



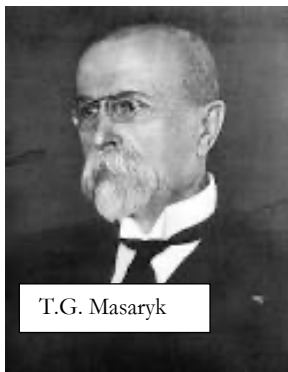
I. (Workshop 2) Team 1 orange: Text 1

I - Czechoslovakia – the First Republic (28/10/1918 – 30/9/1938)

a) Establishment of Czechoslovakia

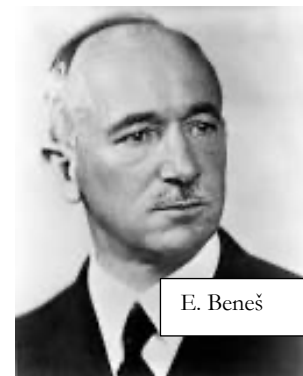
The end of World War I brought changes as to the make-up of states all over Europe. Most important for Czechia was the fact that the Austro-Hungarian Empire (that had been an ally of Germany in WW I) was dissolved. With the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Czech lands and Slovakia that had been parts of the Empire jointly proclaimed the establishment of independent **Czechoslovakia** on **October 28, 1918**.

As a part of the Paris Peace Conference after World War I, the foundation of the new state was agreed on in the **Treaty of Saint Germain** on September 10, 1919 and became internationally acknowledged on **July 16, 1920**. Prague became the capital of the country and the Prague Castle became the seat of the first president of Czechoslovakia, **Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk**. The time between WWI and WWII is now called "**the First Republic**". Czechoslovakia had a parliamentary democracy, concentrated 70% of the industry of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, and had an economy that was among the strongest in the world.



T.G. Masaryk

When the new country of Czechoslovakia was proclaimed, its leaders were still in exile (in Great Britain, the USA) where they were preparing the independence of Czechoslovakia. They helped to establish Czechoslovak Legion in Russia and also other military troops that fought in the western front. They travelled a lot to get the support of the most important politicians (e.g. the US president Woodrow Wilson). **T.G. Masaryk** was chosen as *the president* and **Edvard Beneš** became the country's *foreign minister*. He took part in the **Paris Peace Conference** (lasting from **January 18, 1919 to January 21, 1920**) at



E. Beneš

which the new geo-political order of Europe was negotiated by representatives of 32 countries.



b) Problems with the borders

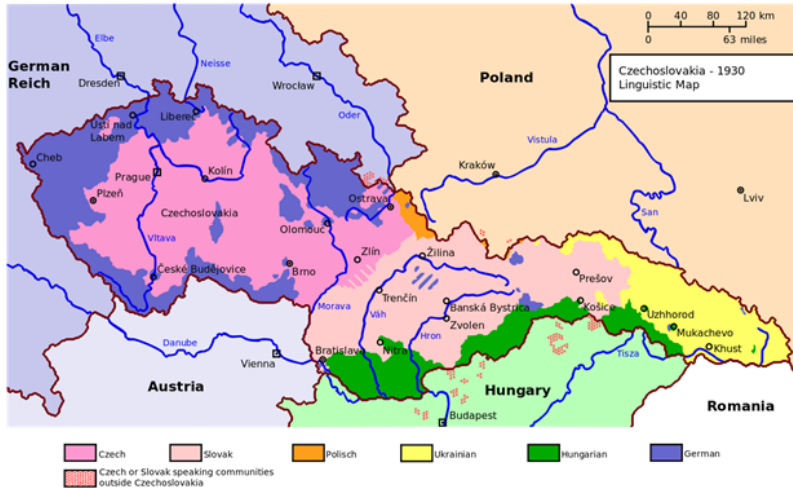
The first task at the **Paris Peace Conference** was to approve the historical frontiers separating Bohemia and Moravia from Germany and Austria. None of the Czechoslovak neighbours (Germany, Austria, Hungary, Poland) was satisfied with the new borders because these countries did not only lose territory but a well-working and productive economy. The only “friendly“ border was the shortest one with Romania.

