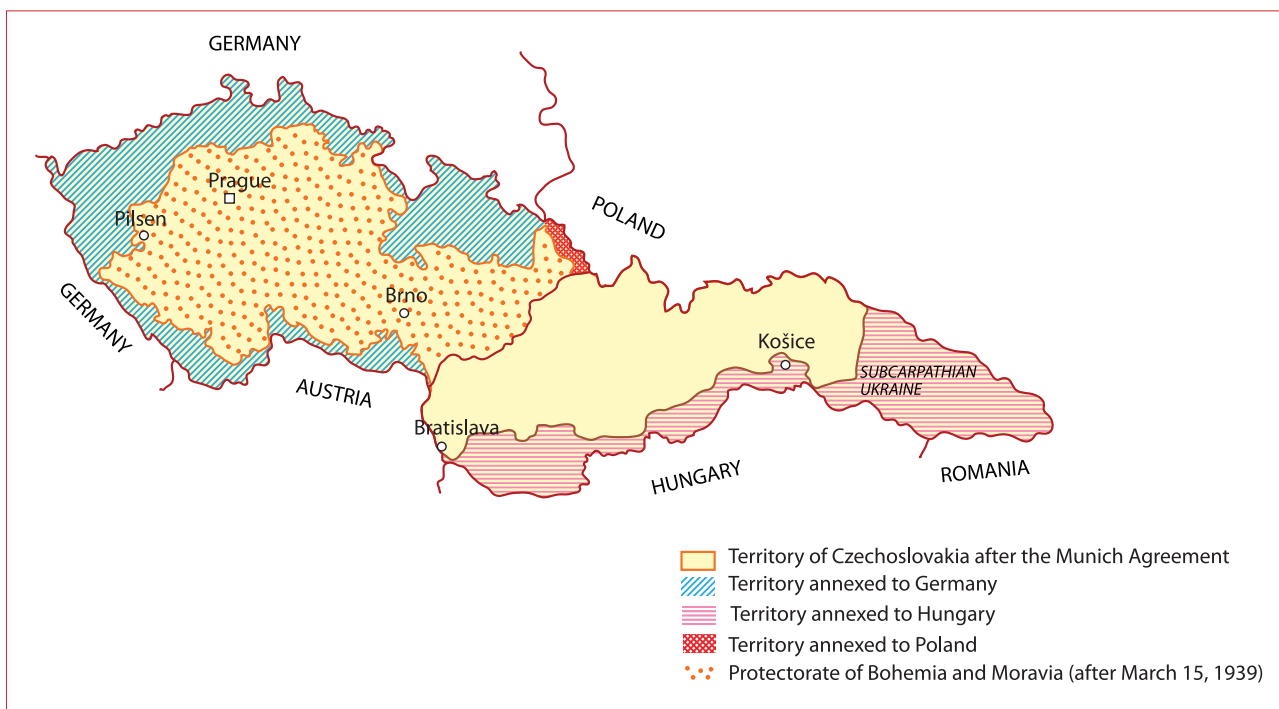


Milestones in Recent Czech History (1938–1989)



Czechoslovakia after the Munich Agreement (October 1, 1938–March 15, 1939).

1938

September 29. Adolf Hitler, Neville Chamberlain, Benito Mussolini and Édouard Daladier sign the Munich Agreement, ceding the Sudeten border regions and much of the country's natural and man-made defenses. Those regions subsequently decide on incorporation into the German Reich.

1938

October 5. President Edvard Beneš resigns as president and leaves the country. His position is taken by Emil Hácha on November 30. In the wake of Munich, the government of so-called Second Republic embarks on

a new path, limiting parliamentary democracy and trying to ingratiate itself with Nazi Germany.

1939

March 15. German forces occupy the remainder of Czech territory left after Munich. Slovakia had declared its independence one day earlier. Adolf Hitler announces the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia the next day from Prague Castle.

1939

November 17. Nine students, identified as ringleaders in an anti-Nazi demonstration, are executed. The demonstration took place at the funeral

of medical student Jan Opletal on November 15, four days after he died from wounds received at an anti-Nazi protest on the October 28 anniversary of Czechoslovak independence.

1941

September 27. Nazi control is tightened with the appointment of Reinhard Heydrich as acting protector of Bohemia and Moravia.

1942

May 27. Acting Protector Reinhard Heydrich is injured in a Prague suburb during an attack by Czechs and Slovaks parachuted in from Britain. He dies from blood poisoning on June 4,

the highest ranked Nazi official to be assassinated during the war. His death unleashes a bloody reprisal.

1943

December 12. Edvard Beneš signs a friendship treaty with the Soviet Union, binding postwar Czechoslovakia to closer economic and military links with Moscow.

1945

April 4. Creation of the Košice National Front government, with Communists given key ministries.

1945

May 5. With US forces stopped on the outskirts of Pilsen and the Red Army still distant, Prague rises against the Nazi occupiers with initial help from General Vlasov's Russian soldiers, who turned against their German masters. Soviet troops enter the city and put down German resistance four days later.

1945

October 28. Four presidential decrees announce the nationalization of large sectors of the economy, including key heavy industries, banks and insurance companies.

1946

May 26. First postwar elections give Communists a leading 37.93% of the vote and 93 seats in the 300-seat parliament, resulting in Communist leader Klement Gottwald's third government, created from a continuing uneasy National Front coalition.

