

**The Czech Republic:  
A Curriculum Guide for Secondary School Teachers**



Created by the **Center for Russian and East European Studies**  
University Center for International Studies  
University of Pittsburgh  
*April 2004*

# INTRODUCTION

*The Czech Republic: A Curriculum Guide for Secondary School Teachers* was created to provide information on the historical and contemporary development of the Czech nation, and in so doing, to assist teachers in meeting some of the criteria indicated in the Pennsylvania Department of Education's "Guidelines to Meeting Academic Standards." To fulfill the fundamental themes for many of the disciplines prescribed by the state guidelines, this curriculum guide provides the following information:

- A description of the unique traits of the Czech culture, and how these traits were developed based upon geographical limitations.
- A description of the effects of political, economic and cultural changes on the European continent, and how these changes shaped the present Czech lands and people.
- Identification and explanation of the contributions of key historical individuals and groups in politics, science, the arts, religion, and business in the Czech lands.
- Exploration of the important roles of Czech dissidents and political leaders.
- Examination of the changing economic and political system of the Czech Republic, and how these changes have affected Czech society.

These and other areas of Czech society and culture are explored in an attempt to assist the secondary school teacher in fulfilling the Academic Standard Guidelines. As the unique transitions in the Czech Republic provide a laboratory for studying political, economic and cultural change, this guide may be additionally useful as a means for comparison with our own country's development. Whether as a tool for meeting the Academic Standard Guidelines, or as a means to explore issues affecting a society in transition, we expect that this guide will be useful in your classroom preparation.

Each section of this guide is designed to be suitable for classroom use either independently, or as part of a comprehensive study of the Czech Republic covering the entire guide. Therefore, you may tailor your use of the guide to fit the amount of time that you have available and the specific topics that are most relevant to your subject area. Each section also contains references to sources of additional information.

This guide was prepared by the Center for Russian and East European Studies at the University of Pittsburgh, with funding from the U.S. Department of Education. It is the first of a series of curriculum guides on post-communist countries in East Central Europe that are entering the European Union in 2004.

## Contributors:

Lisa Pohlman, Department of Political Science, University of Pittsburgh (primary researcher and author)

Gina Peirce, Center for Russian and East European Studies, University of Pittsburgh

Matthew McMullen, School of Law, University of Pittsburgh

## About the Center for Russian and East European Studies

Founded in 1965, the Center for Russian and East European Studies (REES) at the University of Pittsburgh is designated by the U.S. Department of Education as a National Resource Center. This distinguishes REES as one of the nation's strongest language and area studies centers. The Center is responsible for coordinating the efforts of the University of Pittsburgh in teaching, research, and public service related to the former Soviet and Central/East European world region. The 71 faculty members affiliated with REES are based in 14 arts and sciences departments and five professional schools at the University of Pittsburgh.

REES offers undergraduate and graduate certificates to students who complete a multi-disciplinary study of the area and attain proficiency in a language of the region. The Center coordinates the collection of materials on its world region in the University of Pittsburgh's library system, publishes the *Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies*, maintains academic exchanges with 26 overseas partner institutions, and sponsors lectures and special events on a weekly basis. REES also sponsors study abroad programs and, since 1986, a Summer Language Institute for students throughout the U.S., offering intensive courses in nine Slavic and East European languages.

The REES Outreach Program is dedicated to providing elementary, secondary, and post-secondary schools and community organizations with a broad understanding of the cultures, languages, histories, politics, and economies of former Soviet and Central/East European nations. For educators at all levels, REES offers a school visits program, instructional resource lending library, outreach newsletter, and professional development workshops. Most of these services are free of charge. For more information, please see the REES Outreach website at <http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/crees/comout.html>.

### Contact Information:

Center for Russian and East European Studies  
University Center for International Studies  
4G-15 Posvar Hall  
University of Pittsburgh  
Pittsburgh, PA 15260

Phone: 412-648-7407

Fax: 412-648-7002

E-mail: [crees@ucis.pitt.edu](mailto:crees@ucis.pitt.edu)

Web: <http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/crees>

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

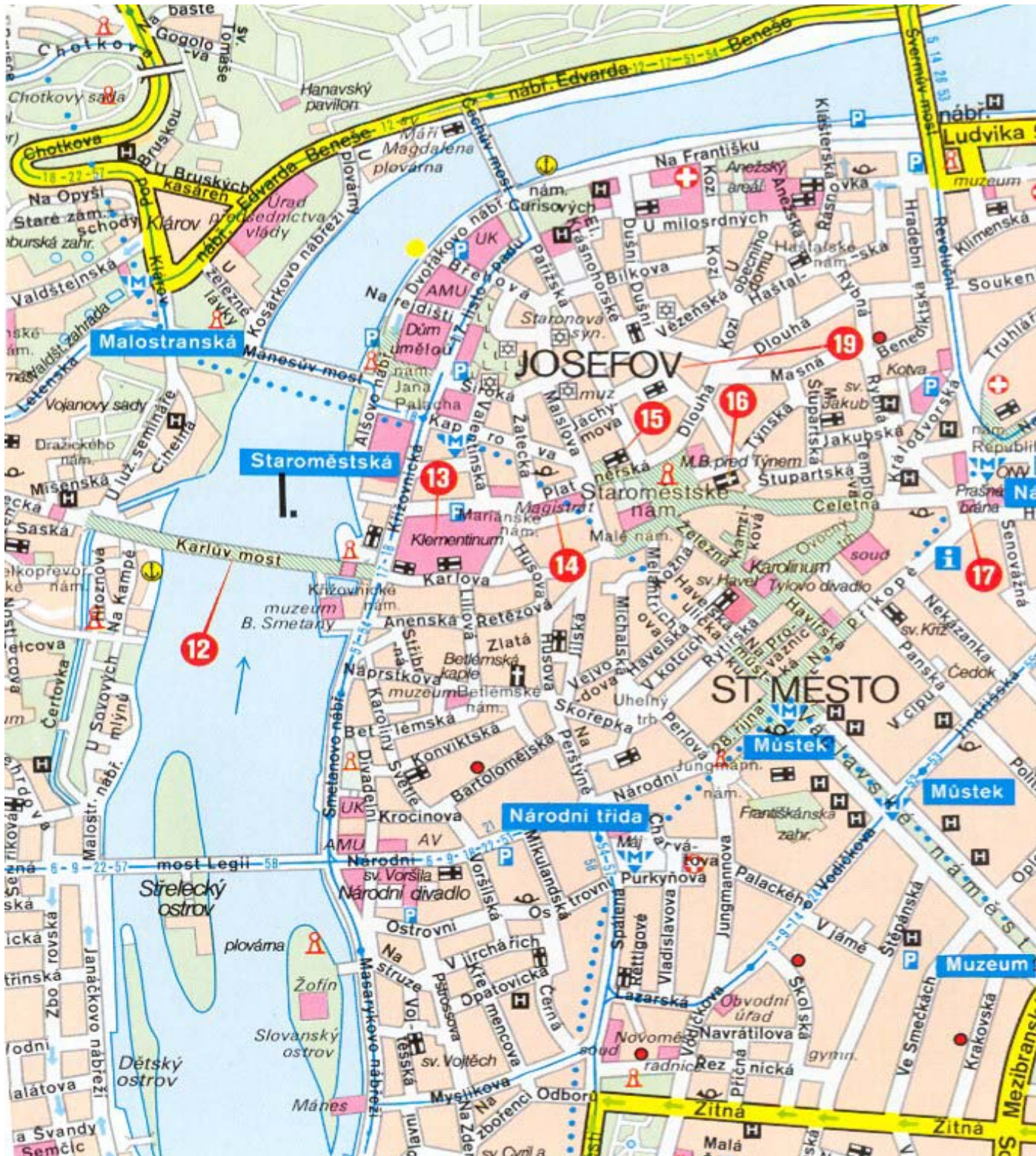
	<u>Page</u>
<b>I. Maps, Photographs and Basic Facts</b>	
A. Maps and Attractions	1
B. Basic Facts	8
<b>II. Czech History and Current Political Issues</b>	
A. Czech History	11
B. Czech Republic Preparations for Membership in the European Union	17
<b>III. Culture of the Czech Republic</b>	
A. Facts about the Czech People	23
B. Famous Czechs	25
C. Regions in the Czech Republic	28
D. Czech Cuisine and Recipes	31
E. Kroje: Traditional Clothing	37
F. Customs and Traditions	40
G. Holidays	48
H. Religion	52
I. The Czech Language	53
J. Czech Pronunciation Guide	56
K. The System of Education	58
L. Architecture	61
M. Classical Music	65
N. Popular Music	67
O. The National Anthem	69
P. Famous Czech Myths	70
Q. Literature	71
R. Film	73
<b>Additional Resources</b>	76

# MAPS AND ATTRACTIONS

## Map of the CZECH REPUBLIC (Česká Republika)



# Map of Old Town Prague (Staré Město)



*Attractions shown on Old Town Prague map:*

12. Charles Bridge and bridge towers (Karlův most a mostecké věže)

13. The Klementinum (convent) and the National Library (klášter Klementinum s Národní knihovnou)

14. Old Town Square and Orloj, the astronomical clock (Staroměstská radnice s orlojem a vyhlídkovou věží)



*Astronomical clock, Old Town Square, Prague*

15. St. Nicholas Cathedral (kostel svatého Mikuláše)

16. Týn Cathedral (Týnský chrám)



*Folk musicians in front of Týn Cathedral, Old Town Square, Prague*

17. Powder Tower (Prašná brána), below:



18. National Museum (Národní muzeum)



*Statue of St. Wenceslas in front of National Museum*

19. Old-New Synagogue (Staronová synagoga)

*Old Town attractions that do not have a number on this map:* National Theater (Národní divadlo), Bethlehem Chapel (Betlémská kaple), New City Hall (Novoměstská radnice), and the famous restaurant and pub U Fleků (hospoda U Fleků).



*Old Town Prague viewed from Charles Bridge*

## Map of the Little Quarter (Malá Strana)



*Attractions shown on Malá Strana map:*

1. Strahov Convent (Strahovský klášter)

2. Cernin Palace (Černínský palác)

3. Loretta Church (kostel Loreta)
4. Toscana Palace (Toskánský palác)
5. Schwarzenberg Palace (Schwarzenberský palác)
6. Archbishop's Palace (Arcibiskupský palác)
7. Sternberg Palace (Šternberský palác)
8. St. Vitus Cathedral, Prague Castle, Hradčany district (Chrám svatého Víta , Pražský hrad, Hradčany)
9. King's Palace (Královský palác)
10. St. Jiří Basilica (Bazilika svatého Jiří)
11. St. Nicholas Cathedral (Chrám svatého Mikuláše)
12. Charles Bridge and bridge towers (Karlův most a mostecké věže)

*Malá Strana attractions that do not have a number on this map: Petrin Hill (Petrínská rozhledna)*

Source:

<http://praha.cz.tripod.com>



*Road to Prague Castle, Malá Strana*

# CZECH REPUBLIC: BASIC FACTS

## Flag of the Czech Republic



Official name: Czech Republic (Česká Republika).

Regions: Bohemia (Čechy) and Moravia.

Cities – Capital: Prague (Praha) (pop. 1.2 million). Other cities: Brno (387,000), Ostrava (324,000), Plzen (175,000).

## Geography

The Czech Republic is located in Central Europe. Geographically, it neighbors Poland to the northeast, Germany to the west and northwest, Austria to the south, and Slovakia to the east.

Area: 78,864 sq. kilometers; slightly smaller than South Carolina.

Terrain: rolling plains, hills, and plateaus surrounded by low mountains in the west, hills in the east.

Climate: Temperate.

## People

Nationality: Czech(s) (noun and adjective). Czechs are West Slavs, like the Slovaks and Poles.

Population (July 2002 est.): 10.26 million.

Population growth rate (2002 est.): -0.07%

Ethnic groups: Czech (90.4% or 9.25 million people); Moravian (over 380,000); Slovak (193,000); Romany (150,000 – 200,000); Polish (52,000); German (39,000); Ukrainian (22,000); Vietnamese (18,000); and Silesian (11,000).

Religions: Atheist 39.8%, Roman Catholic 39.2%, Protestant 4.6%, Orthodox 3%, Other 13.4%.

Language: Czech, a West Slavic language.

Literacy: 99%.

Life expectancy: males 68 yrs., females 75 yrs.

Work force (5.2 million people) – Industry, construction, and commerce: 47%; government and other services: 41%; agriculture: 11%.

## Government

Type: Parliamentary republic.

Independence: The Czech Republic was established on January 1, 1993, when Czechoslovakia split. The former Czechoslovak state was established in 1918.

Constitution: Signed on December 16, 1992.

National holiday: Czech Founding Day, October 28, 1918.

Branches of government – *Executive*: president (chief of state), prime minister (head of

government), cabinet. *Legislative*: Chamber of Deputies, Senate. *Judicial*: Supreme Court, Constitutional Court.

Political parties (as of the June 2002 election): Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), 70 seats in the Chamber of Deputies; Civic Democratic Party (ODS), 58 seats; Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), 41 seats; Christian and Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL), 21 seats; Freedom Union (ÚS), 10 seats.

Suffrage (voting): Universal at age 18.

## **Economy**

GDP (2001 estimate): \$59.5 billion (at late 2002 prices and exchange rates). Per capita income (2001 est.): \$5,777.

Natural resources: Hard and soft coal, clay, timber, graphite, lignite, uranium, magnesite. Agricultural products: wheat, rye, oats, corn, barley, hops, potatoes, sugarbeets, hogs, cattle, horses.

Types of industry: motor vehicles, machinery and equipment, iron, steel, cement, sheet glass, armaments, chemicals, ceramics, wood, paper products, and footwear.

Trade (2001) – Exports: motor vehicles, machinery, iron, steel, chemicals, raw materials, consumer goods. Partners: Germany, Slovakia, Austria, Italy, Great Britain, France, Poland, Russia, United States.

## **People**

95% of the 10.23 million inhabitants of the Czech Republic are ethnically and linguistically Czech, or Bohemian. Other ethnic groups include Moravians, Silesians, Germans, Roma (“gypsies”), and Poles. The Moravians and Silesians are considered “Czech” in terms of citizenship, but they are not ethnically “Czech” or Bohemian.<sup>1</sup> After the 1993 division, some Slovaks remained in the Czech Republic, comprising roughly 3% of the current population. The border between the Czech Republic and Slovakia is open for Czech and Slovak citizens. Laws establishing religious freedom were passed shortly after the revolution of 1989, lifting oppressive regulations enacted by the former communist regime. Major religious denominations are Roman Catholic (39%) and Protestant (3%). A large percentage of the Czech population are atheists (40%), and 16% describe themselves as uncertain (agnostic). There are only a few thousand people in the Jewish community today. More than 80,000 Czechoslovak Jews died in World War II. Their names are preserved in a synagogue in Prague.

## **Crest of the Czech Republic:**



---

<sup>1</sup> Bohemia is called *Čechy* in the Czech language. A male Bohemian is a *Čech* and a female is a *Češka*. Czechs are *Češi*.

References:

United States Department of State “Background Note: Czech Republic.” 8/02.

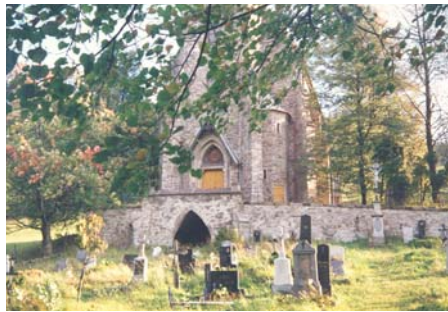
<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3237.htm>

<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/cz.html>

“Czech Culture,” <http://www.bohemica.com>.



*Jewish Cemetery in the Jewish Quarter (Josefov), Prague*



*In the Jeseniky mountains, northern Czech Republic*



*A typical house in southern Bohemia, Czech Republic*

## **CZECH REPUBLIC: HISTORY**

During the prehistoric period, around the Iron Age, the area that is now the Czech Republic was inhabited by Celtic Boii tribes. The Celts were pressured by Roman invasions to move from ancient Gaul (now France) to a new home north of the Danube River. Roman maps identified the region as Boiohemie, later known as Bohemia. The Celts in Bohemia did not retain their identity.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Slavic people began to migrate to the Czech lands from the Vistula River area. According to legend, Jan Cechus, a chieftain, guided them there, hence the name “Czechs” (Čechy). The Sámó Empire arose in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, followed by the Greater Moravian Empire in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. During this time, the Christian missionaries Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius wrote down the Slavic language for the first time. The Přemyslid dynasty arose in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, when Bohemia began to develop as an independent state, Prague Castle was beginning to be built, and Prague became the seat of the dynasty. Prince Václav (the fabled “Good King Wenceslas,” who later became the patron saint of Bohemia) was a ruler of this dynasty. Shortly after his death, the German king Otto conquered Bohemia and it became part of the Holy Roman Empire. However, Bohemia became recognized as the Bohemian Kingdom with its own royal line (the Přemyslids) more than two hundred years later. Under the rule of the “iron and golden” King Přemysl Otakar II, the Czech (Bohemian) Kingdom expanded beyond Bohemia and Moravia into Austria and Slovenia.

