

Ten Propositions about Munich 1938

On the Fateful Event of Czech and European History – without Legends and National Stereotypes

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The Munich conference of 29–30 September 1938, followed by forced cession of border regions of Czechoslovakia to Nazi Germany and subsequently also to Poland and Hungary, is unquestionably one of the crucial milestones of Czech and Czechoslovak history of the 20th century, but also an important moment in the history of global diplomacy, with long-term overlaps and echoes into international politics. In the Czech environment, round anniversaries of the dramatic events of 1938 repeatedly prompt emotional debates as to whether the nation should have put up armed resistance in the autumn of 1938. Such debates tend to be connected with strength comparisons of the Czechoslovak and German armies of the time, but also with considerations whether the “bent backbone of the nation” with all its impacts on the mental map of Europe and the Czech role in it was an acceptable price for saving an indeterminate number of human lives and preserving material assets and cultural and historical monuments and buildings all around the country. Last year’s 80th anniversary of the Munich Agreement was no exception. A change for the better was the attention that the media paid to the situation of post-Munich refugees from the border regions as well as to the fact that the Czechs rejected, immediately after Munich, humanist democracy and started building an authoritarian state instead.¹ The aim of this text is to deconstruct the most widespread

1 See, for example: ZÍDEK, Petr: Po Mnichovu začali Češi budovat diktaturu [The Czechs started building a dictatorship after Munich]. In: *Lidové noviny* (29 September 2018), p. 1.

errors and stereotypical views that are generally connected with the history of Munich 1938 and, at the same time, to briefly examine the whole comprehensive issue of its causes and long-term consequences using a different optics than the traditional nationalist one.

1. The events of the Sudeten crisis together with the gradually growing interference of West European powers tend to be termed the “Munich betrayal” in Czech debates. The label has been used throughout the 80 years that have elapsed since then – starting with the time of exile from 1939 to 1945, through the short-lived period of the so-called Third Republic (1945–48), the 42 years of the communist regime, and the three decades since 1989. In communist propaganda and ideologized historiography, the term also included the betrayal of Czechoslovak people all of whom – if we are to believe this narrative – wanted to fight for their country. Yet, ultimately they were not allowed to do so – by the bourgeoisie.² However, the term “betrayal” as a dominant label of the actions of the two West European democratic powers has remained a constant in Czech socio-historical discourse, all changes of political regimes notwithstanding.³ It should be noted that the term not only contains an inappropriate emotional charge, which complicates the process of learning about the “causes” of the denouement of the Sudetenland crisis in 1938, but is also very problematic from a material and factual point of view. Britain, as the chief moderator of the crisis, was not bound to Czechoslovakia above and beyond the framework of the Covenant of the League of Nations in any way, i.e. it had the same position as any other member of the organization. This means that, at least as far as Britain was concerned, a “betrayal” was definitely out of the question. And France? It would have indeed violated the alliance treaty if Germany had attacked and it would not have come to Czechoslovakia’s help. However, such a situation did not materialize. The French and the British governments “merely” applied strong pressure to make Czechoslovakia agree, on 21 September, i.e. eight days prior to Munich, with the French-British plan for the cession of territories with Germans accounting for more than 50 percent of the population.⁴ However, when Hitler was threatening, at the end of September, that he would attack Czechoslovakia anyway, he was warned by both French and British diplomats that, should that happen,

2 FIERLINGER, Zdeněk: *Zrada československé buržoasie a jejích spojenců* [The treason of the Czechoslovak bourgeoisie and their allies]. Praha, Mír – Družstevní práce 1951.

3 See, for example: HOŘEC, Jaromír: *Cesty zrady* [The ways of treason]. Praha, NV 1957; KŘEN, Jan: *Mnichovská zrada* [The Munich betrayal]. Praha, Státní nakladatelství politické literatury 1958; NOVÁK, Miloslav: *Munich Pact 1938: Betrayal of Collective Security*, Prague, International Organisation of Journalists 1988; CHALUPA, Tomáš et al.: *Mnichovská zrada: 1938. Výstava: osmičky v čase* [The Munich betrayal: 1938. Exhibition: Eights in the course of time]. Praha, Městská část Praha 6 2008; BÍČ, Jindřich: *Zrada v Mnichově: Mnichov 1938* [The betrayal in Munich: Munich 1938]. Praha, Czech News Center 2018.