From the very beginning, the new democratic state had to deal with problems because of the many ethnic groups living in its territory. Especially the regions that had belonged to Germany and



Austria before, were inhabited by people of German descent. The political spokesmen of the Germans in Bohemia and Moravia advocated cession of the area known as **the Sudetenland** to Germany or Austria. (The Sudetenland included parts of northern and western Bohemia and northern Moravia. The Germans were the most numerous minority in the new-born country (23%). Other than most other European countries, Czechoslovakia remained a well-working democracy and had a strong economy throughout the 1920s.

c) Preparations of the annexation



Hitler had never been in favour of the Czechoslovakian state, and openly advocated the annexation (or as he saw it: reintegration) of the Sudetenland in the German Reich. But the annexation of Sudetenland was in fact prepared by Sudeten Germans, who were not satisfied in Czechoslovakia and approved the German nationalist, anti-Czech, anti-Semitic propaganda of **the Sudeten German Party (founded**

October 1, 1933) led by **Konrad Henlein**. In the parliamentary elections of May 1935, the party received almost two-thirds of the Sudeten German vote and sent the second largest bloc of representatives **to the Czechoslovak Parliament**. **Between 1935 and 1938**, the Sudeten Nazis increased their activities, which were basically aimed at uniting the Sudetenland with Germany and included hostile outbreaks and provocative incidents. **In March 1938** Henlein met Hitler in Berlin, where he was instructed to keep political tension in Czechoslovakia by creating obstacles but to strictly avoid any kind of agreement. Henlein's party not only succeeded in embarrassing the Czechoslovak government but also convinced Great Britain and France that the situation in the Sudetenland was highly inflammatory and that the Czechoslovak leaders must be persuaded to take extreme action, even **ceding the region to Germany, to avoid a war**. In **summer 1938**, the British government sent to Czechoslovakia a mission led by **Lord Runciman** (a former cabinet minister). Its aim was to *mediate in a dispute* between the Government of Czechoslovakia and the Sudeten German Party. The British mediators were active in Czechoslovakia during the late summer, issuing their report shortly before the **Munich Conference in September 1938**. However, it did not help to solve the problem itself.



Sudeten Germans marching in Karlsbad in 1937

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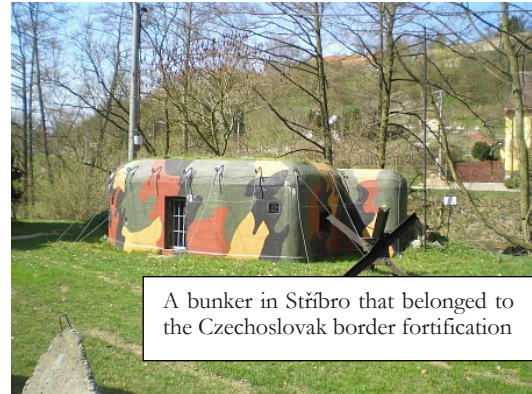


II. (Workshop 2) Team 2 green: Text 2

II Czechoslovakia – the Munich Agreement (30/9/1938) and the Second Republic (1/10/1938 – 14/3/1939)

a) The way to the Munich Agreement

Over **summer 1938** the situation in Czechoslovakia became more and more flammable. After Hitler's successful **annexation of Austria** in **March 1938** Germany planned to "save" 3 million people of German origin who "were suffering" in Czechoslovakia. However, most of the Germans in Czechoslovakia lived in the *Sudetenland* – border regions that were crucial for defending the country (there were border fortifications).



A bunker in Stribro that belonged to the Czechoslovak border fortification

Hitler's generals were working on a plan called "**Case Green**" (the code name for the takeover of the Sudetenland and occupation of Czechoslovakia) **since June 1937**. The plan was changed several times and the Germans finally rejected the plan because it would have caused "a hostile world opinion which could lead to a critical situation." They were afraid that France and Great Britain would decide to defend Czechoslovakia.



The Sudetenland – border regions neighbouring with Germany and Austria: light green. Border region with Poland: red; border region with Hungary: blue.

However, neither France nor Britain felt prepared to defend Czechoslovakia, and both wanted to avoid a

military confrontation with Germany at almost any cost. **France and Great Britain agreed** that *Prague should be urged to make territorial concessions to Germany* (splitting off the Sudeten German areas from Czechoslovakia). They believed that **it was the only way to save peace in Europe**.