The Germans began to colonize the Czech lands after John of Luxembourg, the Holy Roman Emperor, was elected the King of Bohemia in 1310. He made Prague the seat of the Holy Roman Empire. The Bohemian Kingdom reached the height of its power and prestige under the reign of Charles (Karel) IV (1346-1378), the second Luxembourg to take the throne of Bohemia. Charles IV was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in Rome in 1355. During his reign, he established Charles University (the first university north of the Alps), and built the Charles Bridge, St. Vitus Cathedral, Prague’s New Town, and Karlštejn Castle.

The Black Plague which raged across Europe from 1347-1352 decimated the Kingdom of Bohemia. This period of turmoil in Europe was followed by religious tumult, the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, in the Czech lands. In 1402, Jan Hus, preacher and rector of Charles University, started a church reform movement against the corruption of the Catholic Church a century before Martin Luther. King Václav VI gave Hus’ group control over higher education in Prague in 1409, prompting German teachers and students to leave and form their own university in Leipzig. However, on July 6, 1415, Jan Hus was burned at the stake in Constance, making him a religious and national martyr to the Czech people. Hus’ followers, the Hussites, began a rebellion in Prague in 1419 against the royal empire, but they were defeated in 1434. In 1485 a religious conciliation was finally reached, and the Czech lands became an area of religious tolerance.

In 1526, Ferdinand I of Habsburg became the King of Bohemia, marking the beginning of the Habsburg Dynasty. In 1583, Habsburg Emperor Rudolf II moved the court to Prague. This time marked another era of culture in the Czech lands. Jan Amos Komenský, the author of many books on education, wrote the first “children’s book,” and in 1609 Johannes Kepler, an astronomer, published the *Laws of Planetary Motion*. Unfortunately, this time of educational progress was cut short in 1618 with the Thirty Years’ War, which devastated most of Central Europe and shattered Bohemia’s economy. Czechs lost their rights and property, and were forced to convert to Catholicism and adopt German customs. With the Battle of White Mountain in 1620, Bohemia and Moravia were brought under the rule of the Habsburg’s Austro-Hungarian Empire.



*Karlstejn Castle (outside Prague)*

In 1740, however, the peaceful reign of Maria Theresa marked the beginning of another era, the Enlightenment. Empress Maria Theresa instituted compulsory education and a network of schools and under the rule of her son, Emperor Josef II, a large degree of religious tolerance was brought back to the Czech lands after more than 150 years. Around the same time (1787), Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* premiered under his conductorship at the Estates Theater in the Old Town in Prague. Much progress took place at that time. The first Czech revival newspaper was published. The first industrial exhibition in Europe began in Prague’s Klementinum. The National Museum was opened in Prague. The Czech National Revival was under way. In political affairs, the Dual Monarchy of Austro-Hungary (two independent states united under one rule) was established in 1867.

This period of enlightenment did not last much longer, however. The 1914 assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo sparked the beginning of World War I. The Czechoslovak Legion fought for the first time in 1917’s Battle of Zborow. The Pittsburgh Agreement of May 30, 1918 (signed in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania by the first Czechoslovak president, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, and representatives of Slovak

exile organizations) established the country of Czechoslovakia. On October 28, 1918, the new Czechoslovak Republic, with its capital in Prague, was declared with the support of the Allies. The new Czechoslovakia, sometimes called the “First Republic,” was a democracy that had its main power constitutionally vested in the unicameral National Assembly. It was the only East European country to maintain democracy throughout the interwar period. The First Czechoslovak Republic also had a democratically elected president, held elections based on universal suffrage with direct and secret ballots, and had an independent judiciary. The constitution provided for the protection of fundamental civil and political rights of all citizens on a completely equal basis, as well as the special protection of religious and national minorities. Both Czech and Slovak were the official languages of Czechoslovakia, but by identifying Slovaks with the Czechs under the label “Czechoslovakia,” the Slovak national identity was downplayed. Czechoslovakia’s relative political stability was inherited from the traditions of the Habsburg Monarchy. The economic situation was positive as well, since Czechoslovakia was left with about 80% of the industries of the Habsburg Empire.

President Masaryk passed away in late 1937, and Edvard Beneš became the new president. Under Beneš’ tenure, unfortunately, the First Czechoslovak Republic came to an end. This fateful conclusion was the result of the cession of Czech lands to Germany in the Munich Agreement of 1938 and the beginning of World War II in 1939. German Chancellor Adolf Hitler's strategy exploited the existing problem of the Sudeten German minority in Czechoslovakia as a pretext for German penetration into East Central Europe. In early 1938, neither Britain nor France (the other major European powers) wanted war. France, not wanting to face Germany alone, subordinated itself to Britain, and British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain became the major spokesman for the West. Chamberlain believed that Sudeten German grievances were just, and Hitler's intentions limited. Both Britain and France advised Czechoslovakia to concede. Beneš, however, resisted pressure to move toward Sudeten autonomy. Soon Hitler demanded from Chamberlain the immediate return of the Sudetenland to the Third Reich under threat of war, claiming that the Czechoslovaks were murdering Sudeten Germans. Chamberlain referred the demand to the British and French governments; both accepted. The Czechoslovak government resisted, arguing that Hitler's plan would ruin the nation's economy and lead to German control of all of Czechoslovakia. Britain and France issued an ultimatum, making the French commitment to Czechoslovakia contingent upon acceptance of the plan. On September 30, 1938, Czechoslovakia capitulated. The Munich Agreement stipulated that Czechoslovakia must cede Sudeten territory to Germany. The legacy of the Munich Agreement was lasting resentment on the part of the Czechs and Slovaks toward the West for not standing up to Hitler and his demands.

Despite this capitulation, the Nazis invaded on March 15, 1939 and occupied the whole of Czechoslovakia, renaming it “the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.” Slovakia became a Nazi puppet state under the leadership of Slovak priest Josef Tiso. In November 1939, Czech students began a series of demonstrations against the Nazis, resulting in the death of one student, Jan Opletal. After the assassination of the leading SS officer of the Protectorate, Reinhard Heydrich, on May 27, 1942, the Nazis began

arresting and deporting citizens. The country's remaining Jews were transported first to the Terezín ghetto (in Czechoslovakia) and then on to death camps in Poland.

The Terezín concentration camp was built from an actual town that was founded in the 18th century by Empress Maria Theresa as a military fortress. It consisted of the Great Fortress and the nearby Small Fortress. The Nazis forced the residents of the town to leave in the early 1940s and then turned it into a so-called "model ghetto" for the Jews of Bohemia and Moravia, as well as for prominent German Jews. The Nazis created a sophisticated ruse for the Red Cross delegation that visited the camp on June 23, 1944 in order to make the Red Cross believe that Terezín was actually a spa town. The delegation only spent a few hours at the camp and apparently did not discover that, for the vast majority of Jews sent there, Terezín was merely a temporary stop before being deported to Birkenau or another death camp. The Great Fortress is now an actual town with around 1,000 residents, while the Small Fortress is a museum and memorial.

In another important incident in the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia, the Nazis completely burned down the Czech villages of Lidice and Ležáky in June 1942. All of the inhabitants were killed or transported to extermination camps. The official Nazi communiqué stated that they destroyed the villages because residents of Lidice and Ležáky provided support to those who assassinated "Protector" Reinhard Heydrich. However, the assassination of Heydrich actually was conducted by Czech and Slovak citizens trained by foreign countries as Allied soldiers, who parachuted in for the purpose of assassinating Heydrich.

The German leadership surrendered on May 8, 1945, marking the end of World War II and leading to the start of the Communist era in Czechoslovakia. After WWII ended, Czechoslovakia was reestablished with its pre-1938 borders (with the exception of Ruthenia, which was ceded to the USSR). Edvard Beneš, who had led the Czechoslovak liberation movement abroad during the German occupation, became head of state. Because Czechoslovakia was liberated largely by Soviet forces (the American troops advanced as far as Plzeň in western Bohemia, but stopped out of deference to their Soviet allies), the influence of the Soviet Union grew strong in the postwar period. The Communists won 38% of the vote in the 1946 elections, and took many of the important governmental posts. Many political groups in Czechoslovakia began to believe that it was important to have a close relationship with the USSR. However, in February 1948, the Communists provoked a crisis in the government and formed a new government in which they assumed a dominant position. President Beneš resigned and was replaced by the Communist party leader Klement Gottwald. This was viewed in the West as a coup by the Soviet Union, particularly after the mysterious death of Tomáš Masaryk's son three weeks after Gottwald became president. Officially, Jan Masaryk committed suicide by jumping from the bathroom window of a high floor in the foreign ministry building, but the unofficial version is that Communist officials pushed him to his death.

The new leaders of Czechoslovakia molded the political system in the image of the Soviet Union's institutions and practices. Although other political parties were allowed to exist, in reality the Communist party was the only party with any power. They

molded the legal system and the judiciary to fit their political aims, and formed a secret police force to keep the opposition in check. In the 1950s, mirroring what was going on in the rest of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union at the time, the Communist leaders of Czechoslovakia put leaders from their own party on trial – the so-called “show trials” – in which they were accused of being enemies of Communism, and many were ultimately put to death or imprisoned. In addition, the Czechoslovak economy became centrally planned under Communist rule, as the government confiscated the property of private citizens and put it into the hands of the state. Farming was collectivized as well. In short, the Communist leadership of Czechoslovakia began a campaign to make all aspects of life political, including education, culture, the arts, science, and even leisure.

In an attempt to reform the rigid Soviet-style Communist system, the Slovak Communist leader Alexander Dubček, as well as intellectuals and other party leaders, initiated a series of reforms in the 1960s that ultimately became known as the “Prague Spring,” or “socialism with a human face.” Dubček and his fellow reformers wanted to improve the economy through decentralization, but more importantly, they wanted the needs of the Slovaks to be recognized in the common state. These reforms were also meant to create a socialist system that could be considered appropriate for a developed, European country, in which there would be no more censorship, greater intellectual freedom, and political and social pluralism (that is, an end to the Communist monopoly of power). However, conservatives in the Czechoslovak Communist Party (CCP) feared that they might lose their political power if the reforms went through, so they appealed to fellow Warsaw Pact countries (the Soviet Union, East Germany, Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria) for “brotherly” help. The Warsaw Pact forces invaded Czechoslovakia on August 21, 1968 in order to crush the reforms, as the other Communist regimes feared what might happen to their political systems if one of the other regimes allowed political pluralism.

The presidium of the CCP approved “a proclamation to all Czechoslovak people,” in which it condemned the occupation. Shortly thereafter, Soviet soldiers arrested five members of the party presidium and flew them to the USSR, where, under pressure, they were forced to sign the “Moscow Protocol,” which legalized the Soviet occupation. Later an agreement was signed on “the provisional presence of Soviet forces in Czechoslovakia,” a provisional period which lasted more than 20 years. In April 1969, a hard-line Communist, Gustav Husák, was elected to replace Dubček as the leader of the Czechoslovak Communist Party with the assistance of the Soviets, and he immediately began to eliminate all traces of the reforms and punish those who supported the reforms.

This time became known later as “normalization,” and the political arena became stagnant for almost 20 years. The population became politically apathetic, as they believed that no progress or reform could occur under Communist rule. However, many historians, philosophers, and writers still actively opposed the regime, and by working and planning underground and through journalistic and scholarly work, they formed opposition groups such as Charter 77 and VONS (the Committee to Defend the Unjustly Persecuted). These opposition groups called on the Communist leadership to respect human rights and allow more civic freedom. These groups, however, were not allowed to

function publicly, and open dissidents often were condemned to prison sentences or forced manual labor.

Meanwhile, Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms in the 1980s showed that the Communist hard line could not last forever. Realizing that the Soviet Union could not continue to prop up the Communist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe financially and militarily, Gorbachev withdrew Soviet troops and promised not to interfere with the political affairs of Communist Europe any longer. Disagreement within the Communist party between the Communist regimes of Europe and the Soviet Union (and within them as well) became publicly apparent in 1988, and Czechoslovakia was no exception. A radical change occurred on November 17, 1989, when the security forces attacked an officially approved student march in Prague's Wenceslas Square.

The students were marching to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the execution of Czech university students by the Nazis. This crackdown sparked nationwide protests, and prominent demonstrations were staged in the regional capitals of Prague and Bratislava. Václav Havel, a playwright and active opposition leader, helped establish the Civic Forum, an official opposition group to the Communist leadership, in the Prague Actors' Club. This opposition group, along with other groups and individuals, led demonstrations throughout the country, demanding the resignation of the Communist government and the punishment of those who used force against innocent citizens. The Communist leadership capitulated, and the official transition to democracy from communism officially began with Václav Havel, elected on December 29, 1989 as President of the Czechoslovak Republic. This transition was called the "Velvet Revolution" because it occurred without fighting or bloodshed.

#### References:

<http://www.czech.cz>

<http://www.mujiweb.cz/www/historycz/>

<http://www.berea.edu/library/gowler/terezin.htm>

Sayer, Derek. 1998. *Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History*. Trans. Alena Sayer. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Teich, Mikulás, ed. 1998. *Bohemia in History*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

# **The Czech Republic and Preparations for Membership in the European Union**

## **Why EU Membership?**

The resurgence of democracy in the Czech Republic also brought up issues relating to its role in Europe. Reunification of the European continent was a goal of both the European Union and formerly communist European countries for many reasons. As the geographical heart of Europe, the Czech Republic's natural instinct was to rejoin Europe, of which it had been part before the communist takeover. While the Czech lands were under communist rule, Western Europe had slowly but steadily integrated into what is now known as the European Union (EU). The European Union began as the European Coal and Steel Community in the 1950s, mainly to facilitate trade among European countries, but also to promote an ideology of "European-ness" over individual countries' national identities. Its historical purpose was to serve as a permanent "check" on the expansionist urges of Germany, while allowing France to play a bigger role on the European political and economic stage. Its current historical purpose is to serve as a vehicle for a united Europe, east and west. As soon as it became clear that communism was eroding, in 1988, the European Union (then called the European Community) established an official relationship with the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. In 1992, the European Commission opened its delegation in Prague.

Membership in the European Union quickly became significant to post-communist countries, including the Czech Republic. To post-communist Europe, membership in the EU meant a consolidation of democracy and the market economy in these transition countries, and it meant security for all European nations. In an abstract sense, a reunification of Europe meant creating a new European citizenship: no longer should there be an iron curtain dividing Europe, but Europe would now be a continent of diversity and democracy, composed of citizens from many different "nations" under one European Union.

## **Czech Relations with the European Union**

Even before negotiations to join the EU began, the Czech Republic had an important relationship with the EU. For example, since 1989 the EU has become the Czech Republic's largest trading partner with more than a 65% share of its foreign trade, and EU member states are now the largest investors in the country. The Czech Republic shares the longest part of its border with EU-member countries, making it geographically proximal to the EU as well. More importantly, however, the Czechs have always felt that they belonged to European civilization and shared its cultural values, since they have been a substantial part of European history. Indeed, since 1989 a majority of the Czech population have recognized that membership in the EU is a historic, political, economic, and social necessity. Full integration into the EU is supported by nearly all parliamentary parties in the Czech Republic, and certainly by the current government led by Špidla's Social Democrats.

In its Opinions since the Czech Republic began negotiations for EU membership in 1996, the European Commission has continued to affirm that the Czech Republic

fulfilled the political criteria. Since that time, the Czech Republic has made considerable progress in further consolidating and deepening the stability of its institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities.

The European Union and the Czech Republic have begun to work out various contractual agreements to formally define their relationship, as well as to set up rules and regulations to govern trade and other financial relationships, such as the “Trade and Cooperation Agreement” and the “Europe Agreement.” These contractual agreements allow for regular discussions on specific issues, high level meetings of senior officials, and agreed ways of dealing with any problems that arise. These agreements also serve as the umbrella for the Czech Republic’s preparation for EU membership.

The European Union, in order to aid the Czech Republic and other EU-applicant countries in preparing for membership, created and implemented *Phare*, a grant assistance program to support reforms. Phare has become the central financial instrument to help the Czech Republic get ready for EU membership, a role extended from its original goal of simply providing support for democratic and economic consolidation.

### **Czech Preparations for EU Membership**

In the 1993 Treaty of Copenhagen (Denmark), the European Union’s Member States declared that the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe could join the European Union if they fulfilled a number of criteria. In 1996, the Czech Republic responded by applying for membership. The relationship between the European Union and the Czech Republic since then has been to prepare for the Czech Republic’s membership in the EU. Both parties began official negotiations on March 31, 1998 after the Member States approved the European Commission’s positive Opinion on the Czech Republic’s application in Luxembourg in December 1997.

