeň (Pilsen)

Plzeň (population 170,000) is the Czech Republic’s fourth-largest city and is well known for cars and beer. The town 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 helped Plzeň’s engineering industry develop in the 19th century.

Škoda Engineering Works opened a branch in Plzeň in 1869. Until World War II, the factory produced machinery for mills,
 mines, and breweries and parts for engines, boilers, and iron bridges. The company specialized in producing armaments. After World War II, Škoda began producing the Škoda car (Volkswagen currently owns a majority share in the company). Škoda produces industrial machinery and military aircraft. The company developed the electric-railway locomotive.

When Plzeň was industrializing, Pilsner beer was introduced to the world. Beer had been brewed in the region since the 13th century, but the technique was perfected in the 1840s. In 1842, the municipal brewery opened and began producing beer for wider distribution.

**Karlov Vary (Carlsbad)**

Karlov Vary stands apart from other Czech cities because of its unique history and status as a “free royal city.” Emperor Charles IV founded the town in 1358 after the discovery of a series of warm springs, which he believed had miraculous healing powers.

The spa town developed around the springs and became a popular destination for royalty in the 16th and 17th centuries and for artists, writers, and composers—including Beethoven—in the 18th and 19th centuries. It continues to attract celebrities for the International Film Festival held each July.

There are more than a dozen warm springs in the area, heated by geothermal activity and reaching temperatures of 72°C (162°F). The area is known for fine glass and porcelain, textiles, and mineral salts.

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Environmental Issues

When the Czech Republic was formed in 1993, it was one of the world’s biggest exporters of pollution to neighboring countries. Under Communism, fuel was subsidized and environmental standards were poorly enforced. Brown coal was abundant and easily extracted by surface mining, making it an attractive, cheap fuel source for both heavy industry and domestic use.

Brown coal is high in ash and sulfur content. Throughout 1982, Prague measured sulfur dioxide levels that reached a concentration linked to severe respiratory illness and death. 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 collapse of Communism in Czechoslovakia in 1989), the Czech Republic has made major efforts to halt and reverse these trends. More electricity is being generated through nuclear power plants and renewable sources, and the use of natural gas and geothermal heating has increased.

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Greenhouse gas emissions have dropped 27.5% since 1990, nearly twice the rate of the European Union (EU) countries as a whole. Emissions of acidifying substances, secondary particles, and ozone precursors have been falling.92

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. Nearly 10% of Czech farmers have adopted organic practices, decreasing the amount of nitrates entering waterways through runoff.93

But air quality remains poor in some areas, and defoliation of forests from acid rain continues, although at much lower rates. Rapid urbanization is causing the loss of agricultural land and is threatening the habitats of vulnerable species. The Czech Republic anticipates that longer commutes may reverse some of the positive trends related to pollution.94

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.95 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.96, 97, 98

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Chapter 1 Assessment

1. The Elbe River gives the Czech Republic access to the ocean.  
   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. The highest elevation in the Sudety chain is in the Jizerské Hory (Jizera Mountains).  
   False  
   The Krkonoše Hory (Giant Mountains) contain the highest peak in the Sudety chain, Mount Sněžka, which rises 1,602 m (5,256 ft).

3. Ostrava is a small farming town in Moravia.  
   False  
   Ostrava is one of the Czech Republic’s industrial centers. Nearby coalfields once fueled steel factories. The town still produces heavy machinery and automobiles.

4. Plzeň is renowned for its beer.  
   True  
   The town received special sanction to brew beer in the 13th century, but it was not until the 1840s that the technique was perfected. Beer is one of the country’s best-known exports.

5. Although Prague is the political heart of the country, its economic impact is minimal  
   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, an a port on the Vltava that facilitates international trade.
CHAPTER 2: HISTORY

Early History

Little is known about the Celtic tribes who are believed to have been the first inhabitants of the area now occupied by the Czech Republic. They had disappeared by the time Slavic tribes moved into the area in the 5th century C.E., leaving little more than a vague memory; it is believed that the name Bohemia comes from the name of one of these Celtic tribes. The Czech trace their roots as a nation to the founding of the Přemyslid dynasty in the early 9th century. According to legend, Princess Libuše was forced by the people to take a husband. Directed by a vision, she chose Přemysl, a farmer hard at work in his fields. The Přemyslid family ruled Bohemia from Prague for nearly 500 years. About the time the Přemyslids came to power, Christianity reached the Slavs of Central and Eastern Europe, eventually becoming the dominant religion. The Přemyslid ruler Wenceslas I, the “good king” sung about in a Christmas carol, is the patron saint of the Czechs.

Holy Roman Empire

In the 8th century, the Slavic tribes of Bohemia and Moravia fought alongside Charlemagne’s forces to push Avar invaders out of Europe. In return, they were granted the right of self-rule in his empire. In 800, Charlemagne was crowned Emperor of the Romans by Pope Leo III in Rome. Although the gesture was mostly symbolic (the Roman Empire had collapsed in 476 C.E.), it reawakened the idea of a unified Europe. 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. Although the Přemyslids initially resisted incorporation, they eventually became a major force in the empire. 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.

