

SETTLEMENT OF THE CZECH BORDERLANDS AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR: RE-EMIGRATION OF COMPATRIOTS FROM BULGARIA

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Abstract:

Within the context of the Second World War, three mass population movements occurred in the territory of the Czechoslovak Republic, affecting a total of more than 5 million people. The first mass transfer of the Czechoslovak population took place after the Munich Agreement (1938). The second and the third transfers took place after the end of the war, with the expulsion of the German minority, which took place simultaneously with the settlement of the Czech borderlands. The main purpose of this short study is to describe and summarize information about the process of post-war settlement of the Czech borderlands, which included the state-organized re-emigration of foreign compatriots. This text also deals with the final point of the whole event – the re-emigration of Czechs and Slovaks from Bulgaria, which took place in 1950, when the state-organized and individual re-emigration of foreign compatriots was officially terminated.

Keywords: migration, World War II, German minority, Czech borderlands, re-emigration

Introduction

Within the context of the Second World War, three mass population movements occurred in the territory of the Czechoslovak Republic, affecting a total of more than 5 million people (Wiedemann 2016: 13). Such a population transition was unprecedented in the history of the country, which had a population of less than 15 million between the World Wars. These events can thus be described as the most radical demographic revolution in the country's history. The setting of these transitions was the Czech borderland, where a German minority of about three million was settled

before the Second World War. These movements then caused a radical change in the social composition, demography and economy of the borderland region.

The first mass transfer of Czechoslovak population took place after the Munich Agreement (1938). The second and the third transfers took place after the end of the war, with the expulsion of the German minority, which took place simultaneously with the settlement of the Czech borderlands, where 4/5 of the confiscated area was located. The main purpose of this short study is to describe and summarize information about the process of post-war settlement of the Czech borderlands, which included the state-organized re-emigration¹ of foreign compatriots. This text also deals with the final point of the whole event – the re-emigration of Czechs and Slovaks from Bulgaria, which took place in 1950, when the state-organized and individual re-emigration of foreign compatriots was officially terminated.

After the Munich Agreement

The first mass transfer of population was the result of the Munich Agreement of 29 September 1938. As a result of this agreement, Czechoslovakia was then forced to cede its borderlands.

The population of the German minority in inter-war Czechoslovakia is estimated at 3 to 3.5 million people, about 90% of whom lived in the border areas of Bohemia. Therefore, one of the main arguments for the annexation of the border areas by the Third Reich was that these were areas where the percentage of Germans was above half and that these Germans wanted to be part of their homeland. In reality, however, the aim was rather to paralyze Czechoslovakia so that its complete annexation could be achieved more easily later. The loss of the Czech borderlands deprived the republic of roughly one third of its territory, but also of important industrial areas and borderline fortifications. The annexation of the borderlands by the Nazi Germany triggered a wave of migration among Czechs, Jews and German anti-fascists to the interior or outside the republic. After the Munich Agreement, more than 150,000 people left the borderlands, or were expelled (Čapka et al. 2005: 19).

¹ The term re-emigration refers to the return of an emigrant to his or her native country. In the case of arriving foreign compatriots after the Second World War, the vast majority were people who claimed Czech origin but they were already descendants of emigrants, often in their several generations, who had been born in another country and who did not have Czechoslovak citizenship, it must be said that the use of the terms re-emigration/re-emigrant is inaccurate in this situation. The use of this term in the given situation is common, but in many cases erroneous, because the groups that relocated after the war were not simply re-emigrants. The question is, however, what to replace this term with.

Expulsion of the German Minority

The second² mass population transfer took place after the end of the Second World War: the expulsion of the German minority from Czechoslovakia took place in 1945–1947. Its aim was to deport the entire German population outside the territory of the republic. The members of the Czechoslovak exile government³ had already been thinking about the removal of the German minority during the war. Various options were discussed during the negotiations. The one that was finally implemented was, so to speak, the harshest concept which was based on a collective guilt; almost all of the Germans were removed from Czechoslovakia. Only those who had demonstrated their participation in the anti-fascist resistance, or who had been identified as indispensable to the industry, were allowed to stay. The reported numbers of Germans deported often vary quite significantly. However, it is usually stated that a total of 2.9 to 3 million people were deported (Staněk 1991: 237).

The expulsion of the German minority began almost immediately after the fall of the Third Reich. It was a spontaneous expulsion of Germans without any legal basis and that is why it is commonly spoken of the so-called “wild removal”. During the summer of 1945, Czech soldiers, civilians and partisans expelled over 700,000 Germans from their homes (Glassheim 2005: 436). The savage removal had the character of ethnic cleansing, which was accompanied by violent excesses, including several massacres of German civilians.⁴

The *de facto* legal removal of the German population from the entire territory of the former Czechoslovakia took place only after the Potsdam Conference (17 July – 2 August 1945) during which it had been approved by the victorious powers. The legal basis for the removal of the Germans was then provided by decrees⁵ progressively issued by the President of the Czechoslovak Republic, Edvard Beneš. The Decree of the President of the Republic on the Regulation of the Czechoslovak State Citizenship of Persons of German and Hungarian Nationalities 33/1945 Coll. (of 2 August 1945) was crucial in the matter of the expulsion.⁶ This decree deprived the

² On the Czech side this act is usually referred to as a „removal“, while on the German side the term „expulsion“ is used.

³ During WWII there was a Czechoslovak government in exile, which was based in London.

⁴ For example, the causes known as the Brno Death March, or the massacre in the village of Postoloprty. Both events happened in the first months after the end of the war. Estimates of the total number of victims vary widely, with an upper limit of around 6 to 7 thousand victims.

⁵ The Decrees of President Beneš were issued at a time when it was not possible to exercise legislative power through the National Assembly (Parliament). It should be noted, however, that the name „Beneš Decrees“ is misleading, as the President did collaborate in their creation, but in no way created them himself.