In order to ensure that the Czech Republic would be completely ready to assume the responsibilities of an EU Member State, the European Commission wrote an Accession Partnership document that laid out a series of priorities. The Partnership details specific problems to be considered, such as warning about potential danger areas that need to be worked out prior to EU membership, as well as other expectations that the Czech Republic must fulfill in order to become a member. These priorities were made concrete with the specific tasks outlined in the National Program for the Preparation of the Czech Republic for Membership (otherwise known as the NPAA), which was prepared by the Czech Government. The NPAA, updated annually, delineates the Czech government’s plans for reforming the economy, civil service, legislation, and other important realms for EU membership. The European Commission catalogues the results of these preparations each year in its publicly-available Regular Report to the Council of Ministers.

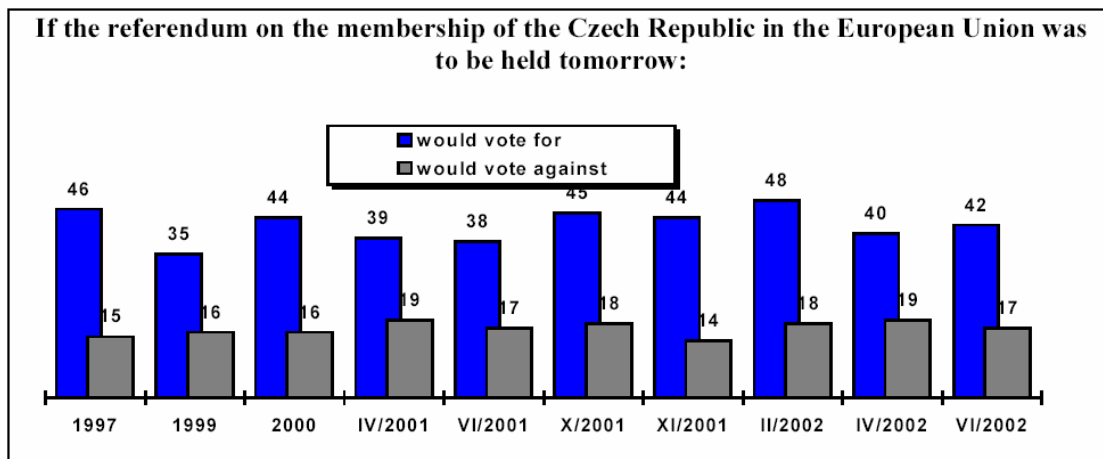
The Czech Republic is not the only party in this relationship to get ready for Czech membership in the European Union. The European Union also has been preparing for enlargement through various treaties. At the Intergovernmental Conference in Nice,

France (December 9, 2000), the European Union agreed on a new treaty to reform its institutional framework. The Treaty of Nice paved the way for the EU to welcome new members through various institutional reforms, such as a reshaping of the European Commission, a re-allocation of seats in the European Parliament for each country, as well as a re-allocation of seats in the Council of Ministers for each country.

Despite its progress toward membership, the EU has noted some problem areas for the Czech Republic. One area that needs to be strengthened is judicial reform, particularly the reduction of the length of court proceedings, more judicial training, and additional human and material resources. Another recommendation of the EU is for the Czech Republic to strengthen its fight against corruption and economic crime with more human and technical resources. Another serious problem remains the difficult situation of the Roma (gypsy) community. Roma are often the victims of much overt prejudice and discrimination throughout all of Europe, and the Czech Republic is no exception. The EU states that the Czech Republic needs to improve the Roma's situation with more structural measures, such as alleviating discrimination in access to education, housing and employment, and enacting a comprehensive anti-discrimination law.

### Public Opinion about EU Membership

In general, the Czech Republic has been considered one of the foremost contenders for EU membership from among the former communist countries. Given its pro-EU government and the strong support for the Czech Republic's membership from existing member states, the main potential problem has been public opinion. As the following chart illustrates, Czech public opinion about EU membership since 1997 has typically hovered below 50% support.



Source: GfK polls

[http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/opinion/cvm\\_and\\_gfk\\_on\\_czech\\_republic.pdf](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/opinion/cvm_and_gfk_on_czech_republic.pdf)

Since 2002, however, public opinion in support of EU membership has far surpassed the 50% mark, reaching the unprecedented 70<sup>th</sup> percentile in mid-March 2003 (CTK 24 February 2003; Gazdik 2003). Czech support for EU membership was overwhelming in the June 2003 referendum, as will be discussed shortly.

Below are some reasons that Czechs gave as negative factors relating to membership in the EU in a 2002 study (in percentages):

<b>Per cent of the respondents:</b>	<b>1st reason</b>	<b>2nd reason</b>	<b>3rd reason</b>	<b>total</b>
ANTICIPATE PRICES WILL RISE	26	20	14	60
WORRY OUR SECOND-RATE POSITION WITHIN THE EU	30	12	9	51
WORRY THAT FOREIGNERS WILL BUY UP LAND AND PROPERTIES	12	17	11	40
WORRY ABOUT LOSS OF INDEPENDENCE	7	10	17	34
WORRY ABOUT HIGHER UNEMPLOYMENT RATE, BANKRUPTCIES OF COMPANIES	7	12	13	32
DO NOT EXPECT ANY PERSONAL BENEFITS	6	10	11	27
HAVE LITTLE INFORMATION ABOUT THE IMPACTS OF OUR INTEGRATION INTO THE EU	6	8	10	24
EXPECT THAT OUR ENTREPRENEURS AND SOLE PROPRIETORS WILL HAVE MORE DIFFICULTIES	2	3	7	12
DUE TO THE SITUATION RELATED TO THE BENES DECREES	2	4	5	11
THINK IT IS MORE ADVANTAGEOUS IF WE DO NOT ENTER THE EU	2	4	3	9

Source: CVVM (Center for Public Opinion Research, Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences) poll, June 5-12, 2002. Data is from interviews with 1,103 people in the Czech Republic over the age of 15. The estimated margin of error is  $\pm 3\%$ .

[http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/opinion/cvm\\_and\\_gfk\\_on\\_czech\\_republic.pdf](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/opinion/cvm_and_gfk_on_czech_republic.pdf)

Below are some reasons that Czechs gave as positive aspects of EU membership in the same study (in percentages):

<b>Per cent of the respondents stated as:</b>	<b>1st reason</b>	<b>2nd reason</b>	<b>3rd reason</b>	<b>total</b>
EXPECT THAT IT WILL BRING THEM HIGHER LIVING STANDARDS	19	16	19	54
POSSIBILITY TO WORK FREELY IN THE EU	15	17	10	42
EXPECT OVERALL ECONOMIC GROWTH OF THE COUNTRY	7	15	17	39
WANT A FULL INTEGRATION OF THE CR INTO EUROPE	21	5	8	34
POSSIBILITIES TO TRAVEL FREELY INTO THE EU COUNTRIES	6	10	11	27
ARE NOT INFORMED ABOUT THE IMPACTS OF OUR ADMISSION TO THE EU	13	6	5	24
EXPECT BETTER OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENTREPRENEURS AND CZECH COMPANIES	9	8	7	24
EXPECT IMPROVEMENT OF THE LEGAL SITUATION IN OUR COUNTRY	4	6	10	20
EXPECT INCREASED RESPECT AND PRESTIGE FOR CZECH REPUBLIC	3	7	6	16
OPPORTUNITIES TO STUDY IN THE EU	2	7	4	13
EXPECT INCREASED RIGHTS OF EMPLOYEES	1	3	3	7

Source: CVVM (Center for Public Opinion Research, Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences) poll, June 5-12, 2002. Data is from interviews with 1,103 people in the Czech Republic over the age of 15. The estimated margin of error is  $\pm 3\%$ .

[http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/opinion/cvm\\_and\\_gfk\\_on\\_czech\\_republic.pdf](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/opinion/cvm_and_gfk_on_czech_republic.pdf)

## **Referendum on EU Membership**

Despite their frequently voiced skepticism, on June 13-14, 2003, the citizens of the Czech Republic overwhelmingly voted “yes” in the binding referendum on EU membership. According to the Czech Statistical Office, 77.3% voted affirmatively. Turnout was higher than expected at 55%. According to a report from the New York Times, citizens voted in favor of membership both for the economic future of their country (access to the European market), as well as for their children’s futures.

## **Conclusion**

The Czech Republic’s political and economic progress since the collapse of communism in 1989 is unrivaled by any other former Soviet satellite country. Although the Czech people were party to the break-up of Czechoslovakia, this separation was an anomaly because it occurred peacefully. The Czech Republic is currently at the cusp of membership in the European Union, which will further consolidate its democratic nature and its market-based economy. While all the political and economic factors point toward EU membership, public opinion is another matter. Certainly there are reasons for citizens to worry about massive changes in their political and economic systems, particularly after only recently gaining sovereignty from the Soviet Union. However, many, such as those in the current Czech government, argue that the benefits of joining are far greater than the costs. The member states of the EU overwhelmingly approve of Czech membership. While only time can tell, the successes of the Czech Republic up to this point predict more accomplishments in the future, particularly after joining the EU.

References:

<http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/report2002/cz-en.pdf>

Regular Report 2002 on Candidate Countries, prepared by the European Commission.

<http://www.evropska-unie.cz/eng/article.asp?id=115>

"Towards the Enlarged Union: Strategy Paper and Report of the European Commission on the progress towards accession by each of the candidate countries", COM (2002) 700.

RFE/RL NEWSLINE Vol. 7, No. 12, Part II, 21 January 2003.

CTK, Czech News Agency. "Latest Poll Shows Increase in Czech Support for EU Membership." Prague, 24 February 2003 (FBIS, 24 February 2003).

Gazdik, Jan. "Czech Poll Shows Support for EU Entry Rising to 79%, Highest Level in Four Years." *Mlada Fronta Dnes* (6 March 2003): 1A (FBIS, 6 March 2003).

<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/15/international/europe/15CZEC.html?ex=1056876483&ei=1&en=03d1239d49a33b40>

Green, Peter S. "Czechs Give Landslide Approval to 2004 Membership in European Union." *New York Times* (15 June 2003).

## Did you know? Facts about the Czech Republic and Czechs

- The Good King Wenceslas of the English Christmas Carol was a Czech. King Wenceslas is the national Czech patron.
- The term "dollar" goes back to 1519, in the western region of the present-day Czech Republic, where the owner of several silver mines minted his own coins and called them "Joachimsthaler Groschen," or "Thaler" for short.
- The Howitzer cannon drew its name from the Czech "houfnice," the multiple-use weapon used by Czech warriors in the 15th century.
- Lithography, the process of printing from a plain surface, was developed in 1798 in Bohemia.
- The word "ROBOT," meaning a man-made mechanical being, was coined by the Czech playwright Karel Čapek in his play "R.U.R." (Rossum's Universal Robot).
- The wife of the first Czechoslovak president, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, was an American. Her maiden name was Charlotte Garrigue, and she was a direct descendent of the Mayflower Pilgrims.
- Antonín Dvořák, the composer of the "New World Symphony," was a Czech.
- Chicago Mayor Čermák, who took the assassin's bullet meant for President Roosevelt, came from a family of Czech immigrants.
- Oscar-winning director Miloš Forman ("One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," "Hair," "Amadeus," "The People vs. Larry Flynt," and "Man in the Moon") is a native Czech. He graduated from the renowned Prague Film Academy.
- Many of the world's best tennis players -- Lendl, Mandlíková, Suková, Navrátilová, Korda, and Novotná, to name a few -- were born and raised in the Czech Republic. Martina Hingis was named after Martina Navrátilová. Hingis also is a Czech native.
- The American astronaut and Apollo 13 commander Captain James A. Lovell, Jr. is of Czech descent.
- Contact lenses were invented by Czech scientist Otto Wichterle.
- McDonald's founder Ray Kroc had Czech ancestors.
- Prague's Charles University (founded in 1348) was the first university in Central Europe, and Prague's Technical University was the first of its kind in the world.
- The founder of modern genetics, Gregor Mendel, is a Moravian native.
- The father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, and composer Gustav Mahler were both Moravians.
- Madeline Albright, Secretary of State under President Clinton, was born in the Czech Republic. Albright speaks Czech fluently.
- The term "pilsner," used generally for a light lager beer, originated in Plzeň, Czech Republic, where the world-famous beer Pilsner Urquell was first brewed in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.
- The term "Bohemian" came from a Latin word, Boia, the name of the Celtic tribe that once lived in what is today the Czech Republic.
- Renowned writer Franz Kafka, who wrote the classic literary works "Metamorphosis," "The Trial," "The Castle," and "Amerika," was a Jew who lived in Prague in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

- The huge Millennium Christmas Tree at St. Peter's Square in Rome came from the Czech Republic.

Reference:

<http://www.mzv.cz/washington/general/general2.htm>  
(Czech embassy website)



*John Lennon Wall in Prague*

## Famous Czechs

### Famous historical figures

**St. Václav** (St. Wenceslas; 900s A.D.): Patron of the Czech lands. Peace-loving king opposing war with the Germans, who was killed by his brother Boleslav. According to legend, he and his soldiers lie under the mountain Blaník and will rise to help the Czech nation in the gravest hour of need.

**Karel IV** (Charles IV; 1316-1378): Holy Roman emperor (1355–78) and founder of Charles University (1348). Under his rule, Czech lands were the political and cultural center of Europe.

**Jan Hus** (1372-1415): Reform preacher and linguist, author of modern Czech spelling. He was burned at stake for heresy. Hus inspired the Hussite religious movement.

**Jan Žižka** (d. 1424): Successful military leader of the Hussite forces. Under him, Czech rebels defeated crusaders sent by the Roman emperor. He is famous for directing battles even after he became blind.

**Jan Ámos Komenský** (Comenius; 1592–1670): Famous educator and bishop of the Czech Brethren, sometimes nicknamed the ‘Teacher of the nations.’ He wrote the first modern compendium of pedagogy. He worked on the educational systems of Sweden and Holland. He was exiled during The Thirty Years War.

**Tomaš Garrigue Masaryk** (1850-1937): Politician and philosopher. Masaryk was the first president (1918-35) of the inter-war Czechoslovakia, founded at the end of World War I after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

**Václav Havel** (b. 1936): First president of Czechoslovakia after the fall of communism, and first president of the Czech Republic (1993-2003). Havel also is a human rights advocate and playwright.

**Jára Cimrman**: A fictitious figure from the turn of the century, attributed with some of the most famous inventions. Cimrman was created in the late 1960s by a group of Czech actors who continue to produce plays in his name. His figure has gained enormous popularity in the Czech Republic on the scale of Monty Python in Great Britain.

### Famous artists and filmmakers

**Alphonse Mucha** (1860-1939): Art nouveau painter and poster designer who spent most of his life in France. Many of his works were created for the French actress Sarah Bernhardt. Mucha also designed unique advertisements for various products.

**Miloš Forman** (b. 1932): Czech-born Academy Award-winning movie director who emigrated to the USA in 1968. The movies he directed in English include *One Flew*

*Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975), *Hair* (1979), *Ragtime* (1981), *Valmont* (1989), *Amadeus* (1984), *The People vs. Larry Flynt* (1996), and *Man on the Moon* (1999).

### **Famous composers of classical music**

**Antonín Dvořák** (1841-1904): Popular, world-famous composer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He spent several years in the United States, where he wrote his most famous symphony *From the New World*. His other works include *Slavonic Dances*, *Sabat Mater*, and *Rusalka*.

**Leoš Janáček** (1854–1928) Most famous Czech composer of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. His operas include *Káťa Kabanová*, *Věc Makropulos*, and *Liška Bystrouška*.

**Bedřich Smetana** (1828–1884): Popular, world-famous composer of the 20th century. Like Beethoven, Smetana composed some of his best works while completely deaf. His works include *The Bartered Bride*, *Dalibor*, *The Kiss*, and *My Country*.

### **Famous writers**

**Jaroslav Hašek** (1883-1923): Writer and journalist. Hašek wrote satirical short stories. During WWI, he took part in the Russian Revolution. He wrote the book *The Good Soldier Švejk*, a popular satire from WWI that has been translated into over 20 languages, including English.

**Karel Čapek** (1890-1938): Writer, journalist, and playwright. He and his brother Josef first introduced the word “robot” in their science-fiction play *R.U.R.* in 1921. The abbreviation stands for “Rossum's Universal Robots” (“R.U.R.”), and the word itself comes from an old Czech word “robota” (hard work, drudgery), which is still used in some Czech dialects. His other works include *War of the Newts*, *White Illness*, *The Macropulos Thing*, *Krakatit*.

**Bohumil Hrabal** (1914-1997): Hrabal’s major works include *I Served the King of England*, *Larks on a String*, *Closely Watched Trains*, and *Too Loud a Solitude*.

**Josef Škvorecký** (b. 1924): Emigrated after 1968. He currently lives in Canada. He started and runs the publishing company called '68 *Publishers*. His major works include *The Cowards*, *Sins for Father Knox*, *Swell Season*, and *Tank Platoon*.

**Milan Kundera** (b. 1929): Emigrated after 1968. Kundera currently lives in France. He wrote his last novel in French. His major works include *The Joke*, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, *Laughable Loves*, and *Immortality*.

**Franz Kafka** (1883-1924): Austrian-Czech writer born in Prague, a significant figure in 20<sup>th</sup> century literature. He wrote in German. His best known novels are *The Trial* (1925), *The Castle* (1926), and *America* (1927).

