

Migrations from the Czech Lands to the Balkans

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I would like to begin my contribution by saying a few words generally about modern Czech migration and then I would like to concentrate on migration to the Balkans. I will first speak about migration to Romania, then to Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia and Bulgaria.

Introduction

Czech minorities or what remains of them can generally be found all over the world. Up to 1989 more people emigrated from the Czech territory than immigrated to it, and besides immigration right after 1945, the only larger groups of emigrants to Bohemia came from Slovakia.

The first modern period waves of migration from Bohemia were mainly for religious reasons. From the battle at Bílá Hora (in English known as White Mountain) in 1620 until the second half of the 18th century, groups of Protestants and other reform religious groups left the Catholic-oriented country mainly for neighbouring Saxony, Prussia, for the Ruhr basin and some, especially intellectuals and richer aristocratic classes to Scandinavian countries, Holland, England, etc. Exceptionally they also left for America. We can still find traces of this migration today for example in the Berlin quarter Rixdorf, in Polish Zelów, which is a small town near Lodz/Łódź, and elsewhere.

Religious immigration from the Czech lands began to weaken at the end of the 18th century, namely under the government of Emperor Joseph II of Austria, who in 1771 issued the so-called Edict of Tolerance, a series of regulations, which in Austria improved the standing of the Protestant Church and Orthodox Church.¹ Even though the Catholic Church maintained its superior position and the Catholic faith remained the state religion, members of the Calvinist or Lutheran Churches and believers in the Orthodox Church were no longer openly persecuted or their lives threatened, despite the fact that their covert persecution and discrimination continued practically until the founding of the Czechoslovak Republic. From 1782, the Jewish faith also began to be tolerated.

Although religious migration did not completely stop with the beginning of the tolerance policy, economic migration began to develop. The first impulse to it was given by another of Josef's edicts which was issued on 1 November 1781 and which is called the Edict on Abolition of Serfdom. Through this patent the serfs were released from direct dependence on their lord and did not need his permission if they wanted to move to the estate of another lord or to town. They could also have their children study or learn a trade; they could buy themselves out from serfdom. These possibilities started to be put into practice mainly after the Napoleonic Wars, when the political situation in Central Europe had calmed down and the conditions formed for the first steps towards industrial society.

¹ As the date of the edict's issue, 13 October 1781 is usually mentioned.

Economic migrations had two aims in view until World War I, the first of which was to gain land cheaply, which could be used for farming, and the second was to get a well-paid position as an employee or as a businessman.

The strategy of gaining land requires specific conditions. There was a lack of free land in Europe throughout the 19th century and it belonged to the nobility or churches. With the prospect of gaining land for farming, the inhabitants thus left the Czech lands mainly for overseas, especially for North America, where, however, also migration to large industrial cities was dominant in the second half of the 19th century, but they also left for Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Canada and other countries. The possibility of gaining land also arose in tsarist Russia, where approximately 15 thousand people from Bohemia and Moravia went in the course of ten years in the 1860s and the early 1870s.²

Since the possibilities of gaining land were very limited within the Austrian empire, the direction of internal migration was chiefly from the countryside to the city. Czechs migrated mainly to cities in their vicinity and also to other metropolises of the monarchy. Beyond the borders of the Czech Lands, the most favoured destination was Vienna, which was, in the second half of the 19th century, considered as the second largest Czech town after Prague; other frequent destinations were for instance Wrocław, Gratz, Maribor, Zagreb, Rijeka.

The only remaining large-scale possibility for those interested in land was to take advantage of Austrian internal colonisation policies on the borders of the Ottoman Empire, especially those places where, after the so-called Treaty of Karlowitz of 26 January 1699 was signed, the Austrian side occupied new territories earlier conquered by the Ottoman Empire. Transylvania was then rejoined to the Hungarian Lands and in 1718 the so-called Military Border District began to be built. The territory of this border area was subdivided into smaller military districts. Despite their being under military leadership, they needed farming. So that these territories would be settled by a reliable, loyal population, both the military administration and the imperial court created attractive conditions, which allowed even poorer farmers to establish new farmsteads and bridge the period to the first harvest. In addition, aristocrats having their estates near the Military Border District did not have enough labour force in the depopulated areas and were forced to recruit a workforce in the interior of the Austrian state. The above-mentioned migrational inducements, which increased in their intensity right after the Napoleonic Wars, affected not only the Czech population but also many more Hungarians, Germans, Bulgarians, Slovaks, Poles, Italians, and also foreign populations, for example the French. In the Military Border District, a very specific mix of villages of heterogeneous provenience was thus created, which were united by German as the language of official discourse, but where every village used the mother tongue from their country of origin for daily communication and maintained a number of features of the original culture.