In **September 1938** **Neville Chamberlain** (the **British Prime Minister**) went to **Berchtesgaden and Godesberg** to discuss the situation personally with the Führer. Hitler stiffened his demands that Czechoslovakia strictly rejected and **ordered a general mobilization on 23 September**. Having one of the world's best-equipped armies and strongly fortified borderline at that time, Czechoslovakia *was ready to fight but could not win alone*.

b) Munich Agreement

In a last-minute effort to avoid war, Chamberlain immediately proposed a **four-power conference to settle the dispute**. Hitler agreed, and **on September 29** **Hitler, Chamberlain** (the British Prime Minister), **Daladier** (the French Prime Minister), and Italian dictator **Benito Mussolini** met **in Munich**. The meeting started shortly before 1 pm. Hitler was furious and no one dared to invite the two Czech diplomats waiting in a Munich hotel and consult the agenda with them.



Nevertheless, **Mussolini introduced a written plan** that was accepted by all as **the Munich Agreement**. It was almost identical with the Godesberg proposal: the German army was to complete the occupation of the Sudetenland by October 10, 1938 and an international commission would decide the future of other disputed areas. *Czechoslovakia was informed* by Britain and France *that it could either resist Germany alone or submit to the prescribed annexations. The Czechoslovak government chose to submit and accept all German demands.*



Meeting in Munich (from the left) Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler, Mussolini

Both Daladier and Chamberlain returned home relieved that the threat of war had passed. Chamberlain told the British public that he had achieved “peace with honour. I believe it is peace for our time.” His words were immediately criticised by Winston Churchill, who declared, “You were given the choice between war and dishonour. You chose dishonour and you will have war.”



Hotel in Bad Godesberg, Germany, where Neville Chamberlain and Hitler met on September 22, 1938.

c) *The second republic (1/10/1938 – 14/3/1939)*

On 1 October 1938 the **German troops entered** Czechoslovakia. However, the annexation of the Sudetenland, completed according to the Munich timetable, was not Czechoslovakia’s only territorial loss. Shortly after the Munich verdict, **Poland** sent troops to annex the Teschen region (**October 1938**) and **Hungary** got one-quarter of Slovak and Ruthenian territories (**November 1938**). By all these amputations *Czechoslovakia lost about one-third of its population, and the country was defenseless.* The economic impact of the loss of territory was also enormous. Just to give an example - the country lost almost all its coal reserves overnight.

The Czech president **Edvard Beneš** abdicated on **5 October 1938** and went into exile to London. A new president, **Emil Hácha**, was elected on **30 November 1938**. The political system of the country was hurt, some political parties (e.g. the Communists) were banned, censorship was introduced and the foreign policy was often pro-German, led by the idea to save at least the rest of the country.

As the country lost its German, Polish, and Hungarian minorities, the Czechs reluctantly agreed to change into a federalist country. The Slovaks pressed Prague for full **Slovak autonomy**, which was proclaimed on **October 6**. The country changed its name into **Czecho-Slovakia**.

A few months later, after confidential negotiations with Berlin, **the Slovak state declared its independence on 14 March 1939** and became a German satellite. Hitler forced the Czech president Hácha to surrender. On the following day, **15 March 1939, Bohemia and Moravia were occupied and proclaimed a protectorate of the German Third Reich.**



German propaganda poster

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III. (Workshop 2) Team 3 blue: Text 3

III – Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia (15/3/1939 – 1945)

On the night from 14-15 March 1939, Nazi-German troops crossed the Bohemian border.



Adolf Hitler at the Prague Castle on 16 March, 1939.

Under pressure from Berlin, Czechoslovak president Emil Hácha was forced to agree to the Nazi occupation of the Czech lands. On **16 March**, the **Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia** was declared by **Adolf Hitler in Prague**. The Czech lands were subjected to German rule, and *Czechs were allowed only limited autonomy*. The Protectorate was headed by the **Reichsprotektor Konstantin von Neurath**.

Hácha remained president, but his cabinet had only very limited powers, meaning that each decision could be annihilated by the *Reichsprotektor*. The Nazi regime immediately took steps to subdue the Protectorate and put into practice the kind of “cleansing” that had already taken place in Germany itself: all political opponents (especially social democrats and communists), emigrants that had fled from Nazi Germany because of their opposing political views and Jews were persecuted and arrested.