## **Famous athletes**

**Dominik Hašek** (b. 1965): Ice-hockey goalie nicknamed "the Dominator," born in Pardubice. He played for the NHL (Detroit Red Wings and Buffalo Sabres) for 12 years and retired in June 2002. He was voted NHL Most Valuable Player and awarded the Hart Trophy twice, the Vezina Trophy (best goalie) six times, the Jennings Trophy in 1994, and the Stanley Cup in 2002.

**Ivan Lendl** (b. 1960): Professional tennis player born in Ostrava. Lendl migrated to the USA in the 1980s. His active tennis career lasted from 1979 to 1994. Many consider him the best male tennis player of all time. He stayed on the top of the ATP rankings for 270 weeks (1983 - 1989), which is the longest time a single tennis player was ranked no. 1 since the ATP rankings were started in 1973.

**Jaromír Jágr** (b. 1972): Professional NHL ice-hockey player born in Kladno. He played for the Pittsburgh Penguins before playing for the Washington Capitals (right wing).

**Martina Navrátilová** (b. 1956): Professional tennis player born in Prague. Navrátilová started playing professional tennis in 1972 and emigrated to the USA in 1975. She won Wimbledon six times in a row (1982 - 1987) and set several records during her career. She won 167 singles championships and 158 professional tennis titles, and became the oldest tennis player who beat a number 1 ranked tennis professional (then Monica Seles) at the age of 37. Navrátilová retired from playing singles in 1994.

## **Other interesting Czechs**

**Sigmund Freud** (1856-1939): Although not Czech by nationality, the "father of psychoanalysis" was born in a town called Příbor, which was then a part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire and today is located in the northeastern part of the Czech Republic. Freud spent the first three years of his life there (1856-1859) before his family moved to Leipzig (in what is now Germany), and then to Vienna (in what is now Austria).

**Otto Wichterle** (1913-1998): Invented the soft contact lens in 1961.

Reference:

<http://www.bohemica.com/?m=catalog&s=31&a=51>

## Regions in the Czech Republic

At the beginning of the 20th century, several cultural areas of today's Czech Republic were easily distinguishable because of characteristics in dialects, architecture, costumes, painted furniture, and ceramics. However, two world wars, extensive migratory shifts of people, and industrialization have all significantly blurred the differences. At present, only four areas can be identified as distinct cultural regions:

*Chodsko* - This area in West Bohemia historically consisted of 11 villages. Chodsko once was granted royal privileges from King John of Luxembourg to protect the border between Bohemia and Bavaria. As a distinct cultural area, Chodsko covers the entire Domažlice region. Chodsko's folk costumes have succeeded in preserving their unique character, in comparison to other Czech regions. Traditional characteristics of the region are particularly evident in folk architecture, ceramics, the rich songs of the area (including the use of archaic forms of musical instruments, such as bagpipes), and in the Chodsko spoken dialect. The Chodsko Festival is held every August in Domažlice.

*Haná* - This area is a lowland in central Moravia with highly-developed agriculture, with Olomouc at its center. Haná originally was the name of a river, but it has been used since the 16<sup>th</sup> century to distinguish the area. Characteristics of the folk culture in the region are evident in the dialect, folk architecture, customs, and literature. Haná has long been considered one of the most significant, rich, and relatively stable cultural areas, and the population has a strong sense of regional pride.

*Slovácko* - This area in Southeast Moravia encompasses distinct sub-regions, including Kyjov, Uherské Hradiště, Dolnácko, Podluží, and Hornácko. Regional elements are manifest in folk architecture, such as 19<sup>th</sup> century earthen buildings. Until recently, wooden buildings with multicolored flower ornaments on the front walls were the norm in many Dolnácko communities. Customs such as the Procession of Kings and folklore festivities that continue to this day are a testament to the uniqueness of this area. Folk costumes vary by area within this region. Specific dialects are still present, and the residents of the area have a strong sense of regional pride. Every year in June, an International Folklore Festival is held in Strážnice.

*Valašsko* - This area in East Moravia was originally composed of Moravian and Carpathian shepherd cultures. Valašsko has evolved as a distinct cultural area since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when an agricultural population settled in the most fertile part of the land. Slovak shepherds and some Polish, Ukrainian, and even Romanian populations began to settle in the surrounding mountains in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The colonists eventually merged with the domestic population, and an intermingling of the agricultural and mountain shepherd cultures took place. The name Valach, originally a Valašsko colonist, later was applied to any sheep breeder in the area. After the uprising against the Habsburg emperor during the Thirty Years War, the name was applied to the whole area. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, shepherding in Valašsko slowly declined and the region was soon characterized mainly by its dialect, as well as the rich Carpathian folk culture, such as wooden architecture and mountain folk clothing. These costumes are less decorative and colorful than Slovácko or

Haná folk costumes. Several characteristic wooden houses are now on display in an open-air museum in Rožnov pod Radhoštěm, the center of annual festivals.

Reference:

<http://www.mzv.cz/washington/general/general2.htm>



*Svihov Castle, Bohemia*



*Trebon, Southern Bohemia*



*Choustník, Southern Bohemia*



*The famous spa town of Karlovy Vary*

## Czech Cuisine and Recipes

Although it is not the best choice for vegetarians, most will find something that they like in Czech cuisine. Czech society has become more health-conscious since the 1990s, but still traditional. Czech meals often consist of meat, and they tend to be somewhat high in calories and fat. Sauces and condiments are popular.

Typical meals begin with soup (polévka), especially at lunch. Some popular Czech soups include:

- garlic soup (česneková polévka or česnečka)
- potato soup (bramborová polévka or bramboračka)
- chicken noodle soup (kuřecí polévka s nudlemi)
- beef soup with liver dumplings (hovězí polévka s játrovými knedlíčky)
- sauerkraut soup (zelná polévka or zelňačka)
- dill soup, made from sour milk (koprová polévka or koprovka)

The main course (hlavní chod) usually includes meat (maso) and a side dish (příloha). The most popular meats are chicken (kuře) and pork (vepřové), followed by beef (hovězí), usually served with some kind of sauce (omáčka). Fish is not very common, although trout (pstruh) or cod (treska) are sometimes served. The mackerel (makrela) is a popular fish to grill over an open fire in summer. Carp (kapr) is traditionally served on Christmas Eve.

The most common side dishes are:

- boiled potatoes (vařené brambory)
- roasted potatoes (opékané brambory)
- mashed potatoes (bramborová kaše)
- French fries (bramborové hranolky)
- rice (rýže)
- bread dumplings (houskové knedlíky) or potato dumplings (bramborové knedlíky) with sauce (omáčka)
- bread or potato dumplings with sauerkraut (zelí)
- potato salad (bramborový salát)

Desserts (moučníky) come in many varieties and tend to be heavy and fatty because butter (máslo) and whipped cream (šlehačka) are often used. Some popular desserts are:

- crepes (palačinky) filled with jam (džem) or strawberries (jahody) and whipped cream
- blueberry dumplings (borůvkové knedlíky)
- apple strudel (jablečný závin)
- ice cream sundae (zmrzlinový pohár)

Meals are often accompanied by the Czech national beverage, beer (pivo). If you're not in the mood for beer, you can have a mineral water (minerálka), orange juice (pomerančový džus), apple juice (jablečný džus), or a soda (specify its name because soda in Czech means “soda water”). Czechs also like to drink tea (čaj) with sugar (cukr) and lemon (citrón), and coffee (káva) with or without milk (mléko) or cream (smetana).

## Recipes

### SOUPS:

#### **Česnečka (Garlic soup)**

1 lb. potatoes  
6 cups water  
dash of powdered caraway seeds (can be omitted)  
¼ cup lard, Crisco, oil, or butter  
4 cloves garlic  
salt to taste  
4-6 slices of toasted rye bread

Dice potatoes. Boil in salted water with caraway seeds until tender (20 to 30 minutes). Add lard. Mash garlic with a pinch of salt and add to soup. Serve with toasted rye bread. Serves 4 to 6.

#### *Alternate version:*

4 cups chicken or beef stock  
1 tablespoon butter  
5 cloves garlic  
salt to taste  
1 tablespoon oil  
4-6 slices of bread

Mince four cloves of garlic and sauté in the butter in a pot over medium-low heat for a minute or two. Do not sauté the garlic until translucent or brown. Add the stock and simmer. Slice the remaining garlic clove and place a few slices into the bottom of each serving bowl (approximately 3 to 4).

As the soup is simmering, cube the bread. Heat the oil over medium heat in a pan and sauté the bread until it becomes golden and crispy. Season to taste.

Ladle the soup into bowls and top with the sautéed bread.

Serves 3 to 4.

#### **Svíčková (Pickled meat in sour cream sauce)**

This meal can be made from beef, venison, or rabbit.

#### *For the meat:*

For beef: use a whole tenderloin. Butter it all over and let it sit in the refrigerator for several days. Pickling the beef in brine will make it tougher. If venison or rabbit: pickle it in a water and vinegar brine with root vegetables (celery, carrot, parsnips, etc.) in crock or glass bowl. Weave bacon strips through the meat before cooking to make it juicier. Roast the meat in the oven (with brine and vegetables) at 325 degrees until tender (about 1 to 1½ hours), basting frequently. When finished roasting, reserve the vegetables and brine/juices for the svičková sauce.

*For the svičková (sour cream sauce):*



- 2 cups sour cream
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1-2 bay leaf
- 6 whole black peppers
- 6 pieces allspice
- 1 medium onion
- a pinch of thyme
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 brine (from the meat) or lemon juice
- mashed root vegetables (those that were cooked with the meat and brine)

Mash the vegetables and brine together in a blender after they are cooked. Add sour cream mixed with flour, and then all remaining ingredients. Cook for 20 minutes over medium-low heat on the stove. Slice the cooked meat, arrange sliced knedlíky on the side, and ladle svičková sauce over all of it.

## **MAIN AND SIDE DISHES:**

### **Kuře Na Paprice (Chicken Paprika)**

- 1 whole chicken, cut into sections (legs, wings, breast, etc.)
- 1 ½ cups water (enough water to cover chicken)
- 1 pint sour cream
- 2 tablespoons flour
- ¼ teaspoon paprika, adjust according to taste
- 1 teaspoon salt, adjust according to taste

Pull skin off pieces of chicken. Sear chicken in pot roast pan. When searing last sides of chicken, add thinly sliced onion. When last side is seared, add water. Cook until meat is tender (approx. 1½ to 2 hrs.) Keep checking so that water does not evaporate. Add additional water as needed.

Beat sour cream and flour together until smooth, just before chicken is done.

When chicken is done, remove from heat. Remove chicken from the pot. Stir in the sour cream mixture until smooth. (Use egg beater or hand mixer to prevent lumps.) Add paprika. Bring to a low boil so that gravy thickens. Put chicken back into the pot with gravy. Serve with knedlíky (dumplings).

### **Knedlíky (Czech Dumplings)**

1 egg, beaten  
1/2 cup milk  
1 cup flour  
1/8 teaspoon baking powder  
1 teaspoon salt  
4 to 5 slices white bread (Note: Use stale bread, cut into small cubes. Trim crust off if it is hard.)

Mix together beaten egg, milk, flour, baking powder and salt until smooth. Add bread cubes to batter and mix until well distributed. Make two small balls.\* Drop into large pot of vigorously boiling water. Cook 10 minutes, then roll knedlíky over and cook an additional 10 minutes. Remove immediately from the water and cut in half to release steam. Slice knedlíky quickly to release steam, and serve.

\* When making these balls, it is best to wet hands with cold water so that dough will not stick to hands.

### **Bramboráky (Potato Pancakes)**

4 or 5 good-sized potatoes, grated  
2 or 3 cloves of garlic, minced  
2 tablespoons finely chopped onion  
1 egg, beaten  
1 teaspoons dried marjoram  
salt & pepper to taste  
about 1/2 cup flour or enough to hold mixture together

Grate potatoes in a bowl, add remaining ingredients, and mix well. Heat frying pan with quite a bit of shortening or oil. Drop mixture by tablespoons into pan, flatten with back of spoon, and reduce heat. Cook until brown on both sides, drain and serve while hot. You may add chopped ham to the mixture before cooking.

### **Sauerkraut**

1 quart sauerkraut  
2 cups water  
1 onion  
1/4 cup chicken or duck fat (can use butter or oil instead)  
3 tablespoons flour  
1/4 teaspoon caraway seed

Drain the liquid from the sauerkraut. Add the caraway seed and water. Cook over medium-low heat on the stove for 20 minutes. Sauté the onion in the fat in another pan until light brown. Add the flour and cook five minutes or until slightly thickened. Remove from stove, add to the sauerkraut, and cook for five more minutes.

### **Czech dill pickles (in open crock)**

9 cups water  
½ cup salt  
Cucumbers  
at least 1 bunch fresh dill  
1 cup vinegar  
3 tablespoons salt

Boil water, vinegar, and salt. Cool thoroughly. Pack cucumbers and dill into sanitized clean jars. Pour the cooled brine over the cucumbers and seal tightly.

### **DESSERTS:**

### **Koláče Šátečkové České (In English, “Bohemian Buns” -- small cakes, like doughnuts)**

Dough:  
1 tablespoon compressed yeast  
1 tablespoon sugar  
2 tablespoons flour  
2 tablespoons lukewarm milk  
4 cups flour  
¼ cup sugar  
1 teaspoon salt  
1 cup lukewarm milk  
¼ cup butter, melted  
1 egg  
½ teaspoon grated lemon peel  
1 teaspoon vanilla

Filling:  
Any kind of jam or jelly, or poppy seeds

One egg, beaten (not for dough or filling, but for the top of the buns)

Place yeast in a bowl, sprinkle with sugar, and stir until mixture liquefies. Add 2 tablespoons of flour and 2 tablespoons milk. Blend. Cover with a cloth and let rise in a warm place for 5 to 10 minutes. Add all other ingredients, and mix well with a wooden spoon. Remove bread from bowl, put on a floured pastry board, and knead until it is smooth and does not stick. Return to bowl, sprinkle with flour, and cover with a cloth. Let it rise in a warm place (about 80 degrees F) for 30 to 60 minutes or until it has almost doubled in size. Punch down and let rise again for about 30 minutes. On a lightly floured board, roll out raised dough about ½ inch thick. Cut into 3- or 4-inch squares. Put a heaping spoonful of filling in the center of each. Pull out corners of dough slightly and pinch together over center. Place buns on a buttered baking sheet and let rise. Brush with egg. Bake in a preheated oven at 400 degrees for 25 to 30 minutes. When buns are cool, sprinkle with powdered sugar.

### **Palačinky (Czech Pancakes)**

1 cup flour

1 cup milk

1 egg

1 teaspoon vanilla

1 tablespoon sugar

2 tablespoons butter, melted

¼ teaspoon salt

Mix eggs with milk. Add salt, butter, sugar, vanilla, and flour. Mix until smooth. Heat and lightly grease griddle or 6-7 inch fry pan. Make thin crepe-like pancakes by filling pan about half full in center and tilting pan so batter spreads quickly over bottom to edges. Heat until batter is dry, then turn over and cook the other side. Serve with jam, jelly, or preserves (strawberry, blackberry, apricot, etc.). Spread jam on pancake and roll up. These can be sprinkled with powdered sugar.

Serves 4.

### **References:**

[http://www.myczechrepublic.com/czech\\_culture/czech\\_cuisine.html](http://www.myczechrepublic.com/czech_culture/czech_cuisine.html)

<http://www.barnasdrug.com/recipes.html>

<http://home.earthlink.net/~tyrowen/recipes/czech.htm>

<http://www.rtis.com/reg/caldwell/czech/latkes.htm>

<http://e.schrabal.home.att.net/#beef>

Břízová, Joza. 1965. *The Czechoslovak Cookbook*. New York: Crown.

## **Kroje: Traditional clothing of the Czech Republic**

Before 1850 in the Czech lands, costumes (called “kroje” in Czech) were worn in the villages for festive occasions such as Sundays, weddings and holidays, and sometimes for ordinary days as well. Many costume designs originated from feudal ages, when oppressed peasants created elaborate costumes to express their individuality. These costumes were signs of status and nationality, since differences in geographic location influenced differences in costume design and decoration. A well-trained eye could distinguish where people were from and their social status just by looking at their clothing.

By the time of Czech immigration to America in the mid-19th century, however, clothing that showed regional origin had become rare. Czechs continued to wear traditional clothing for theater performances after 1850, and many still wear costumes today during Czech festivals. Although people now dress casually in the Czech Republic (more casually than in Western Europe), many Czechs still own one set of traditional clothing that they wear on special days. There are approximately 550 different varieties of costumes. Czechs wear work attire similar to that in the United States

Czech costumes are elaborately decorated with bright, lively colors and symbols such as hearts, bluebirds, doves, daisies, tulips, and poppies. They are often trimmed with handmade lace, embroidery, and ribbons. Red or black vests are very common for men and women. Women's costumes often include beautiful aprons, sometimes the most elaborate part of the costume. Often elements of Renaissance, Baroque, and Empire period styles are reflected in the costumes.

