

Czechoslovakia

Ethnicity in Czechoslovakia

Group selection

For the time after World War II four ethnic groups can be considered politically relevant in Czechoslovakia: Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, and Roma. In 1945 the previously significant German minority in Czechoslovakia was mostly expelled. They are therefore not considered to be a relevant group.

The Czechs were a regionally based minority covering the northern and central part of Czechoslovakia, which constituted about two thirds of the country's area. With 62,5 percent they formed the majority of the population. Slovaks represented the largest minority of the population with 30 percent. Similar to the Czechs and Slovaks the Hungarians were a regionally based group, which was concentrated in the southern part of Slovakia next to the Hungarian border following the Treaty of Trianon in 1920. The only group without a regional base in Czechoslovakia were the Roma (⁹⁶¹).

⁹⁶¹ [Slovakia.org, 2015]

Power relations

1946-1968: While the last months after World War II saw promising moves for a relatively far-reaching autonomy of the Slovak minority, the Czechoslovak government, in which Czechs tended to be strongly represented, began to centralize power in 1946. Again some autonomy to the Slovaks was granted during the 1950's. The new socialist constitution from 1960 constrained these efforts and resulted in a continuation of the Czech-Slovak power asymmetry. Slovak institutions, e.g. the Slovak Academy of Sciences, de facto never reached the independence which would have allowed to level the playing field with the Czechs. In light of the surging public pressure during January 1968 the Czechoslovak Communist Party agreed to a mostly de jure federalization to become effective one year after. Accordingly, for the period from 1946-68 Czechs are coded as "senior partners" and Slovaks as "junior partners" in government.

Immediately after 1945 Hungarians were denied Czechoslovak citizenship and therefore discriminated. This changed with the onset of the period under scrutiny. Even though (forced) cultural assimilation remained a bone of contention in the relationship between Hungarian and Slovak groups (⁹⁶²). Important legal questions regarding the compensation of deported Hungarians were solved by the conclusion of the Štrb protocol in 1949. The fact that the Czechs

⁹⁶² [Rieber, 2000]

constituted the senior partners in the strong central government prevented further-reaching political discrimination by the Slovak minority. Overall, the position of the Hungarians as a politically "powerless" minority is based on the lacking evidence for any targeted and intentional discrimination policy pursued by the state (⁹⁶³). As the coding for Slovakia's post-Cold War years shows the Hungarian minority could improve its political situation after 1998 and even join the national government as a "junior partner".

⁹⁶³ [Minorities at Risk, 2015a]

The picture is quite different for the Roma minority which is coded as being "discriminated". Contrary to the other relevant ethnic groups an apparent intention of excluding Roma from power existed from 1946 onwards. The coding for the post-1992 period (in the newly created Czech Republic and Slovak Republic) is based on the argument that political exclusion "is rather a side-effect of the overall discrimination" (cf. EPR comment for Slovakia). In light of the political decisions after Communist takeover in 1948 the same does not hold for Roma in Czechoslovakia. The central government prohibited all activities of existing Roma organizations. By dispersing or assimilating Roma the ruling coalition aimed at an elimination of a so called premodern and un-socialist "Gypsy way of life".

1969-1992: 1968 saw a major de jure change in the institutional set-up of the Czechoslovakian state which is the reason for the period coding. While the Slovaks had benefitted economically from the union with the Czechs they expressed some resentment over their status as "junior partners". The Slovakian Communist Ladislav Novomeský has summarized the self-perception of the Slovaks as "a tolerated race of vice-chairmen and deputy ministers, a second-class minority generously accorded a one-third quota in everything" (⁹⁶⁴). The Constitutional Law of Federation responded to these claims by granting the Slovaks additional autonomy rights. In light of the external pressures from Moscow and the enduring strong position of the central government the overall status as a "junior partner" continued however to be applicable to the Slovaks from 1969-1992. Even after the velvet revolution the concentration of power at the federal level endured. It was only in 1993 when the two republics officially separated that this situation changed substantially (cf. EPR comments for Czech Republic and Slovakia).

⁹⁶⁴ [U.S. Federal Research Division, 1987]

The Roma continued to be intentionally discriminated against. Despite a brief period during which Roma were allowed to establish a (political) organization their demands for recognition as an additional nationality were suppressed. The government even provided incentives to reduce the birth rate of Roma by offering financial incentives to Roma women agreeing to sterilization (⁹⁶⁵). The 1989 velvet revolution did not result in a significant improvement of the political situation. Even though several Roma became parliamentary representatives and held ministerial and administrative posts after 1989 it would be hard to generalize from these cases and claim that their status as a politically "discriminated" group changed.

⁹⁶⁵ [Minorities at Risk, 2015b]

Despite the increasing tensions between Slovaks and Hungarians after the velvet revolution, Hungarians were still not intentionally excluded from politics (⁹⁶⁶). The coding status therefore continued to be "powerless" for the Hungarian minority during the rest of the period under scrutiny.

⁹⁶⁶ [Minorities at Risk, 2015a]

Bibliography

- [Minorities at Risk, 2015a] Minorities at Risk. (2015a). Assessment for Hungarians in Slovakia. Retrieved on 28.03.2015 from: <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/assessment.asp?groupId=31701>
- [Minorities at Risk, 2015b] Minorities at Risk. (2015b). Assessment for Roma in the Czech Republic. Retrieved on 28.03.2015 from: <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/assessment.asp?groupId=31602>
- [Rieber, 2000] Rieber, Alfred J. (2000). *Forced Migration in Central and Eastern Europe, 1939-1950*. New York: Routledge.
- [Slovakia.org, 2015] Slovakia.org. (2015). Roma in Slovakia. Retrieved on 28.03.2015 from: <http://www.slovakia.org/society-roma.htm>
- [U.S. Federal Research Division, 1987] U.S. Federal Research Division. (1987). *Czechoslovakia: a country study*. Washington D.C.: Library of Congress.

Political status of ethnic groups in Czechoslovakia

From 1946 until 1968

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Czechs	0.625	SENIOR PARTNER
Slovaks	0.308	JUNIOR PARTNER
Hungarians	0.041	POWERLESS
Roma	0.026	DISCRIMINATED

From 1969 until 1992

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Czechs	0.625	SENIOR PARTNER
Slovaks	0.308	JUNIOR PARTNER
Hungarians	0.041	POWERLESS
Roma	0.026	DISCRIMINATED



Figure 221: Political status of ethnic groups in Czechoslovakia during 1946-1968.



Figure 222: Political status of ethnic groups in Czechoslovakia during 1969-1992.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Czechoslovakia

From 1946 until 1992

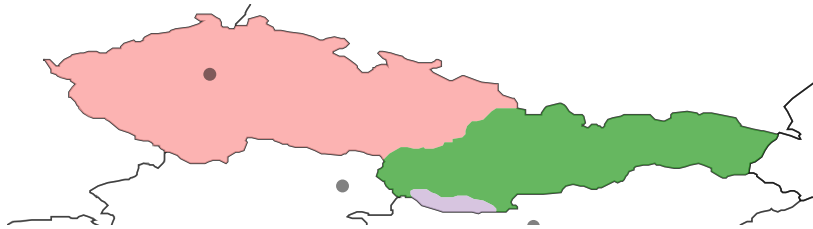


Figure 223: Map of ethnic groups in Czechoslovakia during 1969-1992.

Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■ Czechs	78 436	Regionally based
■ Slovaks	46 496	Regionally based
■ Hungarians	2336	Regionally based
● Roma		Migrant

Table 66: List of ethnic groups in Czechoslovakia during 1946-1992.