⁶ The Decree stipulated that the Germans who had acquired German citizenship after 1938 had lost their Czechoslovak citizenship by this act. Those Germans who had not acquired German nationality from the occupiers lost their Czechoslovak citizenship on the day this Decree came into force, i.e. on 10 August 1945. Anyone who, in any Census since 1929, had declared such a nationality or

persons of German nationality from Czechoslovak citizenship and made it possible to transport them out of the territory of the Czechoslovak Republic.

The injustices, violent excesses and murders of civilians, but also the fact that the property of the displaced Germans was confiscated⁷ without any compensation, make these events a very sensitive point in the Czech-German relations to this day. A large number of scholarly works have been published on the post-war expulsion of the German minority from Czechoslovakia, both in the Czech Republic and (especially) in Germany. The topic has been subjected to deep analysis and criticism but no consensus has been reached so far on the evaluation of this problem among experts and politicians, and certainly not among the public. This is why the post-war expulsion of the German minority is a topic that still arouses strong emotions on both sides.

Settlement of the Borderland

With the post-war expulsion of the German minority (1945–1947), Czechoslovakia lost approximately three million citizens: a great loss for a country with less than fifteen million citizens. The vast majority of Germans (about 90%) lived in the Czech borderlands. This was an important agricultural area, and a significant part of the industrial enterprises were located there. According to the statistical data from May 1945, a total of 410,000 people were employed in the industrial plants in the border area, 290,000 of whom were of German nationality. This means that 70.7% of the employees of the industrial plants in the Czech border region were Germans (Čapka et al. 2005: 29). The expulsion of the German minority threatened the performance of a substantial part of the industry of Czechoslovakia. Although the activity of the agricultural and some of the industrial enterprises could be interrupted and then restored, the financial losses incurred were enormous. The primary aim of the settlement was to solve the problem with the acute shortage of workers in the border area, to keep the local enterprises in operation and thus to minimise the economic losses.

During the war, the Czechoslovak government-in-exile was already working on the restoration of Czechoslovakia as a national state of Czechs, Slovaks and Slavic minorities. To achieve the ideal state by resettlement, every village in the border region should have at least 67% of Slavic population (Čapka et al. 2005: 24). The settlement of the borderlands with the “correct” (i.e. Slavic) population was aimed to prevent the assumed expansion of the Germanic neighbour in the future, and above all to prevent a repetition of the situation before the Second World War, when

had become a member of national groups and political parties associated with Germans and Hungarians was considered to be of German or Hungarian nationality.

⁷ Confiscation is a term that refers to the seizure of property by the state in order to punish the guilty. The confiscation of the property of the German minority in the Czechoslovakia was carried out on the basis of applying the principle of the collective guilt.

the large German minority in the borderlands served as a pretext for the annexation (Munich Agreement) followed by the occupation of the entire territory of Czechoslovakia.

Košice Government Programme

Before the end of the war in Europe (8 May 1945), a meeting of the members of the Czechoslovak government took place in Košice (Slovakia). The meeting resulted in the approval (5 April 1945) of the so-called Košice Government Programme, which was a programme document of the government that set out the main tasks for the post-war reconstruction of the state, and it is worth mentioning that the future political orientation of Czechoslovakia towards the USSR was already largely predetermined here.

The Košice Government Programme envisaged the implementation of land reform that had to be gradually implemented in three stages. It was decided that in the first stage, the property of enemies (Germans, Hungarians) and traitors to the nation (collaborators) would be confiscated, and that this property would then be mainly distributed among the settlers of Slavic origin. The second and third stages were intended as a revision of the first land reform (from the pre-Munich republic period) and as a new land reform (Nosková, Váchová 2000: 6). The new land reform was supposed to be the last stage that would realistically complete the land reforms started in 1919 (Šisler 1986: 156).

National Administration

Thanks to the approval of the Košice Government Programme, the institution of the so-called national administration (over the property of certain persons) was created, the introduction of which *de facto* represented the first step in the settlement process. The first piece of legislation concerning the fate of property held by the enemies of the Republic and the implementation of the post-war property reforms was Decree No. 5/1945 Coll. (19 May 1945) on the nullity of certain property-law acts from the period of non-freedom and on the national administration of the property values of Germans, Hungarians, traitors and collaborators, and certain organizations and institutes. This decree dealt with two problems: Firstly, it invalidated property transfers and negotiations that had been carried out during the period of occupation and persecution, that was intended to redress property wrongs committed by the invaders against the Czechoslovak population in the period following the Munich Agreement (29 September 1938) and during the period when the *Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia* was declared over the Czech territory (16 March 1939 – 8 May 1945). Secondly, it introduced the institution of national administration over enemy's property in order to secure it for future confiscation and redistribution

plans (Říha 2017: 17). It is worth noting that by legally introducing the national administration as early as May 1945, the Czech government was actually anticipating the results of the Potsdam Conference and preparing the ground for the later expropriation of German property (Arburg, Staněk 2011: 191).

The introduction of national administration over property limited the exercise of owner's rights to a minimum. Although he/she remained the formal owner, he/she could not use the property or dispose of it in any way, nor was he/she entitled to any share of the profits or other income from the property. The national administration was applied to cases concerning the property of people designated as "state unreliable persons"⁸. In practice, it was usually sufficient when only one of the co-owners was designated that way (Kuklík, Němečková 2017: 5–6). Decree No. 5/1945 Coll. also introduced the institution of national administrators.

Confiscation of Property

The next step was the confiscation of property itself, which already constituted a real interference with the property rights. Two presidential decrees in particular were crucial in this matter. Firstly, Decree No. 12/1945 Coll. (of 21 June, 1945) on the confiscation and accelerated distribution of agricultural property stipulated that with immediate effect, for the purposes of the land reform, the agricultural property owned by persons of German and Hungarian nationalities, as well as the property of traitors and enemies of the republic of any nationality which had manifested any hostility, especially during the crisis and war (1938–1945) was to be confiscated *without any compensation* (Lacina 1963: 223). The confiscation was also applied to the property of joint-stock companies and other corporations the administration of which deliberately and intentionally served the German war effort or fascist and Nazi purposes. The agricultural property was not confiscated from the persons of German and Hungarian nationalities who had actively participated in the preservation of the integrity of the Czechoslovak Republic and its liberation (Kuklík, Němečková 2017: 8–9). The confiscated agricultural property was then administered by the National Land Fund.