Examples of traditional Czech clothing (kroje)





References:

[http://server2012.virtualave.net/goodolejoe/Costumes/Westfest\\_2002.html](http://server2012.virtualave.net/goodolejoe/Costumes/Westfest_2002.html)

<http://www.czechheritage.org/CountyPages/kroje.html>

Martin, Pat. 1989. *Czechoslovak Culture: Recipes, History, and Folk Arts*. Penfield Press.

# Czech Republic: Customs and Traditions

## Czech values, attitudes, and habits

### *...about space*

- The Czech Republic, like most other European countries, is a country filled with historical cities and towns that are all very near to each other. This lack of space within the country influences Czechs' perceptions of distances. Even a one-hour drive is a significant undertaking. However, Czechs also like to travel both within the country and internationally.
- Building and housing space is also influenced by the constrictions of geography. Even in small towns, most of the population lives in apartment block buildings (the buildings themselves are called "paneláky", and a group of these buildings is called "sídliště").
- Mobility is a problem for the Czechs. Even in times of growing regional unemployment, people are reluctant to move for work. This is partially caused by the shortage of rent-controlled housing, but also by the strong attachment that many people have to the place where they grew up.
- Personal space is also more constricted. This will be discussed in further detail later.

### *...about time*

- The Czech concept of time as a commodity is similar to that in the West. People are expected to be on time. It is inappropriate to be more than 5 minutes late, especially for business meetings.
- The Czech daily schedule begins and ends earlier than in most of Western Europe and the USA. (Please refer to the "Daily schedule" heading later in this section for more specific information.)

### *...about social status*

- Czechs are egalitarian by nature and frown on status and its outward representation. Knowledge and ability are more worthy of respect. One important sign of respect is addressing people with their academic titles (see below).
- It is very important to distinguish between formal and informal language. It is imperative to address elders and other people of higher status with formal language. Consequently, it is important to distinguish which situations require different forms of address. Formal and informal forms of address are used even with people of the same age.
- The elderly command more respect by virtue of their age. For example, younger people are expected to relinquish their seats on public transportation to elderly patrons.
- The Czech dress code is different from in the West. In general, Czechs frown on shabby or unruly clothing and disregard for appearance. However, they tend to

dress less formally for work (a computer consultant in a suit is an exception) and more formally for entertainment.

*...about virtues*

- A sense of humor and an ability to take things lightly is a very important personal quality.
- Modesty is also important. For example, a proper response to a compliment is not to say thank you, but to express some kind of disagreement.
- A down-to-earth attitude is also highly regarded. King Václav IV is famous to this day for seeking advice from the commoners in disguise, and one of Václav Havel's often-quoted virtues was his propensity to drink with his friends with only one or two bodyguards.

*...about family*

- Family ties are closer than in the USA. However, one reason for this may be that families often live together because of space and financial limitations.

*...about drinking habits*

- Czechs consume the most beer per capita in the world. This number is even higher if one takes into account that most Moravians prefer wine.
- Wine and beer are never combined. However, some drinkers will put liquor into their beer.

*...about eating habits*

- Going out to eat is not common among Czechs. In fact, it is considered to be a treat. However, this is changing slowly as a more Western life-style is adopted by the younger generation.
- Table etiquette is very important. It is considered a sign of bad upbringing not to use a knife and fork in the continental manner. (Note: this is very different from American etiquette, in which it is improper to use both the knife and fork at the same time.) Of course, making any slurping noises while eating is a gross violation of etiquette.
- Traditionally, drinks are served after meals, and in some restaurants you have to ask if you want to drink before eating. It is uncommon to have a drink with your meal, unless it is a meal that requires a drink like beer (e.g., fatty dishes).
- Courses of a meal are served in a strict order (soup, main course, salad, dessert) and many combinations of foods are uncommon or downright repulsive to a Czech person.

*...about hygiene*

- *Čistota půl zdraví* (Cleanliness is half your health) is a Czech proverb, indicating that hygiene and cleanliness are important for Czechs. The Czech hygienic habits, however, differ from West European and especially American ones.
- Most notably, Czechs are not as conscious of body odor as other nations (particularly Americans and the Japanese), and many do not use deodorants.

- Czechs are, however, conscious of the cleanliness of their private environment. For example, when entering a home, visitors must take off their shoes. Also, showering or bathing is traditionally done before sleep to wash off the dirt of the day, as well as to keep bedding clean. It is absolutely unacceptable to step in one's shoes on something used for sitting, or to put up one's feet with shoes on.

...*about education*

- Education is very important to the Czechs. To obtain an academic title is an important goal for many people.

...*about foreigners*

- The Czech attitude toward foreigners is both superior and inferior. Czechs may ridicule foreigners for strange habits or foods, and despise certain behaviors typical of tourists. On the other hand, they feel respect for other countries for their economic, political, or cultural achievements.

...*about other racial groups present in the Czech Republic*

- For the last 50 years, the Czech lands have been culturally and racially homogeneous. Consequently, there is latent racism among some Czechs. 45% of the population would like for the Romany (gypsies) to leave. Czechs probably do not consciously believe that some races or nations are inherently better than others, but instead, through lack of contact with other races, a high level of xenophobia (i.e. fear of the unknown) has developed, sometimes bursting into racist violence.
- *Romany/Gypsy*: As the only significant racial and cultural minority in the Czech Republic, Romany are the target of most racist attacks.
- *Asian*: Czechs mostly come into contact with Vietnamese street vendors, who are known for cheap, lower-quality goods and are considered hard-working and harmless.
- The skinhead movement is distinctly racist. Its members, distinguished by shaved heads and green jackets, are responsible for most racial violence.

...*about personal and public space, and how it influences values*

- Observations by foreigners living in the Czech Republic: Czechs are self-contained when in public.  
     However, public displays of affection are common.  
     During public events on the streets, there often is no personal space, and people will crowd in around you. One must be assertive in train or bus lines. People will push by each other if allowed to do so.
- It is polite and expected to greet people you don't know when you walk into a small store, restaurant or waiting room, but not to engage in conversation with them. For example, if you walk into a small store, you say *Dobry den* (hello) to everybody in general but do not engage in conversation.
- It is normal to sit with strangers at one table in a restaurant for hours and not exchange a word, but it would be impolite not to say *Na shledanou* (goodbye)

- when you leave. Also, if you want to sit down at a table with strangers, you have to ask for permission, politely asking *Je tu volno?* (Is this space open?)
- Czech private space is smaller, but its boundary is firmer. This is especially obvious when compared with Americans, who require larger personal space but are much more willing to let people get into it.
  - This difference influences much that is typical of Czech culture. For example, a person has fewer friends, but those friends are closer. Also, people generally do not smile or even initiate contact with strangers. Public displays of affection are common, however, because they are happening within that close personal space with much stronger boundaries. Making noises, or anything that disturbs other people, is frowned upon.
  - It may also explain the sometimes sharp contrast between dirty and shabby public spaces and almost religiously clean homes, or other private spaces.

## Meeting people and making friends

### *Meeting new people*

- It is more difficult to make new friends in the Czech culture, particularly compared to the American culture. Although people meet one another through work and clubs, deep friendships rarely result after a short time. The most common way of meeting new people is by being introduced by a mutual friend, but even then, a friendship only forms after a long time.
- People will be surprised if you begin to talk to them, but they will talk back to you.

### *Associations and groups*

- East European cultures, including the Czech culture, are more collectivist than Western cultures. However, compared with West Europeans and Americans, Czechs are less likely to form associations or professional groups. Such groups do exist, but they are not as common in people's ordinary lives as they are in more Western countries. To take one example, there are no real equivalents to American country clubs.
- There are two possible reasons for this. First, it takes a lot of time to form full-fledged friendships with others and to meet new people. To give an example, there is no word in Czech that is equivalent to the word "networking". Second, almost a half century of communism virtually destroyed meaningful social relations. Under communism, when people joined groups, it was more or less by force, and all groups had some political context attached to them. Consequently, Czechs now appear to have a general distaste for participating in formalized groups.

### *Family*

- Families are closer, probably because children often live very close to their parents. Often, children are forced to live with their parents even after they marry because of the difficulties in finding an apartment.

### *Gender relations*

- Feminism is viewed more negatively in the Czech Republic than in the USA, probably because it receives a lot of negative publicity in the mass media as a radical movement.
- Because of its structure, the Czech language is not particularly sexist.
- However, the situation of women in the Czech Republic is far from perfect. They are still expected to be mothers and family caretakers first, and for that reason it is difficult for them to enter into certain professions. There are only a few women in politics, top medical and managerial positions. On the other hand, women have traditionally worked in all levels of education and research.

## **Czech gestures and taboos**

*Czechs are slightly more reserved than Americans. Here are some things to remember:*

### *Smiles*

- Czechs do not smile at people they do not know. People smiling in the streets are the exception to the norm. It is not a sign of unfriendliness; it just is not expected. Conversely, if you smile at people without a reason, they will be surprised. This is especially apparent when compared with Americans.

### *Counting on your fingers*

- The Czech system is as follows: 1 – thumb, 2 – thumb and index finger, 3 – thumb, index finger, middle finger, 4 – two alternatives: a) thumb tucked in, four fingers outstretched, b) the pinky finger tucked in, thumb and three fingers outstretched, 5 – all fingers.
- Interestingly, the Czech language doesn't differentiate between toes and fingers. So, a Czech has 20 fingers.

### *Gestures and body language*

- Czechs do not have many widely recognized gestures. Many gestures that are considered international are not so common in the Czech Republic.
- Below is a list of some common gestures.
  - Shrugging shoulders = *I don't know* or *I don't care*.
  - Pointing with your finger at your forehead or temple = *You are stupid*.
  - Holding thumbs in a closed fist = *wishing someone luck*
  - Thumbs up = *good*; thumbs down = *bad*
  - Slapping palm over the top of a fist = *obscene, sex-related gesture*
  - Pointing a thumb of a hand with outstretched fingers to one's nose = *ridicule, jeering*
  - Shaking a finger away from one's face = *reproach* or *accusation*

### *Taboos*

- There are few explicit taboos (other than those shared by the majority of the Western world). Talking about personal relationships is uncommon except among

close friends. It is acceptable, however, to talk about earnings, although this is changing with the new economic environment.

- Embracing/hugging is reserved in most instances. Cheek kissing is not a common greeting among Czechs. Kissing is accepted, however, when presenting awards or congratulating.
- Most Czech swear-words are stronger and therefore less acceptable than their English dictionary counterparts.
- Some Western taboos are conspicuous by their absence. Particularly in the countryside, it is still possible to talk freely about how much a person earns. Some bodily functions are also less taboo than in the English and American culture. Children can freely urinate in public, and they can also run around naked.

#### *Other generalizations made by foreigners living in the Czech Republic*

- Czechs are more afraid to show that they don't understand.
- To Czechs, Westerners, especially Americans, seem to ask more and their questions are more direct.
- Czechs often appear shy to foreigners (especially in communication with strangers).
- The "How are you?" question is more often answered with a negative attitude, even if the state of the speaker is not particularly bad.
- Czechs very often complain/express that they are not content, and they quite often underestimate themselves. It could be considered rude not to do it. Czechs rarely boast.
- Czech men are more helpful to women than may be the standard elsewhere. It is common for a man to help a woman to put on her coat, offer a seat, let her enter first (to everywhere except restaurants), and open the door for her, and women usually accept these expressions of politeness. However, men should enter restaurants first.

## **Highlights of Czech life, including holidays**

### *Daily schedule*

- By tradition, Czechs are early risers. Shops open at 7 a.m., and offices open at 8. Factory workers often begin work even earlier. This trait is attributed to the insomniac emperor Franz Josef II from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, who liked to start business at 6 in the morning.
- Everything closes down earlier than in the USA. Shops close between 5 and 7 p.m., and offices close even earlier. There used to be so-called "night shops", which would stay open until 10 p.m. and charge an extra 10% for their service.
- In Prague, due to tourist and expatriate influence, opening hours are more international. However, the farther one goes from the center, the more traditional time constraints become.
- Restaurants and most pubs close between 10 and 11 p.m. Some bars (mostly in the center of Prague) close later, and some even stay open through the night.

- Theater shows start between 7 and 8 p.m. The last movie in Prague starts at 9:30 p.m., but most typically begin at 8 p.m.
- Most schools start at 8 a.m., but some classes may start at 7:15, even at the university level.
- All of this affects the average Czech's daily schedule. Most Czechs get up at 6 or 7 a.m. and start work between 7 and 8 a.m. Lunch is between 12 and 1 p.m. Often people arrive at home at 4 or 5 p.m., have dinner at 6 or 7, and go to bed at 10 or 11.
- If you want to socialize with Czechs, you must adapt to this schedule. Even young people do not go out later than 8 p.m., but often as early as 6 p.m. Parties run past midnight only exceptionally, as people typically go home around 11 p.m.

#### *Weeks and weekends*

- The Czech calendar starts the week with Monday and ends with Sunday. Contrast this with the American week, which begins on Sunday and ends on Saturday.
- Friday afternoon is a bad time to try to get anything done. Traditionally, weekend shopping is done on Friday afternoon and Saturday morning, so the shops are crowded.
- Many Czechs leave the city to spend the weekend at their summer house or cottage, called *chata* or *chalupa*. Gardening is a common hobby, and many families grow most of their vegetables. Even city dwellers may have a small garden on the edge of town.

#### *During the year*

- Like all Europeans, Czechs recognize four seasons. The year begins on January 1<sup>st</sup> with the president's address to the nation. The next important and widely celebrated holiday is Easter. The tradition on Easter is for children to go trick-or-treating, the act of which is called a *koleda*. A traditional treat is a painted boiled egg or eggshell or a sweet bread baked in the shape of a lamb. In a pagan tradition, men beat women with a woven stick and women pour scented water over men.
- July and August are summer break from school, and also a time when most people take their vacations. Schools and many other institutions are closed or have reduced working hours.
- The school year starts on September 1 (October 1 for universities). There is a break for Christmas and also one week-long break later in the spring.
- December starts with a holiday reminiscent of a combination of Halloween and Santa Claus, called *Mikuláš*. Saint Nicholas, accompanied by an angel and a devil or two, walks through town, visits families, and gives treats or small gifts to children if they've been good.
- Christmas for Czechs is actually celebrated on December 24th, when the Christmas dinner (specially-bred carp and potato salad) takes place and gifts are exchanged. Gifts are brought by a mysterious baby Jesus (*ježíšek*) and there is no tale about where they come from. Except for Christians (who are the majority of religious believers in the Czech Republic; approximately 42% of Czechs consider

themselves Christians, 40% atheist, 16% agnostic, and 2% other), December 25th has no special significance.

Reference:

<http://www.bohemica.com/?m=catalog&s=32&a=29>



*Charles Bridge in Prague*



*Prague Castle and Vltava River*

## **Holidays in the Czech Republic**

### **January 1: New Year**

On January 1, families have a special lunch to celebrate the New Year. The meal is often a “řízek” (“schnitzel” in German, a breaded pork steak) and potatoes.

### **March 8: International Women’s Day**

On this day, women receive flowers from family members, friends, and co-workers.

### **Easter Monday**

Easter Monday is the main Easter holiday in the Czech Republic. In the morning, men and boys visit friends, carrying “pomlazkas,” which are braided willow sticks with colorful ribbons tied at the end. They chase and whip the women and girls of each place they visit with the “pomlazkas.” The women and girls are obligated to give the men and boys colored eggs in return. This custom is practiced to ensure the health and fertility of the participants.

### **April 30: Burning of Witches**

Huge bonfires burn on the hills in the Czech Republic on the evening of April 30. Young people gather around the bonfires and celebrate late into the night. This ancient pagan tradition, called the “Burning of Witches,” symbolizes the end of winter and beginning of spring.

### **May 1: Labor Day**

During the communist era, it was required to participate in the float parades that took place on this day. Czechoslovak and Soviet flags hung everywhere and current communist party officials were honored, in addition to former Marxist-Leninist leaders. All citizens were to wave their paper flags and cheer enthusiastically along with the Russian working class songs that were played from loudspeakers. Today, there are still float parades on this day, although the communist influence is gone.

**May 5: Prague Uprising (1945)**

Although Berlin was captured and Hitler was dead by May 5, German troops were still fighting in Czechoslovakia on this day. The Prague Radio Station was attacked by the German army and called for help. Ordinary citizens fought with weapons to protect the radio station. Now known as the Prague Uprising, on this day Czech citizens took an active part in fighting the remaining German troops until the arrival of the liberating American and Russian Armies.

**May 8: Liberation Day (1945)**

Liberation Day was celebrated until recently on May 9, which was the day when Russian troops arrived in Prague. The western part of Czechoslovakia was liberated by Americans. Now Liberation Day is celebrated on May 8, probably because that is when the Americans liberated western Czechoslovakia.

**July 5: Cyril and Methodius (863)**

Cyril and Methodius, two missionary brothers from Thessalonica, spoke several languages, including the (unwritten) Slavonic language. Cyril created a Slavonic alphabet and translated the Bible into written Slavonic. The brothers arrived in Moravia in 863 and established a church there. They are credited with creating the alphabet and bringing Christianity to the Czech lands.