The Military Border District was cancelled in 1872. The whole area has gradually culturally homogenised since, not only because the population of other ethnic origin has slowly adapted to the new conditions in national states, but also thanks to strong re-emigration to the countries of their forefathers. Especially the population originally from countries which are now economically thriving no longer lives here. Namely after 1989 the German settlers left

² In 1897, there were allegedly more than 27,000 Czechs living in Russian Volhynia, whereas in 1912 the number was estimated to have reached 30,000 – 50,000 (Valášková N., Z. Uherek, S. Brouček 1997. *Aliens or One's Own People. Czech Immigrants from the Ukraine in the Czech Republic*. Praha: Institute of Ethnology: 16).

the area. Czechs left the areas of the Military Border District in part right after the Second World War and again in the 1990s and early 21st century. The Slovak population also partially re-emigrated, a part even left for Bohemia. A strong Hungarian minority remains in Transylvania, formed by autochthonous Hungarian population.

Individual settlers from the Czech Lands started to come to the area of the Military Border District already in the 18th century. However, we do not have accurate data about them, and they did not form independent Czech enclaves. In greater numbers, they started to settle down near the Military Border District in the 1820s and 30s in two areas: in the area of Banat, it means in the area of today's Romania and partially also Serbia, and in Slavonia, it means on the territory of today's Croatia.

Czech Settlers in Romania

The first well identified Czech colonists arrived in the Romanian Banat in the years 1820-1824. Historical narrations of successors of the first Czech settlers recorded by Czech ethnographers informed us, that at that time the area was covered in thick beech forests, and these forests were rented by the Military Border District to an aristocrat who is called Magyarly or Madžarly in literature. He needed woodcutters for the forests and therefore sent agents to various parts of the monarchy, who would provide him with forest labourers. The workers were found in the districts of Plzeň, Domažlice, Klatovy, Kladno and Čáslav. They were about 80 families and these founded two settlements, Sfânta Elena (Svatá Helena / Saint Helena) and Eibenthal.³ Other families were invited from Bohemia around 1826. Lord Magyarly, however, lost interest in employing the labourers in the forest and so the new settlers asked the administration of the Military Border District for assistance in settling. They were granted the assistance, and the information that the Military Border District was accepting new settlers spread to the Czech Lands. This resulted in the moving of further families, which had to be stopped at the beginning of the 1830s to prevent the depopulation of the Czech territory. In 1826 the new settlers were allocated land for fifteen villages. By 1830, 3,800 Czechs and Germans had emigrated there from the Czech lands. The highest numbers of Czechs are currently in Svatá Helena, in Gârnic/Garnic (Gernik), in Ravenska / Rovensko, in Eibenthal, in Şumiţa/Sumita / Šumice and in Biger/Bigăr.

Another group of settlers came to the area ravaged by the Turkish expansion in the 1840s and 50s. Some of them founded the settlement of Clopodia /Klopodia , others moved to the mixed village Peregu Mare near the town of Arad.⁴

The number of Czechs in Romania is rapidly decreasing currently. In 1991 the estimate was 10,000, now an approximate 4,500 is mentioned.

Czech Settlers in Croatia

The first larger group of Czechs arrived in Croatian Slavonia at approximately the same time as in Romanian Banat. In 1825 Czechs came as a mercenary workforce on the lands of Count

³ Jech, J., M. Secká, V. Scheufler, O. Skalníková 1992. *České vesnice v rumunském Banátě*. Praha: Ústav pro etnografii a folkloristiku ČSAV 14-15.

⁴ Heroldová, I. 1996. Vystěhovalectví do jihovýchodní Evropy. In: *Češi v cizině 9*. Praha: Ústav pro etnografii a folkloristiku AV ČR: 82-86.

Perejačević, who however, did not fulfil the promises to them and so they turned to the War Council in Vienna with a written request to be incorporated in the federation of the Military Border District. The War Council complied with their request and in 1826 the Czechs established the first Czech Slavonian settlement of Ivanovo Selo.

