

To Understand its Economy, We Must First Check Czech History

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INTRODUCTION

For its issue for December 9, 2002, the German magazine *Focus* warned that *In den nächsten 100 Jahren könnte die Arktis verschwinden* (Dem ewigen 2002), meaning: In the next 100 years, the Arctic can vanish. Yes, global warming is a fact. But the headline just cited was not a front-page headline in papers across the world. Happenings in the Czech Republic don't make those front pages either. In the paragraphs to follow, there is an attempt to establish that exciting things have happened in that Republic and shall continue with significant economic implications.

YOU CANNOT ESCAPE YOUR HISTORY

A Czech Bible introduces two men who will dominate our treatment of Czech history: *V tom David vztáh ruku svou k mošni [ce, vyŠal z ní kámen, kterým] hodil z praku, a udeŠl Filistinského v [elo jeho* (Bible Svata 1991), meaning: And David put his hand in his bag and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine [Goliath] in his forehead. Herein we shall meet **three** Goliaths with whom the Czech Republic, David, must struggle.

The first Goliath was the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a sprawling dual monarchy. In a nostalgic mood, Austrian writer Stefan Zweig painted a pleasant picture of that Empire in the quiet days just before World War I:

...es war das goldene Zeitalter der Sicherheit. Alles in unserer fast tausendjährigen

österreichischen Monarchie schien auf Dauer gegründet und der Staat selbst der oberste Garant dieser Beständigkeit (Zweig 1982) ...it was the

Golden Age of Security. Everything in our almost thousand-year Austrian Monarchy seemed to be established on a permanent basis and the State itself was the most important guarantor of this permanence and stability.

Although Zweig did not want to remember it, there were in Austria-Hungary some ethnic groups who were most unhappy. For example, the Czechs and the Slovaks. Representing several other discontented groups was the young Serb Gavrilo Princip. In Sarajevo today, there is a plaque in Serbo-Croatian memorializing Princip. It reads: *Na tomto míst [astCelil 28. [ervna 1914 Gavrilo Princip arcivévodu Františka Ferdinanda a jeho ženu Šofii* (APA 2003), meaning: On this exact spot on June 28, 1914, Gavrilo Princip shot [Austro-Hungarian] Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife Sophia. The incident led to World War I and when all the smoke had cleared, the Empire was downsized and from it was created an area to be known henceforth as Czechoslovakia. David was victorious over his **first** Goliath!

GOLIATH KNOCKS AGAIN

In creating the new Czechoslovakia, the League of Nations left inside this infant nation **three million Germans** in an area known as the Sudetenland. Those Germans were not happy being a part of a Slavic land. Hitler, we can call him the **second** Goliath, heard their pleas and decided to bring the Sudetens into his Third Reich. Was there no force to stand up for our David? Britain and France could have done it, but an official recent history published by the German Government states that those two nations had adopted a *Beschwichtigungspolitik*

(Fragen 1993), meaning Aa policy of appeasement. But Hitler wasn't through. *Alm März 1939 deutsche Truppen in Prag einmarschieren (Ibid)*, meaning: AIn March of 1939, German troops marched into Prague. Since Britain and France still did nothing at that point, we could conclude that the **second** Goliath was victorious.

But in 1945, the Soviet Union's Red Army drove out the Germans and, with a sigh of relief, we could say that the **second** Goliath was defeated and Czechoslovakia gladly became a member of the Communist-oriented Soviet puppet states, later to be known as Warsaw Pact nations. By 1968, however, the Czechs wanted a little more breathing room and Moscow didn't want to hear that. The website *bagalil.com* explains how Moscow reacted. This sentence from *bagalil.com* is ironic and cleverly worded:

In der Nacht vom 20./21. August 1968, tausende Panzer und Hunderttausende Soldaten von fünf Staaten des Warschauer Paktes leisteten Abbrüderliche Hilfe um die CSSR vor der vermeintlichen Kontrarevolution zu schützen (Sozialismus 1998)

B During the night of August 20-21, 1968, thousands of tanks and a hundred thousand soldiers from five nations of the Warsaw Pact provided Abrotherly help to protect the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic from the imaginary counterrevolution.

GOLIATH, GOODBYE

By November 1989, the Soviet Union had its first APresident, Mikhail Gorbachev, who saw the world picture a little differently. At the same time, Vaclav Havel (a dissident who had been imprisoned for five years by the Soviets) was elected Czech President. As he left office in 2003, one of his last acts was to support U.S. President Bush in the latter's stance on Iraq. At that point, the Czech Republic had driven out its three Goliaths and was now ready for solid

economic

development.

CONCLUSION

Yes, for now the Goliaths are gone, but the ghosts of two (Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Third Reich) linger still:

Prague tient à sa centrale nucléaire de Temelin. Ce qui ne plaît pas du tout à son voisin autrichien... L'Allemagne a manifesté des inquiétudes... L'acharnement autrichien passe souvent pour la survivance d'un vieil impérialisme (Pasquier 2002)

Prague has a nuclear power station at Temelin. This is something that does not at all please its Austrian neighbor.... Germany has made clear its own inquietude.... The Austrian animosity often passes for a survival of an **old imperialism** [Bold emphasis by the current author].

Pay no attention to them, Czech Republic, and keep moving economically forward!

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