**July 6: Jan Hus (1415)**

Jan Hus, one of the most important figures in Czech history, was a Catholic priest and reformer. He preached in the Bethlehem Chapel in Prague and developed a large following. Tried for heresy, he refused to denounce his statements in exchange for his life. He was burned at the stake in 1415. His last words were, "The truth will prevail." These words are inscribed on the Czech presidential insignia. The Moravian Church that has spread around the world has its roots in teachings of Jan Hus. Jan Hus is referred to as John Huss in English.

**August 21: Anniversary of Occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact (1968)**

Although it is unmarked in official calendars, many people still remember this anniversary because of its long-term impact on Czech politics and society.

**October 28: Independence Day (1918)**

Czechoslovakia was granted independence from the Austro-Hungarian Empire after World War I on October 28, 1918. Tomas Garrigue Masaryk was the first Czechoslovak president.

**November 2: Day of the Souls**

Although small compared to the scale of the Day of the Dead in Mexico, on this day or the weekend before, people honor their dead relatives and visit their graves.

**November 17: Students' Day (1939)**

Students have traditionally played a pivotal role in the struggle for democracy and freedom in the Czech Republic. On November 17, 1939, students staged massive protests in Prague against the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia. Jan Opletal, a student demonstrator, was killed by the Nazis on this day. Later, Jan Palach, another student, set himself on fire on January 16, 1969, to protest the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia. November 17, 1989 was the beginning of the Velvet Revolution, the collapse of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia. The Velvet Revolution started as a legal rally to commemorate the death of Jan Opletal in 1939, but turned into a demonstration demanding democratic reforms.

**December 6: St. Nicholas**

On the evening of December 6, children receive sweets from St. Nicholas. He arrives in a priestly robe and a hat, accompanied by an angel and a devil. The devil tries to scare the children. Sometimes, there is a piece of coal from him in the bag with sweets, especially if a child wasn't always good during the past year. A similar tradition exists in other European countries. St. Nicholas was a priest in Turkey in ancient times.

**December 24: Christmas Day**

The main Christmas celebration in the Czech culture takes place on December 24 (American Christmas Eve). On this day, families decorate the Christmas tree and prepare a special dinner. A traditional Czech Christmas meal consists of a fish soup with vegetables and croutons, fried breaded carp (fish) fillets, and a potato salad. Carp are raised for this occasion in ponds around Třeboň in Southern Bohemia. They are sold live just before Christmas. Some people choose to have them killed in the store, but many bring them home alive and keep them in their bathtubs until they are ready to make dinner. After dinner, everyone gathers around the Christmas tree to open the presents. In the Czech tradition, it is said that the Christmas tree and presents are brought by baby Jesus. Santa Claus is not part of traditional Czech Christmas culture.

**December 25 and 26: Christmas Holidays**

Time to rest, be thankful, and visit relatives and friends.

**December 31: Silvestr (New Year's Eve)**

As elsewhere in the world, this is the celebration of the coming year.

**Name days**

People in the Czech Republic celebrate name days, in addition to birthdays. Every Czech name is assigned one day in the calendar year. Name days are similar to birthdays, only on a slightly smaller scale.

Czech traditions are a combination of Christian and pagan traditions. An example of a Christian tradition is Christmas, as well as the children's belief that the Christmas tree and presents are brought by baby Jesus. Also, the breaded carp fillets for dinner on Christmas Eve symbolize Christianity, since the ancient symbol of Christianity was fish. A lot of traditional Czech Christmas carols are about baby Jesus being born in

Bethlehem. Most people in the Czech Republic are not religious, however. An example of a pagan tradition is the “Burning of Witches.”

Since the Velvet Revolution, Czech society has been exposed to many American influences. Santa Claus has been seen in Czech department stores and advertising, and Czech kids have started to celebrate Halloween. Mothers’ Day is also a new holiday in the Czech Republic.

References:

<http://www.mcaonline.ca/prague/holidays.html>

<http://www.czech.cz/index.php?section=4&menu=16&action=new&id=516>

## Religion in the Czech Republic

Many people, approximately 40%, in the Czech Republic are atheists. The communist regime taught atheism in school social studies classes, dissolved religious orders, and sentenced many clergy members to imprisonment. Many historical church buildings were taken over by the government under communism and made into public institutions. Nevertheless, an “underground church” continued to exist alongside the official religious bodies that were sanctioned by the government. The underground church played a role in the opposition movement and the collapse of communism in 1989.

The Czech Republic traditionally has been Roman Catholic, and many Czech customs are rooted in Christianity. The Catholic Church currently is trying to reclaim properties that were confiscated during the communist era. The Church is also trying to have more influence in the Czech Republic, but this is met with some resistance. This partly is rooted in history, as evidenced in the problematic relationship between Czechs and the Catholic Church since the Hussite movement in the 15th century. The Austro-Hungarian Empire’s domination of the Czech lands meant that Czechs were forced to convert to Catholicism or emigrate. Consequently, many Czechs who converted only practiced Catholicism superficially and remained faithful to their old beliefs, and Catholicism became associated with a foreign power.

There are some smaller churches in the Czech Republic, mainly Protestant. The Moravian Church, which was founded by followers of John Huss (Jan Hus), has spread around the world.

### References:

<http://www.mcaonline.ca/prague/religion.html>

Jakobsmeier, Werner. 1993. “The Religious Spectrum.” In Alfred Horn, Tony Halliday, and Brian Bell, eds., *Insight Guides: Czech and Slovak Republics*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.



*Kutna Hora*

# The Czech language

## Origins

Czech, along with Slovak and Polish, is part of the western group of Slavic languages. It is more loosely related to the east Slavic group of languages (Ukrainian, Belorussian, and Russian) and the southern Slavic group (Bulgarian, Macedonian, Slovene, Serbian, and Croatian). As a Slavic language, Czech is part of the eastern division of Indo-European languages.

Czech is different from other Slavic languages because of a number of changes that took place during the 10<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The medieval Latin alphabet was used to write down Czech names and words without any modifications until the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. With the arrival of more extensive Czech texts, a combinatorial writing system appeared, using combinations of two or three letters (digraphs and trigraphs) to write down Czech sounds that had no equivalent in the Latin alphabet. At the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the religious reformer Jan Hus devised a diacritical writing system, placing diacritical marks over some Latin letters to distinguish the Czech palatalized consonants (č, dʰ, ň, ř, š, ť, ž) and long vowels (á, é, í, ó, ú, ý). Digraphs and letters with diacritical marks were used in manuscripts and prints alongside each other for several centuries, but the diacritical system prevailed in the end. The only digraph surviving in modern Czech is ch, with a sound similar to that of the German ch or Russian x.

Czech has been influenced by a number of languages, especially Old Church Slavonic (introduced into the area by the Byzantine missionaries Constantine and Methodius in the 9<sup>th</sup> century), Latin (once the Pan-European language of learning), and German (the language of numerous colonists, as well as the main language of the Habsburg empire). From the 14<sup>th</sup> century onward, Czech was the language of a continuous stream of literary production, although for most of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Czech language was used rather infrequently for higher literary purposes. The language has been recorded, described, and analyzed in a number of grammar books (the first grammar book dating from 1533) and dictionaries (the first dictionaries, written in verse, originated in the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century).

## A brief history of the Czech language

Czech is the main language in the Czech Republic, spoken by around ten million people. Minority languages include German, Polish and Romani, but Czech is the native tongue of the overwhelming majority. It is a Slavic language, very closely related to Slovak (Czechs and Slovaks understand one another with little difficulty), and also similar to Polish and Russian. Although Czech may sound baffling to many West Europeans or Americans visiting the Czech Republic, it is an Indo-European language like French, German, or English. The Czech language's grammatical structure is similar to Latin, in that it has a complex system of different noun and adjective cases.

The Slavs first settled in the territory of the Czech Republic around the 6<sup>th</sup> century, and the first written Slav language there was Old Church Slavonic. The main literary language for most of the medieval period, however, was Latin. Czech gradually

developed as a distinct language, and many texts still survive from the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. Czech culture blossomed under the 14<sup>th</sup> century emperor, Charles IV, but faced turbulent times with the Hussite wars that came soon afterwards. With the onset of rule by the Austrian Habsburg dynasty, Czech went into decline as a written language, and German became the language of the elite. Czech remained the language of the countryside. To this day there is a strong German influence in the Czech language. It was not until the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that deliberate attempts began to reverse the decline of the Czech language. With the National Revival movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Czech rapidly gained ground in most areas of education and public life. Prague's National Theatre, built on the banks of the Vltava River, is probably the defining symbol of this revival, which culminated in 1918 with the collapse of the Habsburg Empire and the foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic. Although Czechoslovakia was a multi-lingual country with three million German speakers, a similar number of Slovak speakers, and around a million Hungarian speakers, Czech was the dominant language of the administration. During the Nazi occupation in the Second World War, German again became the official language. After the war, however, Czech again became the prominent language.

During the communist period (1948 to 1989), the regime often used the Czech language as a political tool, stressing its similarities to Russian. Since the collapse of communism, however, Russian is no longer the most studied language in the Czech Republic. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of English words in modern Czech, often connected with the realms of business, retail, computers or popular culture.

## **What to say in Czech**

### **Czech greetings:**

Ahoj! – Hi! Bye! (informal)

Čau! – Hi! (literally, “Ciao!” - very informal)

Nazdar! – Hello! Hi! (informal)

Dobrý den. – Hello. Good day. (most common form of greeting, formal)

Dobré ráno/jitro. – Good morning.

Dobrý večer. – Good evening.

Dobrou noc. – Good night.

Na shledanou. – Goodbye. (formal)

Měj(te) se (hezky). – Have a nice time. (very common phrase)\*

Šťastnou cestu! – Have a good trip/journey!

### **Thanks:**

Děkuji (official) / Děkuju (Prague dialect). – Thank you.

Děkuji (or) nechci. - No, thank you; no.

Děkuji. - Nápodobně. – Thank you. The same to you.

Díky. – Thanks.

Díky moc. – Thanks a lot.

Srdečně/mnohokrát děkuji. – Thank you very much.

Není zač. – You're welcome. Don't mention it.

Prosím tě/vás... – Please... \*

Bud'(te) (prosím) tak laskav... – Would you be so kind as (to)... \*

**Introducing and addressing:**

Jak se máš/máte? - How are you?\*

Dovolte, abych se představil (if you are male; představila if you are female). - Let me introduce myself.

Těší mě. - Nice to meet you.

Zlom(te) vaz! – Break a leg!\*

Dámy a pánové! – Ladies and gentlemen!

Pozdravujte ode mne... – Give my regards to...

Promiňte. – Excuse me. I beg your pardon.

Vstupte./Dále. – Come in.

Prosím?/Haló! (on the telephone) – Hello./Yes?

Tady (name). (on the telephone) – (Name) speaking.

Dobrou chuť. – Bon appétit!

Nechte si chutnat. – Enjoy your meal.

\* -te at the end of a word shows respect to an elder, someone you do not know, a doctor, professor, etc. It is the norm to include the (-te) suffix when speaking to most people, with the exception of your friends and family.

**References:**

<http://www.czech-language.cz/overview/origin.html>

<http://archiv.radio.cz/php/parse.phtml?start=/english/language/>

## Czech Pronunciation Guide

Note: The čárka, (such as á) in Czech is an indication of length, not accent.

A	a	as in <u>f</u> ather but shorter
Á	á	same as <u>a</u> but longer
B	b	as in <u>b</u> ank
C	c	as <u>ts</u> in <u>hats</u>
Č	č	as <u>ch</u> in <u>church</u>
D	d	as in <u>d</u> ime
Ď	ď	as in <u>d</u> uel (British Pronunciation: "dyuel")
E	e	as in <u>n</u> et
É	é	as <u>e</u> but longer
F	f	as in <u>f</u> ame
G	g	as in <u>g</u> lory
H	h	as in <u>h</u> and; unlike English <u>h</u> --the vocal cords vibrate
Ch	ch	as in <u>Bach</u>
I	i	as in <u>i</u> t
Í	í	as in <u>i</u> t but longer
J	j	as in <u>y</u> es
K	k	as in <u>K</u> arla
L	l	as in <u>l</u> et
M	m	as in <u>m</u> an
N	n	as in <u>n</u>
Ň	ň	as in <u>o</u> nion

O	o	as in y <u>o</u> del
Ó	ó	same as <u>o</u> but longer
P	p	as in p <u>e</u> ar
R	r	rolled <u>r</u>
Ř	ř	no English equivalent, say <u>ž</u> and at the same time pronounce a rolled <u>r</u> ; a rare and difficult sound
S	s	as in s <u>a</u> ng
Š	š	as in s <u>h</u> oot
T	t	as in t <u>a</u> me
Ť	ť	as in t <u>u</u> ne (British pronunciation: "tyune")
U	u	as in d <u>o</u>
Ú	ú	as in r <u>oo</u> m
V	v	as in v <u>a</u> in
Y	y	same as <u>i</u>
Ý	ý	same as in <u>i</u>
Z	z	as in z <u>e</u> nith
Ž	ž	same as in m <u>ea</u> sure

References:

Machann, Clinton and James W. Mendl. 1983. *Krásná Amerika: A Study of the Texas Czechs, 1851 -1939*. Austin, TX: Eakin Press.  
<http://www.angelfire.com/tx5/texaszech/References/Czech%20Alphabet%20Pronunciation%20Guide.htm>

## The system of education in the Czech Republic

*Education is compulsory from ages 6 to 15.*

### **Basic:**

*Similar to American elementary and middle school; there is only one type of basic school.*

Age level: from age 6 to 15

Length of program in years: 9

Certificate/diploma awarded: “vysvědčení”

### **Secondary:**

*Secondary school is similar to American high school, but there are roughly three different types of secondary education that are very common: gymnasium, technical school, and vocational school.*

Gymnasiums prepare students for study at higher educational institutions and for professions. The secondary technical schools and 4-year courses or 3-year follow-up courses at secondary vocational schools prepare students for a wide range of professions, as well as for studies at higher educational institutions. The 2-year and 3-year courses at the vocational schools prepare students for professional activities. At the end of their studies at each type of school, students must pass the *Maturitní zkouška/Maturita* in order to graduate.

*There are three types of gymnasium:*

#### General Secondary, type 1 (Gymnázium):

Admission after 5<sup>th</sup> year of basic school

Length of program in years: 8

Age level: from age 11 to 19

Certificate/diploma awarded: “Maturitní vysvědčení”

#### General Secondary, type 2 (Gymnázium):

Admission after 7<sup>th</sup> year of basic school

Length of program in years: 6

Age level: from age 13 to 19

#### Academic Secondary (Gymnázium):

Type of school providing this education: Grammar School (Gymnasium)

Length of program in years: 4

Age level: from age 15 to 19

*There is one type of technical school:*

#### Technical Secondary (Technical, Health Care, Management, Arts, etc)

Length of program in years: 4

Age level: from age 15 to 19

*There are two types of vocational school:*

Vocational Secondary, type 1

Length of program in years: 4

Age level: from age 15 to 19

Certificate/diploma awarded: “Maturitní vysvědčení”

Vocational Secondary, type 2

Length of program in years: 3

Age level: from age 15 to 18

Certificate/diploma awarded: Vocational certificate

Professional (follow-up to secondary, but not university-level)

Length of program in years: 3

Age level from: 19 to 21

Certificate/diploma awarded: “Absolutorium”

**Higher:**

Higher education is provided by universities and other types of institutions. The non-university higher educational institutions mainly offer programs that terminate in a Bachelors degree. Universities, on the other hand, offer Bachelors, Masters and Doctoral study programs. In general, higher educational institutions offer courses in the Humanities, Social Sciences and Natural Sciences, as well as Engineering, Medicine, Pharmacy, Theology, Economics, Veterinary Medicine, Agriculture, Education, Law, Architecture and the Arts. The majority of higher educational institutions are public, which means that they are financed solely by the state.

*Grading system:*

1: výborná – excellent

2: velmi dobrá (very good)

3: dobrá (good)

4: vyhověl (pass)

5: nevyhověl (unsatisfactory/fail)

*Academic year:* from September to August, with summer vacation from June 15 to September 1.

*Languages of instruction:* Czech, English, German

*University level studies:*

University level first stage: Bachelor studies (Bc. = “Bakalář”)

Bachelor studies programs normally take three to four years, and they cover all disciplines except Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Pharmacy, Architecture and Law. Bachelor studies are undertaken by students who wish to qualify for certain professions, or as the first stage of longer study toward the Master’s degree (“Magistr”). Bachelor

studies lead to the degree of “Bakalář” (Bc.) or Bakalář umění (BcA.) in the field of arts. After completing their coursework, students must take a state examination, which also serves as part of the Bachelor thesis defense.