**Bohemia’s Golden Age**

After the death of Bohemia’s last Přemyslid king in 1306 and a brief period of conflict over succession, the throne was granted to John of Luxembourg, son of the reigning Holy Roman Emperor. What many consider to be the golden age of Bohemia began when John’s son, Charles IV, succeeded his father to the Bohemian throne in 1346. Charles invested in his kingdom like no other king before him. 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, who agreed with some of Wycliffe’s ideas, 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 1415.116

Anger over Hus’ death caused widespread unrest throughout Bohemia, with Hussites massacring Catholics, storming churches, expelling the clergy, and seizing church property.117 Unable to subdue the Hussite population of Prague, King Sigismund (Wenceslas’ successor) declared a crusade against the reformers.118 But even Sigismund’s German and Hungarian forces failed to bring Bohemia under control.119 The Tabors (a radical faction of Hussites) were eventually subdued, but the king was forced to offer the more moderate Utraquists significant concessions, including the establishment of an independent church in Bohemia.120

The Habsburg Ascension

In the century following the Hussite Wars, the Czechs enjoyed a high degree of autonomy, ruled for the most part by provincial assemblies under the authority of absentee kings. When Sigismund died in 1437, Albert II of Austria assumed the throne of Bohemia. Albert died two years later, leaving his unborn son, Ladislas Posthumus, as the only heir to the throne. The barons elected George of Poděbrady, leader of the Utraquists, to act as Ladislas’ regent (much to the chagrin of his Catholic guardians). When Ladislas died suddenly in 1457, George was elected king.121

After George’s death, Vladislav II, a member of the Polish reigning family, was elected king of Bohemia. Vladislav and his successor spent most of their reign in Poland, leaving Bohemia to be ruled by provincial assemblies or diets composed of Czech nobility.122

In 1526 Ferdinand I of Habsburg ascended the Bohemian throne.123 The Habsburg family of Austria was rapidly expanding its power in the empire. Nineteen Habsburgs would serve as Holy

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Roman Emperor, and from 1486 until the empire was dissolved in 1806, the title was the exclusive hereditary right of the Habsburgs.\textsuperscript{124} After 1806, the Habsburgs continued to rule the Austrian Empire (later the Austro-Hungarian Empire), including Bohemia and Moravia, until the end of World War I in 1918.\textsuperscript{125}

Reformation and Counter-Reformation

Despite their misgivings about the growing Protestant movement, the Habsburgs needed the cooperation of the Czech nobles to raise taxes and supply soldiers, and 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.\textsuperscript{126}

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.\textsuperscript{127} (They survived, according to some accounts, by landing on a pile of horse manure.)\textsuperscript{128} The incident, known as the Defenestration of Prague, opened the Thirty Years’ War.

The Thirty Years’ War and Absolute Rule

When Emperor Mathias died in 1619, Czech nobles refused to recognize his successor, Ferdinand II, as king of Bohemia, electing the Protestant Frederick V instead. Their rebellion was short-lived; in 1620 Catholic forces marched on Prague, soundly defeating the Protestants at the Battle of White Mountain. The rebellion’s leaders were captured and executed.\textsuperscript{129}

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\item Prague.net, “Old Royal Palace: Seat of Bohemian Princes,” 2008, \url{www.prague.net/old-royal-palace}
\item\textit{Encyclopædia Britannica Online}, “Czechoslovak History,” 2011, \url{http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/149152/Czechoslovak-history}
\end{thebibliography}
As war raged between Protestants and Catholics throughout the rest of Europe, Czechs faced harsh retribution. Ferdinand revoked the right of the Bohemian diets 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.130

A massive emigration of Protestants followed. Bohemia and Moravia had lost nearly half their population and 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.131

The Enlightened Despot, Industrialization, and the End of Empire

Although the 18th century saw even more centralization of power in the hands of the Habsburgs, it ushered in the Age of Enlightenment (a time when thinkers emphasized rationalism and rejected medieval superstitions). Empress Maria Theresa instituted a series of ambitious reforms meant to improve fiscal efficiency.132 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 even further. He promoted greater religious tolerance, issuing the Edict of Tolerance in 1781, which granted Protestants nearly equal status with Catholics.133

Under the rule of Maria Theresa and Joseph II, Bohemia became even more Germanized and subordinate to Austria. At the same time, the abolition of serfdom (brought about by Joseph II) liberated a labor force that fueled industrialization, while the expansion of educational opportunities laid the groundwork for the rise of Czech nationalism.134

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.

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 the beginning, nationalism was not a political movement. In Bohemia and Moravia, it manifested itself as a revival of the Czech language and the development of distinctly Czech literature, music, and art. But in 1848, a wave of revolutions swept across Europe, inspiring Czechs to take political action.

In 1848, Czech historian František Palacký proposed a congress of all Slavic nations in the Austrian Empire. The goal was not independence, but constitutional reform. Most Czechs believed a unified German state would end their quest for autonomy and favored remaining in the Austrian Empire. The Pan-Slav Congress met in Prague in June 1848, but it was disbanded by Austrian troops following the outbreak of student protests.

The Austrian Empire suffered a major blow in 1866. Following Napoleon’s defeat in 1815, the Austrian Empire became the head of the German Confederation, an association of 39 independent German states once belonging to the Holy Roman Empire. Led by Prussia, Austria’s main rival in the confederation, members of the German Confederation soon began pushing for a unified German state, one not necessarily led by Austria. After defeating Austria in the Seven Weeks’ War, Prussia reformed the confederation as the North German Confederation, with Prussia at the head and Austria excluded entirely.
Roots of Ethnic Strife

As German unification became inevitable, Austria gained new motivation to resolve internal conflicts with its ethnic minorities. Czechs pushed for and gained some concessions, but fell short of attaining full autonomy.\(^{144}\) The main resistance to the Czech national movement did not come from the Austrian government, but from Hungarians (who were granted full autonomy in 1867) and Germans who felt their interests were better served by alliances with, if not membership in, the German Empire, which had replaced the North German Confederation.\(^{145}\)

In 1871, the same year the German Empire was established, Austria agreed to the Fundamental Articles, which would have given Czechs the same level of autonomy as the Hungarians. But strong opposition from Hungarians and German liberals forced the Austrian emperor to renege on the agreement. In 1897, an attempt to give the Czech language equal status with German as an administrative language met with violent protests in Bohemia and Vienna.\(^{146}\)

The growing opposition to Czech nationalism created a great deal of ethnic friction between Germans and Czechs in Bohemia.\(^{147}\) The failure of the “Old Czechs” to win concessions from Austria also split the Czech National Party. As the Old Czechs faction continued to push for a restoration of Bohemia’s historic place in the Austrian Empire, they were eclipsed by the “Young Czechs,” who were focused primarily on social progress instead of historic rights.\(^{148}\) Czechs began to look to their eastern Slavic cousins for support. The Slovaks 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.\(^{149}\)

End of Empire, Birth of a Nation

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.\(^{150}\) Others, including Czech nationalist Tomáš Masaryk, chose exile.\(^{151}\)

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 Allies 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.