On the basis of Decree No. 108/1945 Coll. (25 October 1945) on the confiscation of enemy property and the national restoration funds, the immovable (non-agricultural) and movable property of Germans and Hungarians (natural and legal persons), including property rights (debts, securities, deposits and intangible rights) were confiscated. Only those persons of German and Hungarian nationalities who

⁸ According to the President Beneš Decree No. 5/1945 Coll. the „state unreliable person“ was considered to be people of German or Hungarian nationality, and those who carried out activities against state sovereignty, independence, integrity, democratic-republican form of the state, security and defence of the Czechoslovak Republic, who incited such activities or seduced other persons and deliberately supported the German and Hungarian occupiers in any way (Kuklík, Němečková 2017: 7).

proved that they had never committed any crime against the Czech and Slovak nations were exempted from the confiscation (Říha 2017: 46). The property was confiscated without any compensation; the Decree allowed for two exceptions. That is, if the confiscated property was more than 50% co-owned by a person who was not subject to confiscation, and in cases when the property of a legal entity was confiscated in which a person who was not subject to confiscation had a capital participation (Říha 2017: 48–49).

According to this Decree (No. 108/1945 Coll.), the National Reconstruction Funds were established, which became the central bodies for confiscations, but especially for the subsequent rationing procedure, and were also part of the system of bodies that ensured the settlement process. The National Reconstruction Funds were set up within the settlement authorities; their main task being to secure and administer the non-agricultural property subject to confiscation (under this Decree). The primary task of the National Restoration Funds was to secure the confiscated property so that it would not be devalued, and they also arranged for the financial aspect of the transfer of confiscates (especially the collection of payments for confiscates) (Říha 2017: 50–51). Furthermore, they supervised the national administrators who administered part of the confiscated property according to Decree No. 5/1945 Coll.

The property of the displaced Germans was confiscated without any compensation. President Beneš tried to insist that the displaced persons would receive a compensation. It must be stated, however, that the President's reluctance to expropriate property without any compensation probably stemmed mainly from the fear that this step would set a precedent that could allow such expropriation in the future. Another motive behind this demand was aimed to improve the bargaining position vis-à-vis the Allies on the matter of the actual removal of the German population, since at the time of the negotiation of the Decree this issue was still undecided and at least some property compensations for the displaced could possibly help to enforce the removal. However, President Beneš's proposal was rejected by the government, citing the collective responsibility of the German population (Říha 2017: 41).

The Settlement Decrees

The settlement in general was legislated by Decree No. 27/1945 Coll. (1 June 1945) on the Unified Management of the Internal Settlement, which defined the organisation of the entire settlement; that is, not only the agricultural settlement but also the settlement of trades, both in the borderlands and in the interior (Nosková, Váchová 2000: 7).

Decree No. 28/1945 Coll. (of 20 July 1945) on the Settlement of Agricultural Land of Germans, Hungarians and Other Enemies of the State by the Czech, Slovak and Other Slavic Farmers was also of fundamental importance for the settlement.

On the basis of these two Decrees, the basic institutional set-up of the administrative bodies in the matter of settlement was also created. This system was headed

by the settlement authorities under the central leadership of the Central Settlement Commission (Říha 2017: 34). The above-mentioned measures and Decrees of the President of the Republic created the legal basis and institutions for the implementation of the confiscation of property and the removal of Germans, which then enabled the implementation of the settlement of the Czech borderlands.

Wild Settlements

The settlement of the borderlands took place simultaneously with the removal of the German minority (1945–1946). There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, the process of the so-called “wild settlement” started immediately after the removal of the Germans, when individuals and groups spontaneously relocated and appropriated the abandoned German properties. The second reason was the desire to resolve the consequences of the expulsion (i.e. the fatal loss of employees in the border area) as soon as possible to keep the enterprises in operation and thus to minimize the economic losses.

The first stage of the settlement of the borderland was the so-called wild settlement, which took place more or less spontaneously and uncoordinatedly. The first settlers arrived to the localities (e.g., Southern Moravia) that were liberated before the official end of the war (2 September 1945). People started to arrive in the borderlands from the interior even before the state-organised removal of the German minority began, occupying the abandoned houses. Sometimes, however, expulsions or forced seizures of property also occurred. Since the wild settlements had no basis in the legal system, they can be perceived more as thefts or lootings. The thefts of abandoned property occurred throughout the whole settlement period, but they were most prevalent during this time. In the media back then, as well as in the society, a specific name was given to those who committed such acts: they were called the ‘gold-diggers’. A prerequisite for the removal of Germans from Czechoslovakia was the consent of the victorious powers. The removal was agreed on at the Potsdam Conference (17 July – 2 August 1945). In Czechoslovakia, the expulsion of the German minority was then legalised by the adoption of several Decrees by President Beneš. The stage of wild settlement lasted until the autumn of 1945 when legal arrangements were adopted and the state proceeded to implement a coordinated removal.

In the course of the wild settlement, the greatest interest was in the areas with good soil fertility and those without a compact German settlement (e.g., Žatecko, Podbořansko, Southern Moravia). On the other hand, the interest of settlers was least aroused by the areas less suitable for agriculture, climatically demanding, and with a strong German presence (e.g., Tachovsko, Chebsko, Chomutovsko, Liberecko). This is also the reason why the settlement process was very uneven in this phase, so that the most attractive areas were occupied before the onset of the state-controlled settlement at the end of 1945. It is estimated that between May and August 1945, some 80,000 families moved to the borderlands (Heroldová 1978: 196).