University level second stage: Master studies (Mgr. = “Magistr”)

Master studies programs in the Humanities, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, Education, Pharmacy, Theology, Law and Arts last for five years and lead to the title of Magistr (Mgr.). In Economics, Agriculture and Chemistry, studies last for five years and lead to the title of Inženýr (Ing.). In Engineering, studies last from five to five and a half years, and also lead to the title of Inženýr (Ing.). Master studies last for six years in the fields of Architecture, Veterinary Medicine, and Medicine, and graduates receive the degrees of “Doktor medicíny” (MUDr) and “Doktor veterinární medicíny” (MVDr).

University level third stage: Doctoral studies (Dr. or PhD = “Doktor”)

This is the third and highest level of higher education. Studies for the doctorate are taken under the guidance of an advisor, and are geared toward independent study and scientific research. Potential students must already hold a Master’s degree in order to apply. Doctoral studies last for three years (full-time) and end in a state examination and dissertation defense. The highest scientific degree is “Doktor Věd” (Doctor of Science), which is awarded for original research work and the public defense of the doctoral thesis.

References:

<http://www.czech.cz/index.php?section=5&menu=8>



*Canal at Kampa, Mala Strana, Prague*

## **Architecture in the Czech Republic**

For students of architecture, the Czech Republic is a rare paradise. Untouched buildings from every major architectural era, beginning with the Gothic period, are abundant in this country. The city of Prague is an exceptional microcosm of architectural artifacts as well, primarily because it escaped the heavy Allied bombing from which many other European cities suffered in the World Wars. The only exception, at least in Prague, is the bombing at the site where the Fred and Ginger Building now stands (called the “Dancing House” in Czech). After the previous building was destroyed, American architect Frank Gehry was commissioned to design this very modern building with the new materials available in the mid-20th century, such as bent iron and glass.

### **Romanesque period**

The pre-Romanesque and Romanesque period lasted from the 9<sup>th</sup> to mid-13<sup>th</sup> century in Bohemia. The Romanesque period began the era of medieval architecture, which lasted until the Renaissance in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Italian humanists coined the term “middle ages” or “medieval” in the 15<sup>th</sup> century to refer what they considered the time between the decline of the classic antique culture after the fall of Rome and its revival in Italy in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Romanesque architecture used the culture of the former Roman Empire as its template and foundation, but it was in many ways a primitive substitute of Roman architecture.

In general, Romanesque architecture is characterized by its use of a rounded arch and vault, the substitution of piers instead of columns, the use of arcades for decoration, and grand ornamentation. Many Romanesque buildings were of a special type of basilica, with a longitudinal, east-oriented temple with central and side bodies, and an emperor’s throne. These basilicas that faced toward the east were connected with the worship of the sun, much like in pre-Christian temples. In a Christian basilica, the place of emperor was assumed by Jesus Christ.

Romanesque buildings in Bohemia include the Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Budeč (built 900 AD, reconstructed late 12<sup>th</sup> century), the Churches of Saint Wenceslas and Saint Climent in Stara Boleslav (10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries), and the Rotunda of Saint Peter in Starý Plzenec (10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century). In Prague, Romanesque buildings include the Crypt of the Basilica of the Benedictine in Břevnov (late 11<sup>th</sup> century), the princely residence at Vyšehrad (1070-1135), and the Rotunda of Saint Cross the Smaller (early 12<sup>th</sup> century). In the Prague Castle complex, the Church of the Virgin (882-884, restored in the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> centuries), the Church of Saint George (920), and the Rotunda of Saint Vitus (before 935, modified in 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries) are examples of Romanesque architecture.

### **Gothic period**

The Gothic period in architecture began around the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century and lasted until the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. Although this style’s origins are in France (the Franks), the term “Gothic” originally was applied misleadingly to the arts of the barbarian tribes of Gothes (Germans). This term was used to refer to the style of architecture that differed

completely from the classical styles of ancient Rome, and it was used disparagingly by the Renaissance Italians who sought to destroy the style. The Gothic style, particularly embodied in cathedrals, arose simultaneously with the unification of France.

The most well-known features of Gothic architecture include the cross-ribbed vault, the broken arch, tall ceilings, rich decoration, and emphasis on the role of light. Gothic features were meant to educate believers about the world as the Lord's creation through pictures (painted glass, icons, etc.) and with allegories.

Examples of Gothic architecture in the Czech Republic are numerous. In Bohemia, there is the Cistercian Cloister with the Church of Virgin Mary Ascension in Osek (built mid-14<sup>th</sup> century), Křivoklát Castle (early to mid-13<sup>th</sup> century), and Týrov Castle (early 13<sup>th</sup> century). In Prague, the Gothic style is manifest in the Fortification of the Old Town (1230s-1250s), the Convent of St. Agnes (1230s-1270s), and the Church of St. Francis (after 1252). In the Prague Castle complex, the Old Royal Palace (1333, reconstructed after 1383) is a fine example of Gothic architecture.

### **Renaissance**

In Italy, the Renaissance arose organically from national medieval art blended with classical traditions. Renaissance architecture is neoclassical in purpose, as it took the ancient Greek and Roman classical style of architecture as its starting point. However, in the Czech lands and other transalpine countries, embracing the Renaissance meant embracing a total ideological change. The Italian Renaissance's influence slowly became apparent as the vertical buildings of the Gothic period stood alongside new, horizontal lines in buildings with flatter roofs. In the Czech lands, the adaptation of Italian Renaissance architecture incorporated local folk traditions as well, leading to a new style called the "Czech Renaissance."

Renaissance buildings in Bohemia include the Chateau Moravská Třebová (late 14<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries), Chateau Březnice (1500), and Chateau Benešov nad Ploučnicí (mid 16<sup>th</sup> century). In Prague, Renaissance architecture is embodied in the New Game Preserve (Hvězda) and Summerhouse Hvězda (1541-1563) and the Fountain in Old Town (1560). In the Prague Castle complex, there are the Old Royal Palace's facades of Vladislaus Hall (1493), its portals (1510-1520), and the portal of Saint George Church (1520).

### **Baroque period**

The Baroque influence of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries was particularly strong in the Czech lands, and it remains one of the most abundant, consistent, and preserved type of architecture in this area today. Indeed, the Czech Republic is considered one of the classically Baroque countries, and Czech Baroque architecture is in the core of European culture. The origins of Czech Baroque architecture are in the court community of Emperor Rudolf II of the Habsburg Empire in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, and examples of this are all over Prague. The Baroque style of architecture is characterized by the use of complicated forms, daring ornamentation, and the juxtaposition of divergent elements in order to convey drama and movement.

Baroque structures in Bohemia include the Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in Stará Boleslav (1617-1623, completed after 1728), Church of Saint Ignatius and Saint Francis Xavier with the Jesuit college in Březnice (1642-1673), and the Loretta and Chateau Mikulov (1624-1656, 1700-1706). In Prague, examples of Baroque architecture can be found in Wallenstein Palace (1623-1631) and the Church of the Virgin Mary Victorious (early to mid 16<sup>th</sup> century). In the Prague Castle complex, there is the Lobkowitz Palace (1651-1668), the pavilion in the Hartig garden (late 17<sup>th</sup> century), and the Old Provostship (1662).

### **19<sup>th</sup> century**

19<sup>th</sup> century architecture was mainly an amalgamation of previous styles, as well as new minor styles popular at the time, such as Gothic revival, neo-Renaissance, neo-classicist, Greek, and neo-Baroque. No distinct style emerged from this period.

Examples of the wide variety of architecture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Bohemia include Bouzov Castle (1895-1901), Okružní Třída in Brno (1845-1914), and the Memorial of Peace on Františkov in Brno (1816-1818). In Prague, 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture can be seen in the Estates Theater in Old Town (1781-1783), Strahov Library (1783-1794), and the Klamovka in Smichov (1787-1820). In the Prague Castle complex, 19<sup>th</sup> century structures include St. Vitus Cathedral (1861-1929), Spanish Hall and Rudolf's Gallery (1865-1868), and the New Provostship (1878-1880).

### **20<sup>th</sup> century**

The new technologies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century fostered massive shifts in architectural trends. New building materials, such as iron and concrete, made new designs possible. While no architectural style was dominant during this period, as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century many different influences could be seen. One new style that was influential was Art Nouveau, which began in the mid-1890s in Belgium and Austria. Art Nouveau's defining characteristics included oriental decorativeness, natural motifs, asymmetry, and vibrant color. Art Nouveau did not catch on in the Czech lands until the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as many conservative Czech nationalists denounced it as a foreign style. Soon, however, it was embraced by such famous Czech architects as Jan Kotěra and Osvald Polívka. The most prominent example of Art Nouveau architecture in Prague is the Municipal Building (Obecní Dum), which was decorated by a wide variety of sculptors, painters, and decorators. Kotěra and other architects of the time wanted to modernize Prague's architecture to make it comparable with the modern centers of Paris, Berlin, Vienna, and Budapest, and so a building boom began. In Prague and other industrial centers, both urbanistic and rustic architectural styles developed as well.



*Prague's Obecní Dum, in Art Nouveau style*

20<sup>th</sup> century architecture is found in Bohemia in the City Museum in Hradec Králové (1907-1913), the Jarušek House in Brno (1909-1910), and the Wenke House in Jaroměř (1909-1910). In Prague, 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings include the Peterka House (Art Nouveau, 1899-1900), Hotel Central (Art Nouveau, 1899-1901), and the Main Railway Station (Art Nouveau, 1901-1909). In the Prague Castle complex, 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture includes the modifications of the first and third inner courtyards and gardens (1920-1935), the official residence of the President in the New Royal Palace (1921-1929), and the Tomb of Czech Kings in St. Vitus Cathedral (1929-1935).



*Entrance to Prague Castle*

References:

<http://www.czech.cz/index.php?section=4&menu=15>

<http://search.eb.com/ebi/article?eu=294682>

"Architecture." 2003. Britannica Student Encyclopedia.

<http://search.eb.com/eb/article?eu=119563>

"Architecture, History of Western." 2003. Encyclopædia Britannica.

<http://search.eb.com/eb/article?eu=38241>

"Gothic Art." 2003. Encyclopædia Britannica.

## **Music in the Czech Republic: Classical Music**

### **Renaissance period (15<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century)**

The Renaissance period is characterized by an emphasis on individualism. This emphasis changed the status of musical composers in society, resulting in a wider distribution of living composers' music than during the medieval period. Music during this period increasingly became secularized, although religious music was still common as well. New instruments were invented, such as the clavichord and lute, and existing instruments were improved. In comparison to medieval music, Renaissance music was more expressive and unrestrained.

In the Czech lands, the organ became prevalent as singing was connected to instrumental church music. During this time, the organ was built in the famous St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague. However, the most important musical institution in the area was the court ensemble, which was a group of singers with organ and other instrumental music. The lute became an important part of the instrumental accompaniment to vocal performances in the Czech lands. By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, secular Czech folk songs became particularly prominent.

### **Baroque period (17<sup>th</sup> century)**

Compared to music from the Renaissance period, Baroque music is very rich and textured. A prime example of this is opera, which developed during this period. Opera combined poetry, theater, visual arts, and music for the first time in musical history. It arose in response to the period's attention to the expression of human emotion and natural phenomena, as evident in such works as Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*. Another Baroque creation was the orchestra, which developed as an accompaniment to operas and other vocal arrangements. The most popular baroque musical genre was the *concerto*, in which solo musicians (or small groups of soloists) played "in concert" with an orchestra.

Opera came to Bohemia for the first time in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, but did not become popular until the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. A number of Czech Baroque composers and musicians are well-known, such as Adam Michna, Jan Zelenka, Bohuslav Černohorský, and Josef Seger.

### **Classical period (18<sup>th</sup> century)**

As the name suggests, music from the Classical period looked to the ideals of ancient Greece and Rome – balance, proportion, and discipline – in contrast to the Baroque focus on ornamentation and rich melodies. New genres emerged during the Classical period, such as the distinct style of the Classical sonata, which gave dramatic character to instrumental pieces through contrasts in the music. Public concerts also became common, allowing composers to survive without being permanent employees of the aristocracy and allowing ordinary people to have access to classical music. The increasing popularity of public concerts led to a growth in the popularity of the orchestra, as well as the enlargement of the number of musicians and the number of orchestras overall.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, European social and musical evolution incorporated some of the characteristic features of the Czech popular music tradition. Consequently, Czech music was able to significantly emerge onto the European social scene during this period. A number of creative Classical composers from the Czech lands include František Xaver Brixl, Jan Antonín Koželuh, and Josef Mysliveček.

### **Romantic era (19<sup>th</sup> century)**

In comparison to the Classicism of the previous period, Romanticism brought fantasy, spontaneity, and sensitivity to music. While it attempted to retain Classicism's balance between emotional intensity and classical form, music of the Romantic Era became even more expressive, attempting to tell a story even in purely instrumental compositions. This era focused on the color of sound and the exoticness that different sounds could portray, employing new instruments and playing old instruments in different ways. This era also brought folk music into classical music, particularly as nationalism in musical styles became important in the later Romantic period.

This period coincided with the National Revival in the Czech lands. The clearest influence of the Czech National Revival on music was in opera. It was during this period that the Czech national song, "Kde Domov Můj" ("Where is My Home?"), was written. Famous composers of this period include Bedřich Smetana, who wrote such famous operas as "The Bartered Bride," Antonín Dvořák, composer of the famous "Slavonic Dances," and Zdeněk Fibich, well-known for his Third Symphony in E Minor.

### **20<sup>th</sup> century**

Depending on one's view, classical music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be viewed as a continuation of Romanticism, or a reaction against it. The 20<sup>th</sup> century's classical musical scene was fully heterogeneous due to the influence of new or resurgent forces, including nationalism, jazz and pop music, and new technology (e.g., recorded or electronically-generated music).

In the Czech lands, the 20<sup>th</sup> century also saw dramatic changes in musical style as embodied in the works of several Czech composers. Josef Bohuslav Foerster was a composer of many songs and orchestral pieces at the cusp of this new era. Vítězslav Novák is credited with the destruction of Czech modernism, using folk songs as his musical inspiration. A composer who today is thought to have been the musical heir to Dvořák in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is Josef Suk, while Otakar Ostrčil embodied the spirit of his teacher Fibich in his symphonic poems, melodramas, and ballads. Leoš Janáček advanced Czech modernism with his new musical style, influenced by folklore and ethnography. Bohuslav Martinů was a politically aware, anti-Romantic composer whose prolific works make him one of the best-known Czech composers.

### Reference:

<http://archiv.radio.cz/hudba/indexeng.html>

## Popular Music in the Czech Republic

Popular music has a thriving cultural life in the Czech Republic. It also has played an important historical role in the dissident movement spurring the Velvet Revolution of 1989, particularly though the band “Plastic People of the Universe,” whose persecution by the communist regime led to the formation of the Charter 77 human rights movement.

Evolving from traditional folk music, popular music in the Czech Republic has undergone major changes since the 1950s. In the 1950s, pseudo-puritanical Czech popular music, derived from folklore, saturated the socialist radio broadcasts. As a result, many folk musicians withdrew from this communist-influenced, popularized national music and began to look outside the Czech Republic for inspiration.

In the 1960s, popular musicians were heavily influenced by American folk songs and spirituals, and many included such songs in their repertoire. Musicians began to look to other Czech folk stories to use in their music, such as urban folklore and folklore from much earlier period, which the music in the 1950s missed. Czech musicians also focused on poetic and lyrical expression in their music.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, Czech music began to incorporate protest music against the regime. Music from the rock group “Plastic People of the Universe” and the folk group “Šafrán” were emblematic of this period. However, the communist regime began a crackdown on such protest music, and several folk singers were forced to emigrate (such as Karel Kryl) or stop playing altogether. By the late 1970s, most independent folk music was replaced by rock bands who emulated Western rock music such as that of the Velvet Underground, but these bands were still important to the underground dissident movement all across Czechoslovakia.

In the 1980s, a new generation of folk singers began to complement the Czech music scene. Musicians such as Jaromír Nohavica, Pavel Dobeš, and Karel Plíhal earned their names during this time. A sort of folk mania ensued in the Czech lands as music began to directly challenge the regime with lyrics, and fans found music concerts to be an open, liberating forum where people could connect with others without anxiety about the regime. Former President Havel names the musical dissident movement of the 1960s, ‘70s, and ‘80s as instrumental in bringing about the end of the communist regime.

Today, many new bands are popular in the Czech Republic, ranging from jazz to rock to folk to mainstream pop and hip-hop. Czech music competitions are televised regularly, with major festivals occurring every year to celebrate popular music in the Czech lands.

References:

<http://www.offoffoff.com/film/2002/plasticpeople.php3>

<http://angam.ang.univie.ac.at/EAASworkshop/posppres.htm>

<http://www.villagevoice.com/issues/0203/dibbell.php>



*Market in Domazlice*

## National Anthem of the Czech Republic

The anthem consists of the first verse of the song "Kde domov můj" ("Where is my home"). The lyrics were written by František Škroup, and the music was composed by Josef Kajetán Tyl. The anthem comes from the singspiel "Fidlovačka" (1834).

Andante con moto.  $\text{♩} = 88$

Fr. Škroup.