The First Republic

Backed by the victorious Allied Powers, Czechs reestablished Bohemia’s historic borders. Czech and Slovak leaders quickly met to draft a constitution, excluding from the discussion millions of Germans, Hungarians, Ruthenians, and Poles who now lived within their borders. The assembly decided that a strong central government was needed to ensure the survival of the nascent republic. Minorities were given special protections to ensure that their languages and cultures would be preserved.

The new government was led by a coalition of five Czech parties (the Pětka), which adopted the philosophy that the country would work because the parties would “agree to agree.” Masaryk worked to bring disparate groups together and was able to create a relatively stable government throughout the 1920s. Sudeten Germans initially adopted an obstructionist attitude toward the new government, but the German chancellor urged them to cooperate with the Czechoslovak government. By 1926, most of the Sudeten German parties were participating in the government. Yet autonomy remained a key aim for the Sudeten Germans and other minority groups in the republic.

Edvard Beneš, who served first as foreign minister and then as president, was concerned about possible German and Hungarian aggression. He negotiated a defensive military pact with Yugoslavia and Romania and sought to strengthen ties with Western powers, entering into an alliance with France in 1924.

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The Sudeten Germans

After World War I, Sudeten Germans nursed several grievances against the Czechs. In 1919, the Czechoslovakian government confiscated one-fifth of all individual landholdings and paper currency for redistribution. Since Germans made up the bulk of the upper class, they were disproportionately affected by the policy. 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 large numbers.\(^\text{159}\)

Although most Germans had accepted being part of Czechoslovakia, by 1929 a small minority was pursuing a separatist agenda. They were inspired largely by Hitler’s growing influence in Germany. The Nazi movement gained steady support in Czechoslovakia. Alarmèd by Hitler’s election as chancellor in 1933, Czechoslovakia expelled all Sudeten Nazis 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.\(^\text{160}\)

The Munich Agreement

Following the annexation (Anschluss) 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.\(^\text{161}\) 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.\(^\text{162}\)


The Czechoslovakian government rejected the proposal. The Sudetenland contained a significant portion of the country’s industry and most of its border defenses. Without the Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia would be economically crippled and vulnerable to invasion. But the SdP was now actively obstructing the Czechoslovakian government by rejecting all efforts at reconciliation. In September, the party secretly orchestrated a series of violent protests, forcing the government to call in troops to restore order. Feigning indignation, Henlein demanded that the Sudetenland be handed over to Germany.

Just as Czechoslovakia appeared ready to agree to the proposal, Germans 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.

Death of a Nation

After the Munich Agreement, other countries began picking apart what was left of the republic. Poland moved troops into the contested Teschen region, while Hungary reclaimed parts of Slovakia and the Ruthenian territories. By now Czechoslovakia had lost 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 Slovakian autonomy in the event of an invasion. 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 maintaining his agreement with the Slovakians, he allowed them to retain autonomy.

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Nazi Occupation, 1939–1945

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.169

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. His death at the hands of the Czech resistance in 1942 unleashed a new level of Nazi brutality.170 The village of Lidice, believed to be the home of one of the assassins, was razed and its inhabitants massacred.171

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 a number of towns. 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.172

Reconstruction

On 16 May 1945, Edvard Beneš returned to Prague to oversee the reconstruction of Czechoslovakia.173 The country was a very different one from the one he had left. Following the war Czechoslovakia would be a less diverse nation. The Jewish population was virtually gone. Only 8,000 of Czechoslovakia’s Jews survived the Terezin camp, even though it was not an extermination 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 found themselves 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. Large numbers of Hungarians were also expelled.\(^{174}\)

Czechs were less Western-oriented than they had been before the war. Many felt betrayed by their allies in Western Europe and now looked to the Soviet Union for support. In 1946, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) won 38% of the vote.\(^{175}\)

**Communist Coup**

Initially, Communists showed a willingness to work with their non-Communist counterparts to achieve economic recovery for the country, despite disagreements about how recovery should be achieved. Nazi-owned industries had already been nationalized, and non-Communists resisted the idea of further nationalization.\(^{176}\)

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 moved quickly to form a new, Communist-dominated government. They drew up a new constitution, calling for the nationalization of all business and industry.\(^{177}\) Beneš refused to sign the constitution and resigned as president. A few weeks later, the National Assembly elected Communist leader Klement Gottwald as president.\(^{178}\)

**Under Communism**

**Adjusting to 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 the charge of treason and execution. The Communists then turned on themselves, ferreting out and eliminating anyone who did not follow the party line. About 180 politicians, including a dozen 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 Stalinist Soviet satellite.

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 and meet high quotas. Although the Czechoslovakian economy seemed to be growing at an extraordinary pace, its growth actually 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.

Reform Movement

By 1960 it was clear that the Czechoslovakian economy was in trouble. In 1965, the KSČ 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. But by this time criticism of economic policy had turned into criticism of the KSČ. Hard-core Stalinists found themselves replaced by younger liberal Communists, and political reforms were proposed to grant regional and local committees more autonomy.

When President Antonín 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.