Map of the Protectorate (light purple); the line shows the borders of original Czechoslovakia from 1918

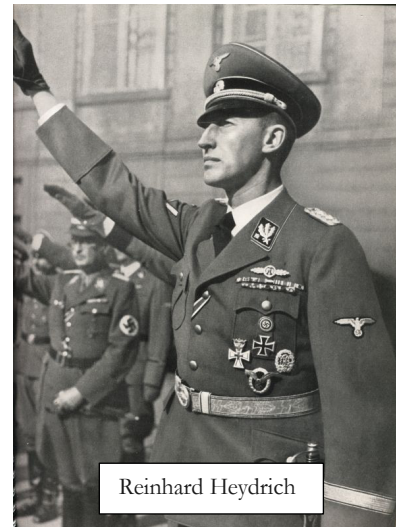
Hitler’s ultimate goal with the Czech territories (just as later with Greece) was to exploit the rich resources of the country and to first subdue the people to do forced labour for the Nazi war industry. Later he wanted to introduce what he called “Germanization“: make the Czech territories completely German, offering new areas of settlement for “Arian Germans“ only (which meant that Hitler wanted all Czech people to leave the country or be killed).

On October 28, 1939 – the 20th anniversary of Czechoslovak independence – there were mass demonstrations and strikes against the annexation and the Nazi rule all over the Protectorate but especially in Prague. The revolt was crushed. A student, Jan Opletal, was wounded and finally died. His funeral on **November 17, 1939**, led to new upheavals during and after which 9 students were shot and 1,200 more students were arrested and interned in the concentration camp Sachsenhausen, and all Czech universities were closed.



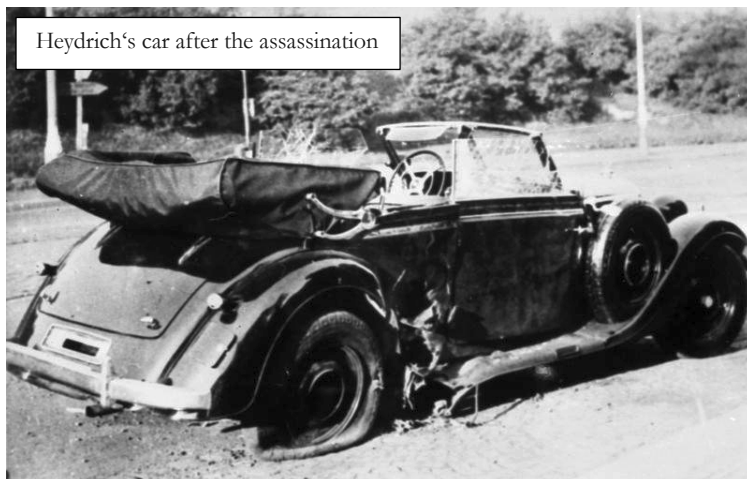
For some two years the Czech protectorate kept the semblance of an autonomous body, but in **September 1941, Reinhard Heydrich**, the head of German secret police, replaced Neurath as Reichsprotektor and inaugurated a **reign of terror**. Heydrich was extremely violent trying to crush Czech resistance.

Under Heydrich's authority **Prime Minister Alois Eliáš** was arrested (and later **executed in June 1942**), the Czech government was reorganized, and all Czech cultural organizations were closed. *The Gestapo arrested and killed thousands of people.* The deportation of *Jews to concentration camps* was organized, and the fortress town of Terezín was made into a ghetto way-station for Jewish families.



Reinhard Heydrich

In revenge, the assassination of Heydrich was prepared: Czech agents bombed and shot Heydrich on **27 May 1942** (he died on 4 June). After the assassination, martial law was proclaimed and **the period of terror** (called *heydrichiáda* in Czech) started: 10,000 Czech people were arrested and more than 1,300 killed. As “measures of atonement“, the Nazis destroyed the villages of **Lidice and Ležáky** (among others), shot almost all male inhabitants and deported women and children to concentration camps, on **June 10, 1942 and June 24, 1942**.



Heydrich's car after the assassination

However, Hácha did not have the strength to resign and, trying to calm down the brutality of German rule, stayed on as a president. Martial law ultimately was lifted (**July 3, 1942**) only because the Germans needed Czech workers to maintain productivity in the war industry that the Germans had installed in the Protectorate.

During the Second World War, the well-trained Czech workforce and

developed industry was forced to make a major contribution to the German war economy. Since the Protectorate was just out of the reach of Allied bombers, the Czech economy was able to work almost undisturbed until the end of the war.

On February 14, 1945, Prague was bombed, killing 700 civilians, and on **April 25**, American planes dropped 638 t of bombs on **Pilsen and especially the Skoda buildings**. **May 5, 1945, the Prague upheaval** succeeded in bringing down the Nazi protectorate before **Soviet troops freed Prague** and the Czech country from the Nazi rule on **May 9**.

The state's existence came to an end with the **surrender of Germany** the same day.

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