4 *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919–1939, 3rd series, 1938–1939*. London, H.M.S.O. 1949–57 [hereinafter *DBFP*], Vol. II, Document No. 991, pp. 437–438, Halifax’s telegram to Newton, 21 September, despatched at 1:20 am, No. 992, p. 438, Newton’s telegram to Halifax, 21 September 1938, despatched at 4:45 am.

there would be a “European” war. The first to issue the warning was the British Foreign Office in a statement dated 26 September, followed by Chamberlain’s advisor Horace Wilson and the French Ambassador in Berlin, André François-Poncet, during talks with Hitler taking place the next two days.⁵ In my opinion, the term “hard pressure” on an ally would be more fitting than “betrayal.”

2. The British and French unwillingness to go to war because of Czechoslovakia’s border regions, in Czech debates usually linked to words such as “shortsightedness” or even “stupidity,” is, in the light of previous historical developments, understandable and, in a way, even rational. The horrors of the Great War with more than two million dead only on the side of France and Britain were still too vivid. On the other hand, horrors of the holocaust and Nazi occupation of most of Europe were, for the time being, hardly imaginable. France’s domestic policy weakness only strengthened its dependence on Britain. Moreover, the French government saw in Mussolini’s ambitions in the Mediterranean, targeting not only Spain, but also Tunisia, or even Corsica and Nice, a danger almost comparable to that posed by German expansion.⁶ British Chiefs of Staff, too, were ruling out a possibility to wage war against Germany, Italy and Japan simultaneously – even in cooperation with France and the Soviet Union (in the case of which the horrors of forcible Sovietization, collectivization, and the just culminating wave of state-organized terror were known well enough to quench any interest of Western politicians in cooperation with the Soviet Union, at least for the time being).⁷ Britain was not militarily prepared for a war, one of the reasons being insufficient defence appropriations (and it must be noted that also members of the opposition Labour Party had been criticizing literally every penny set aside for this purpose until 1937). Since the spring of 1938, British dominions had been flatly refusing to participate in a war in defence of Czechoslovakia.⁸ When Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain described trench digging and trying on gas masks as a nightmare “because of a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing” on the evening of 27 September, he pretty much expressed what most of the British public were thinking.⁹ Thus, when he announced he had been invited to Munich during his speech in parliament the next day, the House burst into ovations. Even Winston

5 DBFP, 3rd series, Vol. II, Note 1 to document No. 1111, pp. 550; NEVILLE, Peter: *The British Attempt to Prevent the Second World War: The Age of Anxiety*. Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2018, p. 119; FRANÇOIS-PONCET, André: *Berlin 1931–1938: Vzpomínky diplomata* [Berlin 1931–1938: Recollections of a diplomat]. Praha, Nakladatelství Universum 1947, p. 314.

6 ADAMTHWAITE, Anthony: *France and the Coming of the Second World War, 1936–1939*. London, Totowa 1977, pp. 255–260.

7 HAUNER, Milan: Czechoslovakia as a Military Factor in British Considerations of 1938. In: *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1978), pp. 194–222, here p. 196–198.

8 PARKER, R. A. C.: *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War*. London, Macmillan Press 1993, pp. 295–296.

9 *Documents on International Affairs*, Royal Institute of International Affairs. London, Oxford University Press 1943, p. 270.

Churchill, a well-known rebel in the ranks of the Conservative Party, wished the Prime Minister “God-speed” for his mission.¹⁰ Yes, the same Churchill, who on 5 October 1938 stated in the House of Commons that Britain had suffered “a total and unmitigated defeat” in Munich, and predicted an early destruction of post-Munich Czechoslovakia – however, in May 1938 even he had failed to see through the convincing act of the leader of the Sudeten German Party, Konrad Henlein, playing a reasonable and moderate politician during his visit in London.¹¹ Nevertheless, Britain did not withdraw into its “splendid isolation,” as often mistakenly stated. On the contrary, it tried to mediate a peaceful solution of the Sudeten crisis – first by sending Lord Runciman as a go-between, then by the Prime Minister’s personal effort during his three trips to Hitler.¹²

3. Most texts or movies capturing the destruction of Czechoslovakia in 1938 and 1939 ascribe the loss of its border regions to the decision of the four chiefs of their governments during the conference in Munich – in the Czech narrative presented as “about us without us.” Yet, everything that mattered had already been clinched during the two weeks before Munich, or decided later, in the first decade of October in Berlin (i.e. at negotiations of representatives of the four powers and Czechoslovak Envoy Vojtěch Mastný concerning the extent of the “fifth zone”), rather than during the chaotic summit in Munich. The most important event there was probably Chamberlain’s meeting with Hitler on the morning of 30 September, during which the German leader signed a commitment for the Prime Minister to the effect that any future European problem would be resolved by negotiations between the two great powers. It was this agreement that Chamberlain, full of emotions and hopes, was waving with after landing in London.¹³ For decades, a vivid debate was going on in Britain as to whether Chamberlain really believed he had ensured “peace for our time,” or whether he was only trying to gain more time for a stepped-up armament programme. His private correspondence suggests the former, but being a pragmatic politician, he also took steps to increase Britain’s defence capabilities.¹⁴ As a matter of fact, Britain was considerably better prepared