Prague Spring of 1968

Dubček instituted a series of liberal reforms, providing greater civil liberties and establishing autonomy for Slovakia (Dubček was Slovakian). He eased censorship, and the press responded by using its newfound freedom to call for even more radical reform. The Soviet Union watched events unfold with concern, worrying that the reform movement would soon spiral out

of control. By July, the Soviet Union was hinting that invasion was an option if Dubček failed to rein in the press. The Soviet Union had already mobilized along Czechoslovakia’s borders under the guise of conducting training maneuvers. The Soviets had no qualms about interfering in the internal affairs of other Warsaw Pact countries. In 1956, they had sent troops into Hungary to put down a similar rebellion.185

On 3 August 1968, Czechoslovakia’s leaders signed the Bratislava Declaration, reaffirming their fidelity to Marxist Communism. Unsatisfied by Dubček’s reassurances, the Soviets invaded the country on 20 August.186 On 23 August Czechoslovakian leaders, including Dubček, flew to Moscow to negotiate an end to the occupation, but won few concessions; Soviet troops would remain in Czechoslovakia until 1991. Most of Dubček’s reforms were reversed, and Dubček was eventually stripped of his party membership.187

Growing Discontent

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 was short-lived. By the end of the decade the country was in a serious depression.188

After the Prague Spring, censorship was reimposed to a stifling degree, 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, to the detriment not only of the arts and humanities but of science as well. Religious activity was strictly monitored.189

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 fact that Charter 77’s signatories were arrested and faced general persecution, by 1985 nearly 1,200 people had the signed the charter.190

Velvet Revolution

During the late 1980s, several mass demonstrations against the Communist government took place in Czechoslovakia.\(^{191}\) Similar protests were occurring throughout Central and Eastern Europe. On 9 November 1989 protestors tore down the Berlin Wall, precipitating the fall of the East German government.\(^{192}\) 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. Although the march had been approved by the government, it took an unexpected turn when students began chanting anti-government slogans.\(^{193}\) Police boxed the students in, and although they met no resistance, they savagely beat hundreds of them with nightsticks.\(^{194}\)

Rumors that one 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—too large to be discharged without lethal force.\(^{195}\) On 19 November, members of several dissident groups joined together to form the Civic Forum with Václav Havel at the head.\(^{196}\) Dubček returned to Prague to rally the crowds and throw his support behind the movement.\(^{197}\) 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.\(^{198}\) 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.\(^{199}\)

Over the next few weeks, the protests continued and spread to other cities. As it became clear to the Communist leaders that their position was untenable, they capitulated to the Forum’s


demands. President Gustáv Husák resigned from office on 10 December, and a transitional government was quickly organized with Havel in the lead.200

**Velvet Divorce**

In 1990, Havel was elected president of Czechoslovakia in the first free elections held since 1946.201 The first priority of the new government was the privatization of property and the transition to a free-market economy.202 Rifts between 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.203 As economic reforms progressed, it became clear that less-industrialized Slovakia preferred a slower pace of transition.204 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 independent nations of the Czech Republic and Slovakia came into being.205

**Moving Forward**

The separation from Slovakia, which was carried out without a public referendum, was greeted with neither enthusiasm nor resistance.206 Assets between the two countries were divided two to one, according to the respective populations of the Czech Republic and Slovakia.207 Václav Havel was elected president of the Czech Republic in January 1993 and served two terms.208 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.209

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The Czech Republic moved to reestablish economic and political ties with the West. But the Czech economy foundered in 1996, stalling the country’s plans to join the European Union. The Czech Republic became a member of NATO in 1999, and succeeded in gaining membership in the European Union in 2004.\textsuperscript{210}

Chapter 2 Assessment

1. As rulers of the Holy Roman Empire, the Habsburgs continuously allowed the Czechs a great deal of autonomy.
   **False**
   Initially, the Habsburgs were tolerant of Czech Protestantism and allowed Czechs a fair amount of autonomy. After losing the Thirty Years’ War to the Habsburgs, Czechs lost their religious freedom and right to self-rule.

2. The Defenestration of Prague in 1618 sparked a religious war.
   **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. The First Republic was marked by a high degree of instability.
   **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. Czechoslovakia thrived economically as well because it held nearly 80% of the former Austrian Empire’s industry.

4. The majority of Germans living in Czechoslovakia supported the idea of becoming part of Germany.
   **True**
   Leaders of the popular Sudeten German Party actively worked against the Czechoslovakian government to ensure that Germany would annex the Sudetenland—areas of Czechoslovakia that were majority German. In reprisal for their actions, Czechoslovakia expelled 2.5 million ethnic Germans after World War II.

5. Playwright Václav Havel was the Czech Republic’s first president.
   **False**
   Havel was first elected the president of Czechoslovakia and then, after Slovakia and the Czech Republic split, was elected president of the the Czech Republic. He served two terms.
CHAPTER 3: ECONOMY

Introduction

The Czech Republic’s cultural heritage, including an impressive collection of castles, brought tourists to the country (then Czechoslovakia) in large numbers after the fall of Czech Communism, spawning a rapidly expanding service industry. The growth of this industry in the immediate aftermath of the Velvet Revolution (the collapse of the Czech Communist Party in 1989) helped keep unemployment low while the government tackled the enormous task of privatizing industries and dividing assets with Slovakia (which came into being after the split of Czechoslovakia in 1993). The growth of the service industry is now helping the Czech Republic wean itself from heavy industries that have contributed to widespread environmental degradation.

Although it is a member of the European Union, the Czech Republic has not yet adopted the euro. Instead, it maintains an independent currency, the koruna (meaning “crown”). Despite the worldwide economic downturn that began in 2008, the Czech Republic has experienced only one year of negative economic growth (-4.1% real GDP [gross domestic product] growth in 2009) since 2003.

Agriculture

Agriculture accounts for a small portion of the Czech Republic’s economy—only 2.4% of GDP—and employs 3.1% of the workforce. Grains, sugar beets, and potatoes constitute the majority of the crops grown in the Czech Republic. High-quality hops used for beer production are grown in Bohemia, and a small wine industry thrives in southern Moravia.