The Main Stage of Settlement

The next stage of the settlement of the Czech borderlands was in the period when this process was already legal, coordinated and to a large extent initiated by the state. The period between 1945 and 1948 can be described as the main, and probably the most dramatic phase of the entire settlement process. In the next period, 1949–1960, the settlement activities were still taking place in the borderlands, but they were no longer about the transfer of large numbers of inhabitants, but rather an attempt to eliminate the problems of certain regions.

The settlement itself can be divided into agricultural and non-agricultural. The agricultural settlement was carried out by the National Land Fund established under the Ministry of Agriculture. The trade settlement was carried out by the Settlement Office established under the Ministry of the Interior. The Settlement Office was subordinated to the Central Commission for Internal Settlement (established in July 1945), which was the central institution for settlement and had primarily a coordinating role (Nosková, Váchová 2000: 7).

Agricultural Settlement

Agricultural settlement was carried out in such a way that the confiscated land was gradually allocated to applicants who had to meet certain conditions. Emphasis was placed in particular on the class origin. Especially the non-wealthy people were identified as suitable candidates. The eligible candidates also included foreign compatriots who had decided to re-emigrate. Participants in the national liberation struggle (soldiers, partisans), political prisoners, peasants damaged by the war, deportees and their families had a priority right to the confiscated land (Heroldová 1978: 195–196).

The Ministry of Agriculture had a primary role in the agricultural settlement, with other institutions participating and coordinating the process locally. The land was allocated to the interested parties by the peasant commissions. These commissions were elected exclusively from among the landless and small peasants who wished to apply for a land allocation and met the requirements. The primary task of the peasant commissions was to draw up a list of persons whose agricultural property was confiscated and to draw up inventories of the confiscated property (houses and land to be confiscated). Subsequently, the commissions drew up a settlement plan proposing the allocation of the confiscated property among the eligible applicants, and determining the amount of compensation to be paid for the allocated property. However, the final allocation of land was decided by the Ministry of Agriculture.

It was mainly the lower social classes, the poor and young people who came to the borderlands in the hope of finding better working and living conditions than in the interior. The possibility of acquiring land and property at a very favourable price was particularly attractive. The price for the allocated land was set at between three and five annual harvests, and the price for the buildings was set at three times

the annual rent of the building (Slezák 2005: 44). The fixed price for the allocated property could be paid either in a lump sum within one year of the takeover, or in two instalments, either in money or in kind. Persons with a preferential right could even obtain a complete remission of payment (Říha 2017: 40).

The applicants could receive a maximum of 8 hectares of arable land or 10 hectares of agricultural land. However, if a family with at least 3 children moved in, they could receive up to 10 hectares of arable land or 13 hectares of agricultural land (Slezák 2005: 39). Only in pastoral areas was it possible to achieve an allocation of up to 20 hectares of land (Říha 2017: 39).

The confiscated agricultural land in the Czech borderlands was settled in an unusually short period of time. The process of agricultural settlement there was largely completed by the summer of 1946. The first to be occupied was the agricultural land located in more fertile areas. In the border area, a total of 1,955,067 hectares of all land (1,206,941 hectares of agricultural land and 648,135 hectares of forest land) were confiscated from agricultural owners. The largest part of the confiscated agricultural land (908,040 hectares) was allocated to 109,040 agricultural settler families and another 29,705 hectares were allocated to 48,455 settler families (of various occupations) for the construction of houses and gardens. The remaining land was given to the state, municipalities, the army, cooperatives, factories, etc. (Čapka et al. 2005: 82–83).

Non-agricultural Settlement

The situation concerning the confiscation and redistribution of the non-agricultural property was much more opaque compared to the agricultural sector. This was mainly due to the diversity of such assets, which included industrial and trade enterprises, but also residential premises and real estate, which meant that a much larger number of institutions were involved in the process than in the case of agriculture. The focus of the state attention was on the implementation of the land reform, and therefore the issue was largely neglected, including the issuance of a relevant legislation. As a result, until the confiscation Decree 108/1945 Coll. was issued (25 October 1945) there was no legal norm regulating the disposal of the non-agricultural property. Until the Decree was issued, such property had been under the national administration. The introduction such administration was especially necessary for industrial enterprises where disruptions in production would cause a great economic damage (Říha 2017: 62).

The state resolved the question of ownership of some assets by issuing two nationalisation Decrees, under which the ownership of key, large industries was transferred to the state. These were Decree No. 100/1945 Coll. (24 October 1945) on the nationalisation of mines and certain industrial enterprises, and Decree No. 101/1945 Coll. (24 October 1945) on the nationalisation of certain enterprises in the food industry. Thus, the redistribution and settlement of the non-agricultural property realistically affected only the medium and small enterprises in the light industry, the

food industry, trades, wholesale and retail trade, real estate (houses) and movable property (Říha 2017: 63).

The allocation of the confiscated non-agricultural property was regulated by the aforementioned Decree No. 108/1945 Coll. which nevertheless did not stipulate the principles of the allocation policy. The specific requirements for those interested in the allocation were laid down in the individual settlement plans drawn up by the Settlement Office in cooperation with the relevant ministries. Confiscates of this type can be divided into three groups: industrial property, which required special treatment due to its national economic importance, then trade enterprises and family houses (Říha 2017: 63).

Due to the relatively complicated situation with regard to the confiscations and the drawing up of allocation plans, the allocation of the non-agricultural property did not begin until 1946. The delay of almost two years after the Decree was issued was due to the need to consolidate trades; first it had to be decided which ones would be preserved and which ones would not. The newly established national enterprises had the priority to apply for the allocation of industrial confiscations that did not fall under nationalisation. According to the law⁹ the national administrators then had the right to allocate the assets they administered. However, they had to meet certain requirements (Slavic nationality, Czechoslovak citizenship, integrity, national and state reliability). These requirements also applied to family members. The national administrators also had to have the qualifications for the trade they were applying for. The participants in the liberation struggle had the absolute priority for the placement in a job, for the granting of a trade license, for the right to become a national administrator, and for the allocation of confiscations. Other privileged applicants were the war victims and national administrators, but their applications could only be approved after those with absolute priority rights. The rule was that one applicant could receive only one trade (Říha 2017: 71–77).

