

Name:

Czechoslovakia Country Profile

Role in World War I

Czechoslovakia (today the independent nations of the Czech Republic and Slovakia) did not exist until after WWI. During WWI, although it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, some Czechs and Slovaks did rebel, flee the area, and join a struggle to free their “country” either militarily or politically. Some fought within “Legions” against the Central Powers while others established themselves in foreign cities (like London) and promoted a political agenda of Czech independence.

Historical Background (1918-1936)

At the conclusion of WWI, Czechoslovakia emerged from the now defeated Austro-Hungarian (Hapsburg) Empire. It contained several different groups of peoples. The western edge of the country, known as the Sudetenland (in green at right), was heavily industrialized and heavily populated by Germans (approximately 86%). At its “birth”, Czechoslovakia was among the top ten most industrialized nations in the world.



Czechoslovakia’s primary early concern was uniting multiple cultural groups under the banner of a single nation. Her first President, Masaryk (1918-1935), struggled to satisfy the desires and dreams of Czechs (46%), Slovaks (40%), Germans (10%), Ruthenes, Hungarians, and Jews. Masaryk’s widespread popularity (he is often compared in popularity to George Washington) helped him navigate this difficult time without the new nation breaking apart.



The Great Depression damaged Czechoslovakia much as it did the rest of Europe, but the Sudeten Germans were especially hard hit. Much of their money for business investments came from Germany, which linked them to the U.S. economy (the Dawes Plan and German reparations)...not a good thing in 1929! The Sudeten Germans blamed the Czech government and the Jews for their financial problems. This led to the significant growth of Nazism during the early 1930’s amongst Sudeten Germans.

While they claimed no connection to Hitler, it is clear that the

Nazis in Germany were directly supporting this growing movement.

Foreign Policy

During the early 1920’s, Czechoslovakia signed a series of treaties with smaller central European nations to secure herself against Hungary. From that point forward, she would focus on maintaining relations with the larger western European countries. A defensive pact was signed with France in 1924 (France would defend her if attacked). When Masaryk retired in 1935, Benes continued in his footsteps. He signed a defensive pact with the USSR in 1935, but it depended upon France actually actively defending Czechoslovakia before the Soviets would act.

Name:

Country Profile Questions

1. What are the greatest issues facing your country?
2. What countries do you see as potential allies?
3. What countries cause you see as potential threats?
4. List your top 3 foreign policy goals in order of importance.