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About 40% of the Czech Republic’s land is arable.\textsuperscript{217} The amount of land under cultivation has been steadily shrinking in the past decade. In remote areas, arable land is being abandoned and allowed to return to permanent grassland and pasture. The trend toward urbanization has led to the development of land near population centers, further eroding the amount of arable land.\textsuperscript{218}

Soil in agricultural areas is at risk of serious degradation because of overuse of heavy machinery, mineral fertilizers, and inadequate cultivation methods. Mild acidification of soil is occurring throughout much of the country. In an effort to protect soil and reduce the impact of agriculture on the environment, the government has instituted a subsidy program to encourage farmers to adopt organic farming. The use of mineral fertilizers has fallen dramatically (mostly because of a sharp rise in prices), and the amount of land under organic farming has grown steadily to nearly 10%.\textsuperscript{219}

Industry

Heavy industrialization in Bohemia began in the 19th century, although mining and light industry had been present in the area for centuries.\textsuperscript{220} Today, industry accounts for 38% of GDP in the Czech Republic and employs 39% of the workforce.\textsuperscript{221}

Car manufacturing and its suppliers account for nearly 20% of Czech manufacturing.\textsuperscript{222} The German company Volkswagen bought Skoda, Eastern Europe’s oldest car manufacturer, in the 1990s and completely modernized the operation.\textsuperscript{223} More than 80% of the cars manufactured in the Czech Republic are exported, with Skoda alone accounting for nearly 10% of the country’s total exports.\textsuperscript{224}

The Czech Republic produces diesel and electric locomotive cars, buses, airplanes, motorcycles, and tractors. The country is one of the largest producers of steel and iron in Eastern Europe, although these industries rely heavily on imported ore. Light industries include electronics, chemical manufacturing, rubber, cement, textiles, fine glass, and beer.225

In recent decades, the Czech Republic has tried to shift its economy away from industry toward the service sector, largely because of environmental concerns. The Czech Republic has coal in ample amounts, which has provided easily available and cheap fuel for industrial development. During the Communist era (1945–1989), environmental controls were insufficient and poorly enforced. Decades of unregulated industrial pollution have left a legacy of environmental problems, including water pollution, acid rain, and air quality that is among the poorest in the world.226

**Tourism and Service Sectors**

The service sector has grown quickly in the past two decades, largely because of an influx of foreign visitors following the Velvet Revolution. Today, the service sector accounts for 60% of GDP and 58% of employment.227

Although more than 6 million foreigners visit the Czech Republic each year, tourism accounts for only 3% of GDP and employs only about 5% of the workforce.228, 229

**Energy and Natural Resources**

The Czech Republic has vast deposits of coal as well as modest oil and natural gas reserves. Consequently, about 75% of the Czech Republic’s electricity is generated with fossil fuels, most of it from coal-powered plants.230

Bituminous coal is mined in the east, near Ostrava, while brown coal is found in the extreme west near the German border.231 Because brown coal has a higher ash and sulfur content, it does

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not burn as cleanly as bituminous coal. Its use has contributed to poor air quality and acid rain, particularly in the western part of the country.\(^{232}\)

The country is a net importer of oil, producing about 10,000 barrels a day (bbl/day) and importing 209,000 bbl/day, most of it from Russia.\(^{233}\) A new pipeline linking the Czech Republic to the Mediterranean Sea through Trieste, Italy, has made the nation less dependent on Russian oil.\(^{234}\) The Czech Republic produces 203 million cubic meters of natural gas and imports 8.5 billion cubic meters.\(^ {235}\)

Although the Czech Republic is a net importer of energy, it exports 25,000 bbl/day of oil, 159 million cu m of natural gas, and 22.23 billion kilowatt hours (kWh) of electricity.\(^ {236}\)

The Czech Republic’s economy, which is considered energy intense, uses twice as much energy for every dollar of GDP as the European Union on average.\(^ {237}\) Because of concerns about pollution, the Czech Republic has been instituting policies to reduce energy use in all sectors.\(^ {238}\) Energy consumption has fallen dramatically in the past two decades, from 34.3 Mtoe (million tons of oil equivalent) in 1990 to 24.3 Mtoe in 2009.\(^ {239}\)

**Trade**

Foreign trade plays a large role in the Czech economy. In 2010, the country exported USD 116.7 billion in goods and imported USD 113.9 billion. Germany is the Czech Republic’s main trading partner, receiving about 32% of its exports and supplying roughly 26% of its imports. Exports go to several other places, including Slovakia (8.7%), Poland (6.2%), and other European countries (about 15%).\(^ {240}\)

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After Germany, China is the biggest source of imports (12%), followed by Poland, Russia, and Slovakia, which together contribute 17% of imports. The most common imports are raw materials and chemicals needed in manufacturing, as well as fuel and some machinery and transport equipment.241

**Banking and Finance**

The Czech National Bank functions as the central bank for the Czech Republic. The Czech president appoints the bank’s president, but the bank operates independently of the 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.242

The bank is specifically charged with controlling inflation and maintaining price stability. To do so, it sells repo tenders, similar to the bonds sold by the United States Federal Reserve, in order to influence interest rates. Higher than average interest rates have helped keep inflation consistently low in the past decade.243

Although the Czech Republic is part of the European Union (EU), it is not part of the Eurozone, an economic merger among those EU states that have set aside their various national currencies in favor of a unified currency, the euro. The exchange rate of the Czech koruna is independent of the euro, which may have helped it weather the recession better than other European countries with fixed exchange rates.244 But in order to join the euro area, the Czech Republic will have to synchronize its economy to the Eurozone and allow the European Central Bank to assume control over its monetary policy.245 The country has stated that it will adopt the euro, but no date has been set for the conversion.246

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246 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](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3237.htm)
Standard of Living

Czechs enjoy a higher standard of living than people in many other former Communist states. Efforts to control inflation and keep unemployment low helped to stabilize the country as it shifted from Communism to a free market economy.\(^{247}\)

Although GDP per capita is about USD 26,000, lower than in the United States and most of Europe, the Czech Republic is 27th out of 187 countries in the 2011 Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI ranks countries based on life expectancy, health, education, and general quality of life.\(^{248, 249}\) The poverty rate in the Czech Republic is about 9%, significantly lower than the average for Europe.\(^{250}\)

Employment Trends

The Czech Republic’s workforce of 5.24 million represents 71% of the adult population (ages 15–64). Unemployment in the Czech Republic reached a high of 9% in 2009, but has since fallen.