A crucial phase of the settlement process was the allocation of family houses, which began to be practically implemented only after February 1948. This option was of great interest to ordinary people. The first house handover took place on 18 June 1949 and by the end of January 1950 a total of 116,044 houses had been handed over. The principles for the allocation of houses were similar to those for the allocation of trades (nationality, political reliability and integrity). In addition, applicants had to meet other specific requirements. Applicants could not be married, had to be employed, and if they owned other dwellings, they had to give them up. The main institution that processed the applications was the local national committee. Only one house could be allocated to each applicant. The houses were allocated with all accessories. The price per house was set on the basis of multiples of the annual rent, taking into account the size of the building, location, amenities, etc. The prices were deliberately lower than what the market prices would be. The state thus sought to dispose of the properties as quickly as possible at a time of a general

⁹ Act No. 31/1947 Coll. (of 14 February 1947) on certain principles in the distribution of enemy property.

lack of finance. A change in the pricing of houses took place after the issue of the Government Decree No. 32 of 23 February 1949. According to the new Decree, the prices of houses for working people were maintained, whereas for others they were increased by 50%, and for the class-hostile persons (businessmen) they were doubled (Říha 2017: 84–88).

Settlement Problems

The settlement of the Czech borderlands after the Second World War was completed in a rough outline as early as 1947. The whole process of settlement was characterised by the fact that arrivals were replaced by departures (the movement of people wasn't only one-way). The settlement process began to lose momentum at the end of 1947, partly because the internal resources of the population had been exhausted, but also as a result of the stabilisation of the economy and the increase in job opportunities in the interior, which reduced the number of people who would consider moving to the borderlands.

At the end of 1946, but especially in 1947, a new, surprising trend began to emerge in the settlement process. Whereas up to this time the arrivals of settlers had outweighed the departures, in the following months the situation reversed and the departures began to dominate the arrivals. Farmers in particular left the borderlands and the countryside began to depopulate. A 1949 report by the Ministry of the Interior stated that from May 1945 to the end of 1948 over 27,000 farmers had left the borderland, roughly 20% of the total number of settlers (Slezák 2007: 385).

The outflow of settlers, especially from the countryside, intensified in 1948. A number of factors certainly influenced this phenomenon, but the basic cause can be seen in the size of the land allocations. Applicants could receive a maximum of 13 hectares of land, but in reality, the allocations were much smaller. The small amount of land in the less fertile (mountainous) areas could not support larger families. Part of the problem was that sometimes people who had little or no experience in farming came to such difficult conditions. The poor choice of crops planted also played a part, with the same crops not being possible in the mountainous borderlands as in the fertile lowlands of the interior. The disastrous drought of 1947 had also contributed to these problems (Topinka 2005: 535–539).

After the communist coup (February 1948), the collectivisation of agriculture began, which dealt another blow to the already devastated countryside in the borderlands. Collectivisation had been going on throughout the country since the spring of 1949, but in the borderland, which had experienced a different development in relation to the land reform and the composition of the rural population, it had taken a different course than in other parts of the country. In the borderlands, more than half a million people, over 20% of the population, depended on agriculture and forestry for their livelihood (Nindel 1949: 336). Farmers were urged to join unified agricultural cooperatives through agitators and media campaigns. For struggling farmers,

joining an agricultural cooperative was more of a rescue from economic decline; it was a way to get rid of financial obligations to the state. Overall, the resistance to join agricultural cooperatives was much weaker in the borderlands than in the interior (Slezák 2007: 390). However, there were also groups that resisted joining cooperatives. In addition to some of the old settlers, agitators encountered resistance especially from the Czech emigrants from Volhynia and Poland, because they had moved here with the idea of farming on their land and therefore did not want to give it up (Topinka 2005: 543).

Radical changes had also affected the industrial enterprises in the border region. In addition to the displacement of most German employees, medium and small industry suffered two other blows. First, a number of formerly German factories were seized by the Red Army and taken to the USSR as war booty (2004: 303–320). The real liquidation of industry was then *de facto* continued by the Czechoslovakian government itself, when in the period 1945–1948 it had hundreds of enterprises moved to the industrially backward Slovakia (Topinka 2005: 541). At the end of the 1940s, the industrial plants in the borderlands were facing the problem of high turnover and, in some places, a shortage of employees. A large part of the fluctuation was due to outgoing Slovaks, who started to return to Slovakia after they realised that salaries were not as generous as they had expected. This tendency indicated one thing that became characteristic of the border region in the future; namely, that the problem was not so much getting the settlers here, but keeping them here.

Update

The final stage of the settlement in the borderland can be understood as the period up to the end of the 1950s, when the so-called resettlement was already being discussed. As the change in terminology suggests, this phase was more about solving local problems that had resulted from the previous changes. In this period, the main problem of the borderlands was the unevenness of the settlement pattern, which was particularly acute in Northern and Southern Bohemia. The resettlement of the borderland was carried out only from internal sources, as the re-emigration of foreign compatriots was stopped in 1950.

Re-emigration

The expulsion of the German minority led to a substantial population decline in Czechoslovakia.

One of the ways towards increasing the number of people in the state by suitable, i.e., in the terminology of the time, “nationally and politically proven persons”, was to organize the re-emigration of foreign compatriots. According to the estimates of 1945 there were more than two million people living outside the territory of the

Czechoslovak Republic who claimed Czech or Slovak nationalities. Most of them, about 1 million, lived in the USA. In Europe, mainly in the territory of the former Habsburg monarchy, there were around 900,000 compatriots (Vaculík 2002: 9). On the European continent, the largest group of compatriots was located in Hungary (473 thousand), followed by Yugoslavia (130 thousand) and Romania (46 thousand) (Vaculík 2002: 43–104). A large group of compatriots also lived in Volhynia (part of the former USSR); according to the (unofficial) estimates, 40 to 60 thousand people who claimed Czech nationality lived there after the war (Heroldová 1983: 109).