1. Kde do-mov můj, kde do-mov můj? Vo-da  
hu-či po lu-či-nách, bo-ry šu-mí  
po-ska-li-nách, v sa-dě skví-se ja-ra  
květ, zem-ský ráj-to na po-hled! A to  
je ta krá-sná ze-mě, ze-mě če-ská-  
do-mov můj- ze-mě če-ská-do-mov můj! J.K. Tyl

### Kde domov můj?

Kde domov můj?  
kde domov můj?  
Voda hučí po lučinách,  
bory šumí po skalinách,  
v sadě skví se jara květ,  
zemský ráj to na pohled;  
a to je ta krásná země,  
země česká, domov můj,  
země česká, domov můj.

Reference:

<http://www.czech-language.cz/fiction/songs/hymna.html>

## **Famous Czech Myths**

Czechs know their historical myths well, and some believe them to be true. Below are three of the most common Czech myths.

### **Praotec Čech (Grandfather Czech)**

Czech tribes led by grandfather Čech stopped their journey at Říp Mountain (about 50 km north of Prague). There he beheld the “land of milk and honey” and decided to settle. His brother Lech had separated from his tribe earlier and became the founder of the Polish nation.

### **Přemysl and Libuše**

Countess Libuše, Čech’s granddaughter, ruled the Czech people after the death of her father Krok. She was gifted with prophetic powers and foresaw the founding of Prague. She lived at Vyšehrad Castle, and in one of her prophetic moments declared, “I see a large city whose fame touches the stars.” She then sent builders into the woods where they found a man making a threshold (práh) which also gave a name to the new city (i.e. Praha).

Once, when presiding over her court, she made a decision between two brothers. The one in whose disfavor she had decided, proclaimed: “Sorry are the men who let themselves be ruled by a woman!” Libuše became angry and promised the men a firm rule by a man. She sent a delegation to her secret lover Přemysl to call him to become the king of the Czechs. Přemysl was a farmer and the delegation led by Libuše’s horse found him plowing his fields. That’s why he is known as Přemysl Oráč (the Plower). Thus the Přemyslid dynasty ruling the Czech lands for over 300 years was founded.

### **Šárka (Maiden War)**

Some women, discontent with the rule of men, went away and founded a castle called Děvín, from where they very successfully fought men.

One of the maidens, Šárka, lured Ctirad and his men, who had slain many women, into a trap by pretending to have run away from the women’s castle. After Ctirad, having fallen in love at first sight, had celebrated this encounter and fallen asleep, women stole upon him and his men, who were overpowered and killed. Ctirad himself was executed at the wheel.

Men angered by Ctirad’s death stormed Děvín, the castle of the women fighters, and killed all women who resisted including Šárka.

### Reference:

[http://www.bohemica.com/czechculture/factfile/czech\\_mythology.htm](http://www.bohemica.com/czechculture/factfile/czech_mythology.htm)

## Literature in the Czech Republic

The Czech literary tradition is said to have begun in the 9<sup>th</sup> century with the translation of the Bible into Old Slavonic, a linguistic precursor to Czech, by the Christian missionaries Cyril and Methodius. Other early works include the 10<sup>th</sup> century *Legends of St. Wenceslas* (Bohemian prince Václav). Old Slavonic was abandoned as the literary language, however, in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. It was replaced with Latin, which had been introduced as the language of the church liturgy.

In the early 12<sup>th</sup> century, the historic foundations of Czech literature began with the publishing of the *Bohemian Chronicles*, which recounts the history of Bohemia from the founding (with Praotec [Grandfather] Čech) until the early 12<sup>th</sup> century. This was written in Latin. Beginning with the rule of the Přemyslid kings in the 9<sup>th</sup> century through the reign of Charles IV in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, literature was written once again in Czech, as well as in German.

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Hussite Protestant movement encouraged writing in the vernacular, including church-related texts. In the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, Jan Amos Komenský, reformer of the educational system, wrote many influential textbooks that were used widely across Europe. His most famous textbook, *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (The World in Pictures), provided illustrations alongside Latin text.

Emperor Joseph II's reforms, particularly the abolition of serfdom, set into motion a national revival in the Czech lands. Josef Dobrovský wrote the history of the Czech language, as well as a two-volume German-Czech dictionary. In 1936, the Romantic poet Karel Hynek Mácha wrote the epic poem, *Máj* (*May*), often considered a milestone in modern Czech poetry. Other well-known literary figures from this period, which peaked in 1848, include Božena Němcová (prose writer who was on the cusp between Romanticism and Realism), Karel Havlíček Borovský (publicist and poet), and Josef Kajetán Tyl and Václav Kliment Klicpera (dramatists). Following the Romantic period was Realism, whose great writers include Jan Neruda. Neruda is most famous for his *Tales of the Lesser Quarter* (1878), a collection of novellas and sketches of Prague's Malá Strana, as well as his *Pictures of Old Prague*.

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bohemia, particularly the Jewish community, had reached a preeminent place in European literature. Both Czech and German reigned as the main literary languages, and an artistic society developed in Prague. Czech literature opened up to many new perspectives; one prominent literary subject was the creation and destruction of the Czechoslovak state in the interwar period. Rainer Maria Rilke, Max Brod, Franz Werfel, and Franz Kafka are among the most famous Czech literary figures, both during their lifetimes and at the present, who were Jewish and wrote in German. Of those who wrote in Czech, Jaroslav Hašek, Karel Čapek, Jaroslav Seifert, and Egon Erwin Kisch are among the most well-known. Čapek wrote satirical plays, the most famous of which is *R.U.R.* In this play, a man-like machine - a "robot" - is created that functions more efficiently and precisely than a human. Indeed, the word "robot" was invented for this play. Seifert was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1984, many

years after he wrote, for his lyric poetry. Kisch was the author of several works of social criticism, and is most famous for his book *Roving Reporter*.

Hašek and Kafka, two very different writers, are particularly well-known and representative of the historical moment in which they wrote. Hašek had a colorful personality himself, much like the main character in his most famous book, *The Good Soldier Švejk*. Hašek was a drafted soldier in the Austro-Hungarian Army who was captured by the Russians in World War I. In Russia, he joined the Czech Liberation Army, but then he began to write communist propaganda for the Bolsheviks. After he returned to Prague, he resumed his writing in Czech, but largely for the purpose of paying off his drinking debts. Like his character Švejk, Hašek has been characterized as a compulsive practical joker who loathed arrogance and authority. In contrast to his contemporary, Hašek, Kafka was a Czech Jew who wrote in German, although he continually sought contact with the Czech population. A legal clerk by day who rarely left Prague, Kafka's life-long struggles with women and his father are dominant themes in his works, such as *The Trial* and *The Castle*.

The post-World War II generation of writers was limited by the “socialist realism” dictated by the communist regime, so no works of major significance were produced until the 1960s, when political control began to relax. Josef Škvorecký, Milan Kundera, and Ludvík Vaculík, novelists; Bohumil Hrabal and Arnošt Lustig, short story writers; and Václav Havel and Ivan Klíma, playwrights, blossomed as major literary figures. Hrabal is known for his haunting, sometimes uncanny, short stories, such as *Closely Watched Trains* (which was later made into a movie, adapted for the screen by Hrabal himself). Other writers had to survive under a regime that worked to suppress any anti-communist writing, so authors like Kundera and Škvorecký were forced into living and writing abroad, while others like Vaculík and Havel had to publish underground in Prague. After the collapse of communism in 1989, Václav Havel, who had been a dissident, became president of Czechoslovakia (and later, the Czech Republic). Since that time, Czech writing's place in society had changed as government censorship ceased. Since 1989, many in the Czech lands feel that writing has become commercialized and literature is less valued in the market economy.

#### References:

- “Czech Literature.” Encyclopædia Britannica. 2003. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 28 May, 2003 <http://search.eb.com/eb/article?eu=28917>.
- “Czech Republic.” Encyclopædia Britannica. 2003. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 28 May, 2003 <http://search.eb.com/eb/article?eu=118038>.
- Plachetka, Jan. 1993. “Czech and Slovak Literature.” In Alfred Horn, Tony Halliday, and Brian Bell, ed., *Insight Guide: Czech and Slovak Republics*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

# Film in the Czech Republic

## The beginning of film in the Czech lands

Although inventions in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century were able to produce the appearance of pictures in motion, real cinematography began in 1895, when the Lumière brothers in France patented their motion-recording camera. By 1896, silent movies already began to be filmed in southern Bohemia.

## 1920s

By the 1920s, silent movies had become a very popular form of entertainment. Approximately 20 feature films, all silent, were made each year in Czechoslovakia. In 1927, film had a new feature: sound, which made possible the fame of many new actors and actresses. One famous Czech actress from this period is Anna Ondráková (1902-1987), who played the lead in Alfred Hitchcock's first sound film.

## 1930s

The number of movies filmed in the Czech lands fostered the need for a major film studio. In 1931, Miloš Havel, the uncle of Václav Havel, oversaw the construction of a modern film studio in the Prague suburb of Barrandov. By 1933, Barrandov Studios were in use. Soon, up to 80 films were made per year there, drawing many foreign producers and directors.

This time period was characterized by many avant-garde and commercial films, leading to a renewal in filmmaking in the Czech lands. This was the period of "Czech modernism." An important Czech director of this period was Gustav Machatý, who directed *Erotikon* (1929) and *Extasy* (1933), which was highly scandalous at the time. *Extasy* launched the career of Hedy Lamarr, a German actress who, at that time, was named Hedwig Kiesler. The comic duo of Voskovec and Werich were extremely popular as well.

## 1940s

Germany took over Barrandov Studios after the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1939. Joseph Goebbels expanded Barrandov to the same size as the major studios in Berlin and Munich. During World War II, most movies filmed in Barrandov were German films to satisfy the Nazi propaganda drive.

## 1950s

The communist takeover in 1948 resulted in the nationalization of Barrandov and a smaller studio at Hostivař. A special effects studio and a film laboratory were added to Barrandov. Strict censorship became the norm, as the Russian-influenced communist regime enforced their policy of a style known as "socialist realism." Movies were intended to depict the unity of the working class, as well as anti-American sentiment. A major director of "socialist realism" was Otakar Vávra.

## 1960s

As the government relaxed its previously highly authoritarian stance, film bloomed in Czechoslovakia. This new generation of filmmakers was able to criticize politics and society, and express themselves without constant fear of the government. The trend was called the “Czech New Wave.” Many of the New Wave filmmakers graduated from FAMU in Prague, one of the best film academies in the world. Representative filmmakers of the Czech New Wave include Miloš Forman, Jiří Menzel, Věra Chytilová, Jan Němec, Ivan Passer, and Vojtěch Jasný. Jiří Menzel’s *Closely Watched Trains (Ostře sledované vlaky, 1967)* received an Academy Award for Best Foreign Film. The Czech New Wave was stopped short, however, by the Soviet invasion of August 1968, which ended the Prague Spring.

## 1970s and 1980s

The suppression of the Prague Spring ended the careers of many New Wave directors. Many other filmmakers emigrated rather than stay under a repressive regime, as the remaining filmmakers were banned from making new films. Miloš Forman is perhaps the best known of these émigré filmmakers. He began making highly respected movies in Hollywood, such as *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest, Amadeus, Hair, The People Vs. Larry Flint,* and *Man on the Moon*. By the end of the 1970s, Czech New Wave directors were allowed to film again, but they never reached the quality of their earlier work. Foreign directors began to film in Czechoslovakia.

## 1990s to the present

The Velvet Revolution of 1989 brought massive changes to the film industry in the Czech lands. The state monopoly over film was brought to an end, and economic hardship resulted for filmmakers as studios like Barrandov were privatized. For the first time, many of the movies shown in cinemas in the Czech lands were foreign films, as directors had a difficult time raising money to fund their productions.

The current generation of post-communist filmmakers is not producing movies with socially critical themes as in the Czech New Wave, but about more intimate yet universal human topics. Some, however, say that post-communist Czech movies are largely commercialized and merely entertain. Since the collapse of communism, Czech movies have reappeared in cinemas around the globe, and the number of films made per year has slowly began to increase as well.

The most famous director of this generation is Jan Svěrák, who made such internationally successful films as *Kolya (Kolja, 1996)* and *Dark Blue World (Tmavomodrý svět, 2001)*. Svěrák is known for making grandiose films with many visual attractions, while maintaining a strong sense of creativity. Svěrák is also known for taking on a different type of theme and genre with each new film or commercial. Another well-known director is Saša Gedeon. Gedeon is more introspective and subtle than Svěrák, but no less creative. His films use natural settings to evoke the moods of human behavior and relationships.

### **Czech movies that have won or been nominated for an Oscar:**

Saša Gedeon's *Return of the Idiot*, released in 1999, was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 2000.

Jan Svěrák's *Kolya* was the winner of the 1997 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

Jan Svěrák's *Elementary School*, released in 1992, was nominated for an Oscar.

Jiří Menzel's *My Sweet Little Village*, released in 1987, was nominated for an Oscar.

Miloš Forman's film *Amadeus* won several Oscars. Although the movie is about Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's life in Vienna, it was filmed in Prague and elsewhere in Bohemia. Several filmmakers participated in this film.

In 1975, Miloš Forman's film *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* won five Oscars.

In 1967, Jiří Menzel's *Closely Watched Trains*, based on a novel by Bohumil Hrabal, won an Oscar.

In the 1960s, Miloš Forman's *Loves of a Blonde* and *The Firemen's Ball* both were nominated for an Oscar.

#### References:

<http://www.mcaonline.ca/prague/films.html>

[http://www.ce-review.org/01/18/kinoeye18\\_hames.html](http://www.ce-review.org/01/18/kinoeye18_hames.html)

[http://www.utexas.edu/ftp/depts/eems/Czech\\_Cinema.html](http://www.utexas.edu/ftp/depts/eems/Czech_Cinema.html)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Books

Timothy Garton Ash, The Magic Lantern (chapter on the 1989 revolution in Czechoslovakia entitled, “Prague: Inside the Magic Lantern”): A vividly written account that captures the atmosphere of excitement and hope at the time of the “Velvet Revolution”.

Václav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless”: An insightful, philosophically oriented essay on the ability of citizens to effect nonviolent change within a totalitarian system. The entire essay could be assigned to college students; possibly excerpts to high school students depending on teacher discretion. This essay is available in several book-length collections, including Living in Truth (a collection of writings by and about Havel from the late 1970s and early 1980s).

Plays by Václav Havel: The Memorandum deals with the misuse of language in totalitarian societies. The “Vanek and Stanek” series (Audience, Private View, and Protest) concern an individual’s struggle to live truthfully in a society based on lies, and the reactions of those around him.

Franz Kafka, The Trial: Chillingly foresightful depiction of the persecution of an individual by a faceless state bureaucracy, written by a resident of Hapsburg-occupied Prague during the First World War.

Milan Kundera, The Joke: Novel depicting the political situation of Czechoslovakia during the “Stalinist” period of the 1950s, when an overreaction by the authorities to an apparently trivial gesture could result in dire consequences. (Note: some adult content.)

Peter Sís, The Three Golden Keys: A beautifully illustrated children’s book, depicting three classic legends of Prague.

### Films

“Closely Watched Trains” (film directed by Jiří Menzel, 1966): Set in Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia during World War II, this film is representative of the innovative Czech New Wave cinematic movement of the 1960s. Based on the novel of the same title by Bohumil Hrabal. (Note: some adult content.)

“Kolya” (film directed by Jan Svěrák, 1996): An entertaining and touching film set in Prague in the late 1980s, containing much cultural information. A thorough set of cultural background notes by Dr. Martin Votruba of the University of Pittsburgh’s Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures is available from the Center for Russian and East European Studies to accompany the film.

## Internet

Central Europe Review, online journal with an archive of articles on the Czech Republic covering a wide range of contemporary issues: <[http://www.ce-review.org/thematicarchives/czech/ta\\_czechmain.html](http://www.ce-review.org/thematicarchives/czech/ta_czechmain.html)>. Includes Tiffany G. Petros, "2000: The Year in Review for the Czech Republic," a summary of recent political, economic and social developments in the Czech Republic, at <<http://www.ce-review.org/00/43/roundup43czech.html>>. New articles and reports are added on an ongoing basis.

CIA World Factbook, basic information and statistics about the Czech Republic, at <<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ez.html>>.

Czech Republic Index, including a list of major events in Czech history: <[http://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/law/ez\\_\\_indx.html](http://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/law/ez__indx.html)>. However, the timeline has not been updated after 1996.

Joseph Yanosik, "The Plastic People of the Universe," at <<http://www.furious.com/perfect/pulnoc.html>>. A fascinating account of the intersection of rock music, youth culture, and political dissent in 1970s Czechoslovakia. Students may be interested to read about an instance of young musicians very directly changing the world. Hear a sample of the Plastics' music and an interview with their one-time lead singer, Paul Wilson of Canada, at:

<[http://radio.cbc.ca/programs/thismorning/sites/a&e/plastic\\_010112.html](http://radio.cbc.ca/programs/thismorning/sites/a&e/plastic_010112.html)>

(To hear it, you will need Real Player, which may be downloaded free of charge.)