Many Czech women work outside the home, making up 43% of the total workforce. Women are slightly more likely to be unemployed. The liberal amount of maternity leave that mothers receive, sometimes up to three years, as well as the limited availability of part-time work may account for this circumstance.\(^{251}\)

The country’s population is aging; each year more people leave the workforce through retirement than enter the labor market.\(^{252}\) A shrinking workforce may make economic growth difficult to sustain and place a greater tax burden on workers to support the social security program.\(^{253}\)

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Public vs. Private Sector

Under Communism, the state owned 97% of businesses and 95% of farms. After the Velvet Revolution, farmland was returned to its previous owners and state-owned businesses were privatized.

The Czech Republic used a voucher system to privatize businesses, allowing citizens to purchase vouchers that could be exchanged for shares in companies. Today, the government owns fewer than 20% of businesses.

The World Bank ranks the Czech Republic 64th out of 183 countries in terms of ease of doing business, and it is the first post-Communist country to receive an investment grade credit rating. The country attracts high levels of foreign direct investment (FDI), with the United States one of the top five investing countries.

Future Outlook

Strong industries and shrewd monetary and fiscal policies have helped the Czech Republic transition to capitalism with relative ease. Inflation and unemployment remained low, and the service economy grew rapidly. Its strong and diverse economy also helped it weather the recent economic recession with only modest increases in unemployment.

But 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.

An aging population will place a growing burden on younger generations, who will likely pay higher taxes to support government social services.

But the biggest question regarding the Czech Republic’s economic outlook is if and how it will adopt the euro, a process that would likely take years.

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254 Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Czech Republic,” 19 August 2011, [http://www.state.gov/r/pe/bgn/3237.htm](http://www.state.gov/r/pe/bgn/3237.htm)
257 Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Czech Republic,” 19 August 2011, [http://www.state.gov/r/pe/bgn/3237.htm](http://www.state.gov/r/pe/bgn/3237.htm)
258 Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Czech Republic,” 19 August 2011, [http://www.state.gov/r/pe/bgn/3237.htm](http://www.state.gov/r/pe/bgn/3237.htm)
Chapter 3 Assessment

1. The Czech Republic’s economy is mostly agricultural.
   **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. About 75% of the Czech Republic’s electricity comes from fossil fuels.
   **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. The Czech Republic imports oil.
   **True**
   The Czech Republic, a net importer of oil, imports 209,000 bbl/day, most of it from Russia.

4. The Czech Republic uses more energy per dollar of GDP than the European Union on average.
   **True**
   The economy of the Czech Republic, which is considered energy intense, uses twice as much energy per dollar of GDP as the European Union on average. But the growth of the service industry is reducing the country’s dependence on energy-hungry heavy industries.

5. The United States is the Czech Republic’s main trading partner.
   **False**
   Germany is the Czech Republic’s main trading partner. Poland, Slovakia, and China are also important trading partners. Although the United States conducts little direct trade with the Czech Republic, it is one of the nation’s leading sources of foreign capital.
CHAPTER 4: SOCIETY

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.

Although Czech Jews suffered centuries of severe discrimination during the Austrian Empire, Prague had a thriving Jewish Quarter until World War II. During the Nazi occupation, Jews were rounded up and sent to the town of Terezin, where they were incarcerated until being shipped to extermination camps. By the end of the war, more than 80,000 Jews—about 70% of the prewar Jewish population—had died in the camps. Thousands of Jews who survived the war emigrated after facing discrimination under the Communist regime. Only a handful of Jews remain in the Czech Republic; some of them receive an annual pension from the German government as restitution for the Holocaust.\(^\text{259}\)

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.\(^\text{260}\)

Today Germans, Hungarians, Poles, and Ukrainians each account for less than 1% of the population. Since the Velvet Divorce—the 1993 separation of Czechoslovakia into the independent nations of the Czech Republic and Slovakia—less than 2% of the Czech Republic’s population is Slovak.\(^\text{261}\)

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\(^{261}\) 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](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3237.htm)
Roma

Despite living in the Czech Republic for more than 500 years, Roma (Romani or gypsy) are still considered outsiders. They face a high level of discrimination.

Roma are a tribal people who immigrated to the area 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 were made by the Holy Roman Empire and the Czechoslovakian government, but the Roma have clung to 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.

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 because new citizenship laws led to many Roma slipping through the 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. Recent years have brought an increase in racial violence, particularly from neo-Nazi groups.

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. English is becoming a popular second language for young people.

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Religion

Despite the defining role that religion played in Czech history, Czechs today are largely nonreligious, and about 40% of Czechs are atheists.266 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.267 During the Communist years (1948–1989), some people practiced their religion secretly to avoid persecution by the secret service (StB).268

Among Czechs who claim a religion, roughly 27% state they are Catholic. Although the Czechs played a large role in early reformation movements, only about 2% today claim affiliation with a Protestant church, the Hussite Church being the largest. The number of practicing Jews in the Czech Republic is unknown.269

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.270

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. In fact, Czechs are notorious for their high beer consumption. Fruit-filled dumplings and palačinky, a crepe-like pancake filled with jam, are common desserts.271

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: someone’s village could be identified by the style of his or her *kroj*.272

The women’s *kroj* features a white blouse with puffed sleeves and a lace or ruffled 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.273

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.274

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.275

Gender Issues

Women are well regarded in Czech society and treated with a high degree of respect. Communism 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. They were generally regarded as equals.276

From an economic point of view, women still lag slightly 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.277, 278