The compatriots were officially invited to re-emigrate on 31 June 1945. At the same time the government instructed the ministries involved to proceed with the preparation and then the implementation of the re-emigration (Nosková 2007: 73). The compatriots themselves showed interest in re-emigration; some of them became involved in this matter almost immediately after the end of the war. The European compatriots in particular banded together and collectively appealed to the government to allow them to re-emigrate. In several cases, delegations of representatives of compatriot groups were sent to Czechoslovakia.¹⁰

The period of the post-war re-emigration to Czechoslovakia can be defined as the years between 1945–1950, when re-emigration was officially terminated. The arrival of foreign compatriots to Czechoslovakia was intertwined with the entire process of settling the borderlands, although it was most strongly anchored in its second half (Čapka et al. 2005: 32). In the first years (1945–1946), re-emigration was rather individual. In the next period (1947–1950) it was mainly organised by the state. The reason why the state-organised re-emigration was an issue in the second half of the defined period is mainly that before the actual transfer of re-emigrants, an agreement had to be reached (between the particular state and the Czechoslovak Republic) and these negotiations sometimes lasted for years. Negotiating the whole thing was undoubtedly complicated, but the fact that the states in question were not very interested in cooperating in this action because it was uninteresting or rather disadvantageous from their point of view played a significant role in these delays. In the case of Bulgaria, it was not until 1949 that an agreement on re-emigration was completed.

Offers Made by the State to the Returning Migrants

At the beginning of the re-emigration action there were different ideas about what the government would offer and provide to the re-emigrants. Ideally, the re-emigrants were to be provided with the same, or at least similar, living conditions as

¹⁰ In the summer of 1945, for example, a fifty-member delegation of Slovaks from Hungary, Yugoslavia and Romania visited Bratislava and Prague and met with the Prime Minister Z. Fierlinger to inform him about the life and position of their minorities in these countries. They made a demand for re-emigration (Vaculík 2002: 14). In 1946, a four-member delegation from Vovvodovo, Bulgaria, went to the Czechoslovak Republic. The aim of this visit was to personally inspect the places that were offered to Vovvodov re-emigrants as new places of residence (Jakoubek 2011: 91–109).

they had lived in before moving to Czechoslovakia; they were to be allocated land in areas similar to the areas of their previous residence, and they were to be settled in compact communities so as to disrupt their social ties as little as possible, and so on. However, the unexpectedly rapid development of events in the post-war borderlands meant that the original ideals very often did not come to fruition, and the realistic offers made to the re-emigrants by the state were gradually reformulated and adjusted according to the actual possibilities.

The conditions of the re-emigration changed within a few months after the war, mainly due to the rapid settlement of the borderlands from the interior, but also partly due to the spontaneous, unorganized state re-emigration and repatriation. At the beginning of 1947 (10 January), the government announced that the newcomers could no longer count on being assigned farms or independent trades, but would only be placed in employment. Foreign compatriots were kept informed on these facts (Vaculík 2001: 62).

Bulgarian Compatriots: History of the Compatriot Branch

The Bulgarian branch of the emigration began to constitute more strongly during the 19th century, and the numbers of newcomers increased significantly after 1878, when the Bulgarian independence was restored. The migration then continued in the early years of the 20th century. Although Bulgaria is a relatively distant country, and we could certainly consider cultural and other differences, it was an interesting destination for some Czechs and Slovaks during this period, because after the end of the Ottoman era there was a significant economic development, which meant new opportunities for work and business, attracting foreign workers and bringing capital to the country.

After 1878, the Turkish, Tatar and Circassian population was displaced from Bulgaria, causing depopulation in some parts of the country. The problem was solved by offering land to farmers (from 1897), first for free and later for low fees (Bečvářová 2009: 22). At first, only Bulgarian emigrants could acquire land, but over time it began to be allocated to members of foreign, especially Slavic, ethnic groups with the tacit approval of the authorities (Penčev 2012: 63). This possibility was then used by some Czech and Slovak farmers who came to Bulgaria as part of a secondary migration, from the area of the so-called military border and the surrounding areas (today's Hungary, Romania and former Yugoslavia).

From the 1880s onwards, the Czech capital began to penetrate intensively into Bulgaria. Some industries (for example, brewing and sugar production) were *de facto* non-existent in Bulgaria at that time. Therefore, some entrepreneurs seized the opportunity and started to build and develop these industries here. Several “colonies”¹¹ of Czech and Slovak employees were established at large industrial enter-

¹¹ The term „colony“ was used in the Czech interwar ethnography to refer to a group or a minority.

prises, such as the sugar factory in Gorna Oriyahovitsa, or the breweries in Lom, Kamen and elsewhere (Lančová 2017: 40).

In Bulgaria (but also in other Balkan states which were part of the Ottoman Empire for a long time) there was a shortage of professionals for the state administration and in other fields, such as lawyers, teachers, doctors, engineers, musicians, etc. (Bečvářová 2009: 22). This state of affairs was caused by the fact that the Ottoman Empire did not have a developed educational infrastructure to educate such people. Thus, young Bulgarians had to study abroad, and they also went to Bohemia. The ideas of *Pan-Slavism*, a mutual support during the struggle for national independence, as well as the contacts with Bulgarian students and intellectuals contributed greatly to the intensification of Czech-Bulgarian relations during the period of national liberation in the second half of the 19th century.

Czech artists and intellectuals also came to the country. Some of them were involved in the building of the modern Bulgarian state and science. Czech intellectuals left such a significant mark that sometimes people speak directly of a “Czech invasion” or a “Czech cultural occupation” (Strohsová 2012: 33).