Alongside the military administration, noblemen settled this area. Neighbouring the Military Border District were the districts of Daruvar, Pakrac and Sirać, which were owned by Count Janković, who was seeking proper settlers. He had advertisements printed in Pressburg and Viennese newspapers already in 1814 and in the years 1826-1827 he had 60 Czech families come and settled them in Končanica about 8 km from Ivanovo Selo.⁵ Končanica is the largest Czech settlement in Slavonia still today and is the only Czech village in Slavonia where even today the Czech minority is in the majority. From this it arises that there is also a Czech mayor here and even a school with instruction of the Czech language. In 2004 1,318 Czechs lived here.

In Slavonia there are dozens of villages with Czech inhabitants. Their centre is the small town of Daruvar, where Czech is taught at the grammar school. There is also a Czech publishing house there, Jednota (Union), where a magazine of the same name is printed, and textbooks, instructional publications and even fiction are published. In 1900 approximately 31 thousand Czechs lived in Slavonia and in the 1930s it was even over 36 thousand. Since then their number has gradually decreased, but even now the Czechs of Slavonia are the largest Czech enclave in Europe outside the territory of the Czech Republic.

The Czechs in Croatia are relatively well organised. They have a network of *Besedas* (clubs), which unite Czechs not only in the Daruvar district, but also in other areas of Croatia where Czechs live. There are currently 24 *Besedas* functioning in Croatia; the oldest of which is in Zagreb, where it was founded by Josef Václav Frič in 1874. Czech *Besedas* are joined in the Czech Union of Croatia, which represents the Czech minority in Croatia as a whole. Individual *Besedas* meet mainly to discuss minority politics, to develop activities of interest and celebrate holidays and festivities together. During the census of 2001, 10,510 people in Croatia claimed Czech nationality and 7,178 people listed Czech as their mother tongue.⁶

Czechs in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Another country in the Balkans where Czechs settled was Bosnia and Herzegovina. They came in greater numbers mainly in the years 1878-1918, when Bosnia and Herzegovina was part of the Austrian empire. Czechs settled here chiefly in large cities, such as Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Mostar, Tuzla, Zenica, Doboj or Prijedor. They worked here in highly qualified positions as physicians, geologists, architects, or in the state administration, or as tradesmen. They also came as skilled labourers for example in mines or on railroad construction. In the years 1894-1896 Czechs also requested land as farmers and founded several villages along the Sava River. They lived in the villages: Mačino Brdo, Nova Ves, Malica, Vranduk and Detlačski Lug. The majority of colonists of the Czech origin in villages did not emigrate to Bosnia and Herzegovina from Bohemia, but from Russian Volhynia, where they had gone in the 1860s in an attempt to gain cheap land and in the 1890s they returned to belong under the Habsburg crown again, so that they would not have to change their faith and join the

⁵ Heroldová, I. 1996. Vystěhovalectví do jihovýchodní Evropy. In: *Češi v cizině 9*. Praha: Ústav pro etnografii a folkloristiku AV ČR: 70-80.

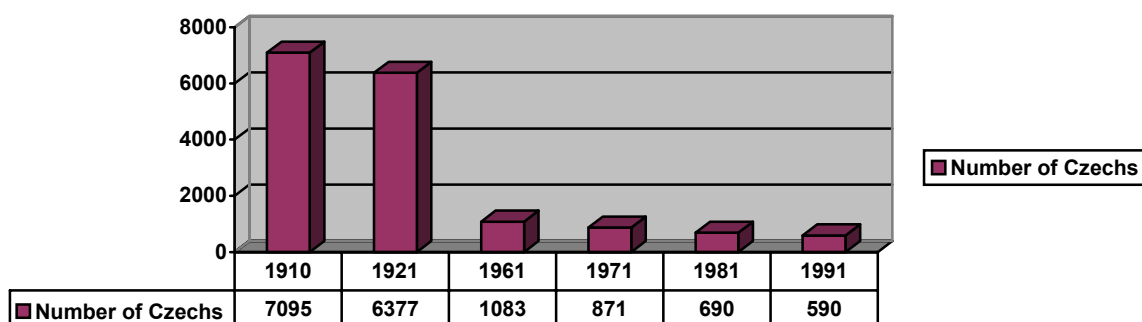
⁶ Field research Zdeněk Uherek and Kateřina Plochová 2004.