In the home, traditional roles prevail, with men expected to work and women expected to care for the household, cooking, cleaning, and raising children. Labor laws reflect this reality, giving mothers up to 3 years of maternity leave.\(^{279}\) Czech men may make what Americans might consider sexist comments, but from a Czech point of view, such comments may be seen as showing respect for women’s traditional roles.\(^{280}\)

**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.\(^{281, 282}\) 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.\(^{283}\) Dvořák achieved a greater level of international recognition for his symphonic works. His music, less overtly nationalistic, incorporated folk melodies of Moravia and Slovakia.\(^{284}\)

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.\(^{285}\) The


\(^{281}\) Christine Gengaro, “Program Notes: Mozart’s Prague,” Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, May 2011, [http://www.laco.org/performances/151/?program=1](http://www.laco.org/performances/151/?program=1)


Prague Spring International Music Festival, held annually, attracts top musicians from around the world.\textsuperscript{286}

Jazz has an increasing and dedicated following among Czechs. Until jazz was repressed under Communism, Czech jazz musicians were among the best in Europe. Some musicians immigrated to the United States and achieved international acclaim.\textsuperscript{287}

\textit{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.\textsuperscript{288}

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 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.\textsuperscript{289}

The greatest literary work of this period is the epic poem “Máj” (“May”) by Karel Hynek Máchá.\textsuperscript{290} 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 group of nationalist writers who called themselves the Máj, after Máchá’s poem. \textsuperscript{291}

Czech literature flourished between the world wars, with the publication of works such as \textit{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).\textsuperscript{292,293} After the Communist takeover, all works of art were expected to conform to the Soviet model and adhere to the tenets of socialist realism. 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.\textsuperscript{294}

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.\textsuperscript{295}

**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.\textsuperscript{296} In 1881, the Prague National Theatre opened.\textsuperscript{297}

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.\textsuperscript{298}

Modern theater was frowned on 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 he worked as a stagehand before becoming the theater’s resident writer.\textsuperscript{299}


\textsuperscript{296} Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 48–49.


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.\(^\text{300}\)

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 by Jiří Šebánek and Oscar-winning writer Zdeněk Svěrák in 1967. The theater performs plays supposedly written by Cimrman and presents lectures on Cimrman’s varied life: among other things, 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.\(^\text{301}\)

**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.\(^\text{302}\) Since there is no longer state funding for the film industry, most films produced today are small-budget, independent films.\(^\text{303}\)

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.” Czechs produce a unique brand of dark, surreal animation that continues to attract an international following.\(^\text{304}\)

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.*\(^\text{306}\)

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Pop Culture

To understand the importance of rock ‘n’ roll in Czech culture, look no further than the late Václav Havel, the T-shirt wearing president who spent time with performers like Mick Jagger and Frank Zappa. Rock music was banned under the Communist regime because it is American, so listening to it constituted an act of rebellion against government repression. Today rock music abounds in the Czech Republic; it is mostly imported from the United States along with movies and fashion, and listening to it lacks the political overtones of the past.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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308 Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 44.
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.\footnote{Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, \textit{Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics} (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 37.}

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 (a style of realistic art aimed at furthering Communist goals), which pushed Czechoslovakia’s edgier artists underground.\footnote{Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, \textit{Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics} (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 37–39.}

\textit{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.\footnote{Tim Nollen, \textit{Culture Shock! Czech Republic: A Guide to Customs and Etiquette} (London: Kuperard, 1997), 36, 41.} 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 looked to the peasant classes for authentic Czech culture.\footnote{Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, \textit{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.\footnote{Dita Asiedu, “UNESCO Proclaims Czech ‘Verbunk’ Masterpiece of Intangible Heritage of Humanity,” Radio Prague, 29 November 2005, \url{http://www.radio.cz/en/section/curraffrs/unesco-proclaims-czech-verbunk-masterpiece-of-intangible-heritage-of-humanity#0} \footnote{Jan Velinger, “Ride of the Kings Added to UNESCO Heritage List,” Radio Prague, 28 November 2011, \url{http://www.radio.cz/en/section/curraffrs/ride-of-the-kings-added-to-unesco-heritage-list#0}}}

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.\footnote{Neal Bedford, Jane Rawson, and Matt Warren, \textit{Lonely Planet: Czech and Slovak Republics} (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), 38.}
Sports and Recreation

National Sports

Hockey and soccer (football) are the two most popular sports in the Czech Republic.\(^{321}\) 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.\(^{322}\) Many Czech players have been recruited to play in America, including Jaromír Jágr, Patrik Eliáš, and Milan Hejduk.\(^{323, 324, 325}\)

Soccer 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 soccer and hockey, although they are not as popular and attract few spectators.\(^{326}\)

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.\(^{327}\)

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Chapter 4 Assessment

1. Most Czechs are Catholic.
   **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. It is still possible to find people in the Czech Republic dressed in the traditional *kroj*.
   **True**
   The national costume is a source of pride amongst Czechs, and particularly Moravians, who still don the costume for festivals and other special events.

3. Before the 19th century, few writers used Czech as a literary language.
   **True**
   As a literary language, Czech only existed in medieval religious texts, such as the Kralice Bible. 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. Czechs eat meat sparingly, focusing instead on fresh fruit and vegetables.
   **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. The Czech Republic has for many years produced world-class animation.
   **True**
   Even from behind the Iron Curtain, Czech artists and animators were producing cartoons and animated films enjoyed by people around the world, including in the United States. Several popular children’s cartoons produced in the Czech Republic are still shown regularly on Czech television, while the darker brand of Czech surrealist animation has garnered a worldwide cult following.
CHAPTER 5: SECURITY

Introduction

In the past few decades, 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 50.328 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 Czechoslovakia in 1989 (the Velvet Revolution), the country had 200,000 troops in its army and air force, half of which were conscripts.329

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.330 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 4% of government expenditures and less than 2% of GDP (gross domestic product).331

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.332

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Police

A national force, consisting of 47,000 police officers and 11,000 police 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.