The compatriots in Bulgaria lived in big cities, such as Sofia, Ruse, Varna, and in the countryside. Among the villages with a large number of Czechs and Slovaks were Belintsi, Gorna Mitropoliya, Podem (formerly Martvitsa), or Brashlyanitsa. A very interesting case is the village of Voyvodovo¹² founded and built at the beginning of the 20th century by mostly Czech¹³ settlers. They came to Bulgaria from another predominantly Czech village, St. Helena located on the territory of the Romanian Banat. The history of the Czech settlement in Voyvodovo then basically ends in 1949–1950, when the vast majority of the 700 inhabitants re-emigrated to Czechoslovakia (Jakoubek 2010: 11).

In the period between the wars, around 3,500 compatriots lived in Bulgaria (Klíma 1925: 15–18). Another source from the period just before the start of the Second World War states that the compatriot group numbered about 3,000 people, 1,700 Czechs and 1,300 Slovaks (Strejček 1938: 13).

Re-emigration of Compatriots from Bulgaria

The Czechoslovak government officially invited the compatriots to re-emigrate on 31 July 1945. Some of them reacted surprisingly quickly to this call. Very active were the inhabitants of the above-mentioned village of Voyvodovo, who on the very next day (1 August 1945) sent a letter to the Prime Minister of the Czechoslovak

¹² The issue of Voyvodovo has been mainly examined by two Czech researchers M. Jakoubek and L. Jakoubková Budilová. For more on the topic see Jakoubek 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2016, 2021; J. Budilová 2011; Kňourek and J. Budilová 2015.

¹³ Voyvodovo was founded by about 200 Czechs, soon joined by about 100 Slovaks, and then by Banat Bulgarians (Penčev 2012: 64).

government Z. Fierlinger in which they expressed their interest in re-emigration to Czechoslovakia. It was essential for these compatriots, who were known as excellent farmers, to obtain agricultural land of the quality to which they were accustomed in Bulgaria.

In December 1946, a group of representatives of Bulgarian Czechs and Slovaks even came to Prague to discuss with the central authorities the possibility of their settlement. The result of this effort, however, was only a recommendation that they wait until a bilateral agreement on the transfer of property was signed, and at the same time they were warned that Southern Moravia, which they considered an ideal place for the settlement, no longer had free agricultural land that could be allocated to them (Vaculík 1994: 45). Some Bulgarian compatriots, however, did not wait until the interstate agreement was signed and went to Czechoslovakia individually.

The exact wording of the re-emigration agreement between the Czechoslovak Republic and Bulgaria was finalized in December 1947, with the understanding that it would be signed as soon as the two national banks agreed on the account to which the money for the re-emigrants' property would be sent. It was further agreed that the Bulgarian state would buy up the farms at local mid-prices, and that the urban real estate and movable property (not to be transferred to the ČSR) could be sold at free prices. The re-emigration agreement also defined what the re-emigrants could bring to their new residence: personal clothing, home furnishings and household goods, personal jewelry; the most necessary tools were allowed, and each family could take one pig and five sheep (Vaculík 1994: 46).

The text of the resettlement agreement was approved by the Czechoslovak government on 17 March 1948. However, it was more than a year later – on 6 May 1949 – that the Czech and Bulgarian sides signed the Convention on the Regulation of the Resettlement of Czechs and Slovaks from Bulgaria to Czechoslovakia, which became the legal basis for the implementation of the re-emigration action (Vaculík 1994: 45–46). However, it should be noted that the several years of delays (before the signing of the agreement) were caused by the Bulgarian side, which quite logically was not very interested in the matter, as it meant financial costs and population decline for them, but also, perhaps a bit surprisingly, by the Czechoslovak side. Two things were manifested in the situation. Firstly, the fact that other groups of re-emigrants were seen as a priority in dealing with re-emigration. The emphasis was placed on carrying out the re-emigration from Volhynia and Romania first. As a result, the delays were also caused by the poorly supportive policy of the Czechoslovak institutions (ministries) that secured the re-emigration. These ministries were (even before the communist takeover in 1948) in the hands of the Communist Party, which, in accordance with its programme and plans, emphasised the need for re-emigrants, especially valued as a new source of labour, and deliberately did not create the conditions necessary for the settlement of private farmers and tradesmen (small entrepreneurs).

Before the transfer of people to the Czechoslovak Republic could be implemented, the property issues of re-emigrants in their place of residence had to be resolved

practically. Therefore, a Joint Commission was formed, which in July 1949 began preparations for the re-emigration from the territory of Bulgaria. After examining the received applications, the Commission granted the right to re-emigration to about 1,400 persons. In accordance with the wording of the Convention, local joint commissions and committees were then established to ascertain the prices of the real property of the re-emigrants at which they would then be redeemed (Vaculík 1994: 46).

The compatriots from Bulgaria were transported to Czechoslovakia in four courses which took place in 1949 and 1950. Special trains were dispatched for the emigrants and their property. The first two courses were realized in December 1949 with a total of 786 transported persons. After arriving in the territory of Czechoslovakia, the transports were then redirected to Southern Moravia, where 272 family houses were reserved for the re-emigrants (Vaculík 1994: 47). They were also allocated agricultural land of 1 hectare.

The third transport course (188 persons) arrived in Czechoslovakia on 23 January 1950. These persons were also settled in Southern Moravia, but some were also placed as industrial workers in the Cheb and Karlovy Vary regions. As 362 more persons subsequently applied for re-emigration, a fourth transport course was carried out. This one arrived in Czechoslovakia on 23 May 1950. People from this transport were placed in several localities in Southern Moravia¹⁴ (Vaculík 1994: 47).

A total of 1,336 Bulgarian Czechs and Slovaks arrived in Czechoslovakia through a state-organized re-emigration campaign. The value of the immovable property they had left behind in Bulgaria was estimated at 362 million leva, which equaled 55 million crowns at the time (Vaculík 1994: 47).

However, even after the fourth and final transport course, there were further demands for re-emigration made by Bulgarian Czechs and Slovaks, and by the end of 1951 around 500 more people had re-emigrated to Czechoslovakia (Vaculík 2002: 125). These figures show that a total of 1,800 people re-emigrated from Bulgaria during the state-organized action.