Orthodox Church. Today Czechs live in greater concentrations in the rural enclaves in Nova Ves and in Mačino Brdo.

The Czechs have also founded *Besedas* in Bosnia and Herzegovina, arranged social events, celebrated Shrovetide together, harvest festivals, the country fair of St. Catherine's, organised Czech courses, lectures and other interesting activities. Individual *Besedas* also issue informational bulletins. *Besedas* exist today in Sarajevo, in Tuzla, Zenica, Prijedor, in Banja Luka, in Nova Ves and in Mačino Brdo.⁷

The number of Czechs in Bosnia and Herzegovina was decreasing until 1991, and in the census in 1991 it was only 590. A sharp drop occurred especially after World War II when a part of the Czechs emigrated from Yugoslavia back to the Czech Republic. However, the nationalisation of culture after the collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s resulted in a higher number of people again starting to claim to be Czech and in the renewal of compatriot societies which had ceased to exist already in the 1960s.⁸ We estimate that about 2,000 people claim to be Czech in Bosnia and Herzegovina now.

Graph 1: The number of Czechs in Bosnia and Herzegovina



Czechs in Serbia

Apart from direct immigration and the consequent colonisation, also secondary migration took place from the original Czech enclaves. Thus the Czech settlement originated in Serbian Banat, where Czechs emigrated from Romanian Banat. In Serbian Banat approximately 2,000 people claiming Czech origin live and the compatriot centres here are Ablian, Bela Crkva, Kruščica, Veliko Središte, Veliki Bečkerek.

⁷ Uherek, Z. et al. 2000. *Češi v Bosně a Hercegovině. Úvod do problematiky s výběrovou bibliografií*. Praha: Etnologický ústav AV ČR.

⁸ Uherek, Z. 1998. Češi v Sarajevu: menšina v městském prostoru. *Český lid* 85, 2: 129 -146.

Czechs in Bulgaria

Czechs also arrived on the territory of today's Bulgaria. The numbers were, however, relatively low, with the prevalence of urban population who started coming to the territory of Bulgaria after the departure of the Ottoman armies. They were very often intellectuals, teachers, men of letters, journalists, who helped form the modern Bulgarian political nation, which is the reason why Czech culture is well received even today especially among historians. Czechs in Bulgaria also built sugar refineries and breweries. In 1910 1,555 people lived in Bulgaria who declared Czech as their mother tongue. In the interwar period, there were about 3,000.

In the rural environment of Bulgaria, there were hardly any Czechs with the exception of the village of Vojvodovo, which was founded by Slovaks together with freely reformed Evangelicals from Saint Helena, a village in Romanian Banat, where precisely religion was the cause of social tensions and families were, in addition, troubled by the lack of land. At the beginning of the 20th century, approximately 210 Czechs lived in Vojvodovo. After 1945, together with other Czechs of Bulgaria, the population of the village of Vojvodovo was resettled to the Czech Republic.⁹

Conclusion

As arises from my contribution, Czechs were not the only nation in the Austrian state to enrich the ethnic picture of the Balkans. Also seeking a home in the Balkans were Germans, Italians, Ukrainians, Poles, Slovaks, Hungarians and other groups. As can be seen from my description, their attempts were very often unsuccessful. Only fragments have remained from the originally founded enclaves, because their inhabitants went during various migrational opportunities back to the lands of their forefathers, especially in cases when the country of origin offered considerably better life conditions. The groups which stayed on the territories of the newly formed national states integrated into the new environment, and only such large enclaves as for instance the Hungarians in Romania have successfully resisted assimilation influences. Nevertheless, in comparison with the 1970s or 80s for example, the tempo of assimilation has been slightly slowing down, influenced by democratisation, minority politics and thanks to contacts with their countries of origin. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, compatriot life has been re-established and the number of people claiming to be Czech has risen. On the other hand, the possibilities of migration to the country of origin are weakening individual enclaves. The German minorities have already almost disappeared from the Balkans, the number of Czechs in the Romanian Banat is considerably decreasing and it is thus quite likely that it will soon not be possible to study these groups in the field any more. However, that is not important. It is much more important that their descendents live happily and contentedly in a country that they have freely chosen themselves.

⁹ Petkov Necov, N. 2006. *Dějiny Vojvodova*. Radnice: Občanské sdružení.