Laws require the police to follow due process when investigating crimes and arresting criminals; they place limits on the amount of time a person can be detained unless charged with a crime. Corruption is an ongoing problem; for example, 4 officers were arrested in 2011 for covering up financial crimes. 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 to reestablish democracy and civil society. Setting aside their historic differences, the three countries agreed to share resources.

References:

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.  

The Visegrad Group is still active, conducting joint projects in defense, education, tourism, and energy, and providing general cooperation. Because the group lacks a central administration, each of the four countries (Hungary, Poland, and, since the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia) takes a turn as 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.

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. But Austrians have put pressure on the Czech Republic to repeal the Benes Decrees and have raised
objections to Czech plans to expand the Temelin nuclear power plant near the Czech-Austrian border.\textsuperscript{347}

**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.\textsuperscript{348} The United States has a sizable Czech-American population, particularly in the Midwest.\textsuperscript{349}

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.\textsuperscript{350} 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. Czech troops continue to serve in Iraq and Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{351}

**Recent Relations**

In recent years, 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.\textsuperscript{352} 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 because of ongoing discussions of a possible missile defense

\textsuperscript{347} Bethany Bell, “Austria and Czech Republic Divided over Nuclear Power,” BBC News, 3 January 2012, \url{http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-16359991}

\textsuperscript{348} Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Czech Republic,” 19 August 2011, \url{http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3237.htm}


\textsuperscript{351} Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Czech Republic,” 19 August 2011, \url{http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3237.htm}

Proposals to locate a key component of the U.S. missile defense system in the Czech Republic were shelved in 2009 because plans for the European portion of the system changed. 

**Issues Affecting Stability**

The Czech Republic is a highly stable country, 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 helped bring inflation under control and spared the country many problems that hampered other post-Communist countries in the 1990s. The recent worldwide recession has had a limited negative effect on the country, which has been able to hold inflation and unemployment in check via sound monetary policy. 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.

**Water and Food Security**

The Czech Republic has, for the time being, enough water to meet its needs. But water quality continues to be an issue, as the country strives to upgrade water processing facilities. 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.\(^3\) 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.\(^2\), \(^3\)

**Outlook**

The greatest challenges to the stability of the Czech Republic come from larger uncertainties facing the European Union as it grapples with serious economic problems.\(^4\) The Czech Republic has not been as hard hit as other countries in the EU, but the 2008 economic crisis has affected trade and unemployment rates; it has also raised questions about the country’s position in the European Union.\(^5\)

A worldwide economic downturn has opened discussions about the long-term viability of a single-currency Europe as some countries, particularly Greece, have struggled to keep their economies going.\(^6\) Dealing with the crisis has been more difficult because of a shared currency, which limits a country’s options. While Germany has called for greater fiscal oversight of euro zone countries, the Czech Republic has rejected a fiscal pact, prompting concerns over whether or not the country will honor the terms of its accession treaty to adopt the euro.\(^7\)


\(^3\) Efstathia Sioras and Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Czech Republic*, 2nd ed. (New York: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2010), 45–47,


Chapter 5 Assessment

1. All males age 18 and over are required to serve in the military.
   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. The Ministry of the Interior administers the police force of the Czech Republic.
   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. One of the missions of the Visegrad Group was to help its members enter the European Union.
   True
   One of the Visegrad Group’s primary goals was the political and economic integration of its members—Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia (later the Czech Republic and Slovakia)—into Europe. The European Union admitted all four countries in 2004.

4. The United States did not support the creation of Czechoslovakia following World War I.
   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. Sound monetary policy helped the Czech Republic maintain stability as it transitioned from Communism to a free-market economy.
   True
   Recognizing that inflation had the potential to be hugely problematic during the transition, Czech leaders took early steps to keep inflation under control while privatizing state-owned industries. As a result, the Czech Republic experienced fewer problems with the transition than did other post-Communist states.
FINAL ASSESSMENT

1. The Czech Republic encompasses the traditional regions of Bohemia and Moravia.  
   True / False

2. Two of Europe’s major rivers begin in the Czech Republic.  
   True / False

3. The Krušné Hory (Ore Mountains) are part of the Outer Western Carpathians range.  
   True / False

4. Nuclear power plants have contributed to the poor air quality in the Czech Republic.  
   True / False

5. The Czech Republic has had a greater reduction in greenhouse gas emissions than the European Union countries as a whole.  
   True / False

6. Czechs believe their nation was founded in the 9th century.  
   True / False

7. Czech as a written language was largely ignored until the 19th century.  
   True / False

8. The aim of the Czech nationalist movement was complete independence from the Austrian Empire.  
   True / False

   True / False

10. The Czech Republic is an alternate name for Czechoslovakia.  
    True / False

11. The euro is the Czech Republic’s currency.  
    True / False

12. Automobiles are one of the Czech Republic’s major exports.  
    True / False

13. The tourism industry grew rapidly after the fall of Czech Communism.  
    True / False

14. The Czech National Bank is specifically tasked with controlling inflation and maintaining stable prices.  
    True / False
15. Czechs have a high standard of living relative to many other countries.  
   True / False

16. The Roma have mostly assimilated into Czech society.  
   True / False

17. Czech history, folk life, and legends were often the subject of music, art, and literature during the 19th century.  
   True / False

18. The arts thrived under Communist rule.  
   True / False

19. Tennis is the most popular sport in the Czech Republic.  
   True / False

20. Czechs enjoy spending time outdoors.  
   True / False

21. The Czech armed forces consist of an army, a navy, and an air force.  
   True / False

22. Germany does not trade with the Czech Republic because of a long-standing dispute over the expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia after World War II.  
   True / False

23. The Czech Republic’s decision to expand one of its nuclear plants has strained its relations with Austria.  
   True / False

24. The Czech Republic has had troops serve in Afghanistan.  
   True / False

25. In 2009 the U.S. shelved plans to locate a component of its missile defense system in the Czech Republic.  
   True / False
FURTHER READING

Books


**Articles and Reports**