Reasons behind Re-emigration

The decision of the compatriots to leave Bulgaria and start building a new life in Czechoslovakia was influenced by a number of circumstances. Undoubtedly, the atmosphere of the time, which greatly strengthened their national feeling, had a significant influence, but the main reasons were probably found in the economic sphere. For poor (non-wealthy) compatriots, re-emigration meant hope for a better life. Those who were better off reacted positively to the political and economic changes in Bulgaria at that time, especially to the collectivisation already underway, in which privately farming compatriots mostly did not want to participate. By the

¹⁴ Nový Přerov, Mikulov, Valtice, Drnholec, Novosedly, Jevišovka, Hrabětice, Brod na Dyjí, Perná.

time the re-emigration treaty was signed, both countries were already under a communist rule, which discouraged a significant number of Bulgarian compatriots from re-emigrating; however, the relatively favourable terms of the treaty provided many with the hope that they would retain their current socio-economic status by leaving (Nosková, Váchová 2000: 35). For the inhabitants of the aforementioned Voyvodovo, another, not entirely usual circumstance played a significant role. For several generations, this village had practiced group endogamy – a marriage rule according to which the marriage partner should come from the community. The re-emigration was also supposed to be a solution to the problem of limited marriage possibilities for the villagers (Jakoubková 2020: 46–69).

Conclusion

The settlement of the Czech borderlands was a very demanding and complicated organizational action for which there was no precedent or precise plan. The fact that the institutions (ministries) that practically managed and organized the settlement were (even before the communist coup in 1948) in the hands of the Communist Party had a fundamental influence on the course of the settlement. Many of the measures were thus aimed at fulfilling the political objectives of the party. The way in which the settlements were carried out was enforced by the communists despite criticism from other political parties and associations. It is also significant that the settlement of the borderlands was in fact a tool in the political campaign of the Communist Party, which then won about one third of the total vote in the first elections after the war in 1946, thus achieving a landslide victory over the other parties.

The results of the settlement of the borderlands are not easy to assess. Compared to the interior of the country, the borderlands were already lagging behind before the war. In particular, the western part was lagging behind, and the mass population movements associated with the Second World War exacerbated these differences.

The newly settled borderlands were much more diverse in terms of ethnic composition than before the war, and this fact also contributed to their complicated development after the war. From the remnants of the original population and the new settlers, who were socially and culturally strongly heterogeneous, a new society was created only slowly and with difficulties. The assimilation and integration of the settlers was often problematic also because there was simply nowhere to integrate, there was no majority society but only groups of newcomers.

According to the plans and preliminary applications of those interested in the re-emigration, more re-emigrants were expected than actually re-emigrated. In the case of European countries with the largest groups of compatriots, the main reason may be the results of the negotiations on the international agreements that preceded re-emigration. The agreements were signed only when the border areas had already been heavily occupied and only industrial and agricultural jobs were available, which did not correspond with the interests of those who had achieved a certain

status. This is one of the reasons why a significant number of those interested in re-emigration decided to abandon their intention (Heroldová 1978: 197). Another reason why many expatriates decided to stay where they were was the fact that the conditions of re-emigration were not favourable or almost unacceptable for them as in the case of Yugoslavia. As a result, only 11,000 people out of a group of 120,000 emigrated (Pelikán 1989: 162).

Although the Bulgarian agreement was quite advantageous for the re-emigrants, their new life in Czechoslovakia was negatively affected by other circumstances. If I were to try to evaluate the benefits of re-emigration for the Bulgarian compatriots, I would have to say that the move to Czechoslovakia brought them considerable difficulties and disappointments, at least in the first years of their stay. Most of the Bulgarian re-emigrants were the so-called small farmers (owning land up to 5, rarely up to 10 hectares) (Vaculík 1994: 47). Those compatriots who had been private farmers in their previous place of residence could no longer practice this type of livelihood after the re-emigration. Neither the small area of land allocated to them (up to 1 hectare), nor the communist establishment of the state allowed it. Instead, they were offered poorly paid jobs in agriculture and industry. It should be noted, however, that since the communist regime (and collectivisation) had taken hold in both Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria, it is fairly certain that they could not have continued this way of making a living there either.

Another problem that the Bulgarian compatriots had to face was the disruption of social ties and the disintegration of communities, which was caused by the fact that, in contrary to the original ideas and promises, the people were placed in multiple locations. For example, for the group of people from Voyvodovo, who were strongly socially and kinship-connected, this was a real disaster (Jakoubek 2016: 232–235). However, for the compatriots who claimed some property, the re-emigration also meant major financial losses. Those who sold their property to the Bulgarian state had the funds from the sale deposited in escrow account, which meant that they could not dispose of them freely. They could not use it to repair the allocated houses, which were often in a catastrophic state, or to buy household equipment and other necessities. An even more fundamental problem, however, was the currency reform of 1953 when the currency was adjusted at an exchange rate of 1:50 (Jakoubek 2014 191). Many Bulgarian compatriots thus lost the results of their lifelong efforts and had to start from scratch.

After the war, a total of 202,526 people emigrated to Czechoslovakia. Of these, the largest group came from Hungary (71,787), followed by the Ukrainian Volhynia (38,859) and Romania (21,001) (Čapka et al. 2005: 166). It is also somewhat complicated to evaluate the post-war re-emigration action as a whole. At the beginning, there were visions and goals that were only partially fulfilled, but the fact is that from the state's point of view, the re-emigration of more than two hundred thousand compatriots brought the state about one hundred thousand workers.

The post-war settlement, which included the re-emigration of foreign compatriots, did meet certain objectives, but in comparison to the goals that were set at

its beginning, it was by no means a success. Mass population transitions and the interventions of the communist regime influenced the borderland for many decades. And it must be openly claimed that the traces of uprootedness and decline are still visible in many places today.

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