1948

February 20. Non-Communist ministers from three parties in the National Front coalition government resign following a clash over Communist moves to tighten their grip on the state security apparatus.

1948

February 25. President Edvard Beneš accepts a Communist-dominated government after accepting the



Klement Gottwald, Chairman of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSČ) and Czechoslovak Prime Minister, during his speech from the Kinský Palace balcony, Prague Old Town Square (Staroměstské náměstí), February 1948. Left, in the background, is Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Vladimír Clementis (later sentenced in the Slánský trial) and photographer Karel Hajek.
Source: ČTK

resignation of non-Communist ministers and refusing to bring forward general elections due that year.

1948

June 14. Klement Gottwald becomes president following the resignation of Edvard Beneš.

1948

October 6. Parliament passes Act 231, establishing the grounds for treason, which will form the basis for many political trials.

1950

May 31–June 8. Show trial of Milada Horáková and co-defendants.

1951

July 11. Parliament passes a law giving border guards security and military powers as part of steps to secure frontiers with Western states.

1951

November 23. Former Communist Party General Secretary Rudolf Slánský is arrested and charged with masterminding an anti-state conspiracy.

During the succeeding show trial, he is sentenced to death along with 10 others, with the punishment carried out just over a year after his arrest.

1953

March 14. Death of President Klement Gottwald. Antonín Zápotocký replaces him on March 21.

1953

June 1–2. The government's announced currency reform sparks a full-scale revolt against the Communist regime by factory workers in Pilsen. The center of the city is only reclaimed by authorities with the help of more than 10,000 security police and tanks.

1957

November 13. President Antonín Zápotocký dies. Communist Party First Secretary Antonín Novotný becomes the new president.

1960

The so-called Socialist Constitution is adopted, with the adjective socialist now appearing in the name of the coun-

try, and the leading role of the Communist Party enshrined in the text.

1967

June. The fourth Czechoslovak Writers' Congress launches criticism of Novotný's leadership of the Communist Party.

1967

October 31. A protest march by more than 1,500 Prague students following another blackout in their residence halls is brutally suppressed by the security police, who beat, kick and use tear gas on the demonstrators.

1968

January 5. Antonín Novotný is replaced by Alexander Dubček as Secretary General of the Czechoslovak Communist Party.

1968

March 21. Antonín Novotný is pressured to resign as President in a move which signals the further weakening of the hardliners.

1968

June 27. Leading newspapers publish Ludvík Vaculík's appeal "Two Thousand Words," which expresses support for the democratization movement and cautions against anti-Communism and outside interference (the threat of Soviet occupation).

1968

August 20–21. Soviet and forces from four other Warsaw Pact countries invade Czechoslovakia to quash the reforms implemented by the Czechoslovak Communist Party.

1969

January 16. Student Jan Palach sets himself on fire in Prague's Wenceslas Square in protest against the Soviet occupation and retreating reforms. He dies three days later.

1969

April 17. Dubček is replaced as Communist Party leader by Gustáv Husák

(who as of May 1975 also becomes the president of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic).

1969

August 22. The so-called truncheon law, giving security forces and the police reinforced powers to protect public order, is adopted with immediate effect and signed by Dubček, President Ludvík Svoboda and Prime Minister Oldřich Černík. It allows detention for up to three weeks instead of the former 48 hours and dismissal from work or studies (a total of 1,526 citizens are punished under this provision).

1976

March 17. Police arrest members of the underground rock band Plastic People of the Universe and later put them on trial, a move which helps to rally and unite opposition to the regime.

1977

January 1. Charter 77, a manifesto calling for the Czechoslovak government to respect the human rights obligations of the Helsinki Final Act, is unveiled with 242 signatures.

1978

April 24. VONS (The Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Persecuted) is created to monitor cases of unjust legal persecution of those who expressed their beliefs or who became victims of the arbitrary behavior of the regime.

1987

December. Gustáv Husák steps down as General Secretary of the Communist Party, to be replaced by Miloš Jakeš.

1988

December 10. The first opposition demonstration is permitted to take place in Prague's Škroupovo Náměstí on Human Rights Day, coinciding with the visit of French President François Mitterrand.

1989

January. Repression is used by the Communist authorities to suppress "Palach Week," a series of demonstrations to mark the anniversary of Jan Palach's self-immolation.

1989

June. Publication of "A Few Sentences," a call by dissident leaders for the release of political prisoners, open and free discussion on all aspects of public life, including thorny historical issues, and the end of censorship.

1989

November 17. Security police block and then violently break up a students' march in central Prague, sparking the "Velvet Revolution."

1989

November 19. The Civic Forum (Občanské Fórum) is created to unite opposition to the Communist regime in the wake of the outcry against the suppression of the students' march and mistaken reports of one student death.

1989

November 20. A university strike starts with a demonstration in Prague's Wenceslas Square, attracting more than 100,000 protesters. The demonstration is the first of many which helped convince the regime it had lost support.

1989

November 24. The Communist Party's general secretary and its entire central committee step down, opening the way for a switch in power.

1989

December 4. State borders are opened.

1989

December 29. Dissident leader Václav Havel elected president of Czechoslovakia, replacing Gustáv Husák.

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