10 *Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons*, London, H.M.S.O., 5th series, 1938–1948 (herein-after *H.C. Deb.*), Vol. 339, 28 September 1939, Cols. 26–28; GILBERT, Martin (ed.): *Winston Churchill, Companion Vol. V.: The Coming of War, 1936–1939*. London, Heinemann 1975, pp. 1184–1185.

11 *H.C. Deb.*, 5th series, Vol. 339, 5 October 1938, Cols. 360–374; GILBERT, M. (ed.): *Winston Churchill, Companion Vol. V., The Coming of War, 1936–1939*, pp. 1024–1025.

12 VYŠNÝ, Paul: *The Runciman Mission to Czechoslovakia, 1938: Prelude to Munich*. Houndmills – Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan 2003; ELLINGER, Jiří: *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmířování k válce. Britská zahraniční politika, 1937–1940* [Neville Chamberlain: From appeasement to war. British foreign policy, 1937–1940]. Praha, Nakladatelství Lidové noviny 2009, pp. 182–241.

13 PARKER, R. A. C.: *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, pp. 180–181.

14 *Birmingham University Library*, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1071, Neville Chamberlain’s letter to his sister Ida, 9 October 1938; NC 18/1/1072, Neville Chamberlain’s letter to his sister Hilda, 15 October 1938; NC 18/1/1075, Neville Chamberlain’s letter to his sister

to wage a defensive war against Germany in the summer of 1940, when it actually happened, than it had been in the autumn of 1938. Suffice to say that by 1940, there were Spitfire and Hurricane fighters, radars, air raid shelters, and, after all, also the broken Enigma code.

4. In spite of all real or just perceived perfidy of the Western powers, we should not forget that the main engine of the whole crisis was Hitler's targeted and planned expansionist policy – fueled partly ideologically by extreme nationalism and partly economically by growing needs to meet the enormous costs of armament, full employment, the social security system, etc. At the time when Germany was still preparing for a large-scale war, its expansionist policy was supposed to be approved by the West, whether tacitly or explicitly. Hitler was, at the same time, making use of his propaganda machine to create a concept of alleged oppression of Germans living abroad combined with emphasizing the German nation's right to self-determination.¹⁵ The essence of the matter thus became blurred enough to make the annexation of additional territories inhabited by Germans to the Reich an acceptable price for the preservation of peace in Europe for a substantial number of Western politicians.

5. Still, it must be noted that Czechoslovakia was not just a wholly innocent victim. Let us remind ourselves that Edvard Beneš, speaking to Entente statesmen during the peace conference in Paris, stated that his country would become another Switzerland – and that certainly did not happen.¹⁶ The Czech-German relationship was permanently burdened by the memory of 54 dead (and more than a hundred wounded) Czech Germans shot during anti-Czechoslovak riots on 4 March 1919.¹⁷ Even impartial and objective observers subsequently kept noticing that Czech public servants often treated German inhabitants tactlessly, to say the least. This, of course, only strengthened complexes of a substantial part of the Germans who never put up with the fact that their position had changed from that of a privileged nation to that of a subservient one almost overnight in 1918. The government of the multiethnic state could, and perhaps even should, have shown its effort to deal, if possible generously, with the situation of ethnic minorities in the calm 1920s, and

Hilda, 6 November 1938; Bodleian Library, Oxford, microfilm, CAB 23/96, Cab 60(38), 21 December 1938. See also my interview with R.A.C. Parker: Nejen o appeasementu [Not only about appeasement]. In: *Dějiny a současnost*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (1999), pp. 44–47.

15 WEINBERG, Gerhard L.: *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany*, Vol. 2: *Starting World War II*. Chicago – London, The University of Chicago Press 1980, esp. Chapter 2 – “Hitler's Preparations 1937–38,” pp. 18–51.

16 See, for example: Memorandum No. III, *Le problème des Allemands de Bohême*, presented by the Czechoslovak delegation at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, which, referring to the future position of Germans in Czechoslovakia, stated: “La régime serait semblable à celui de la Suisse.”

17 KÁRNÍK, Zdeněk: *České země v éře První republiky (1918–1938)* [The Czech Lands in the era of the First Republic (1918–1938)]. Vol. 1: *Vznik, budování a zlatá léta republiky (1918–1920)* [The birth, building, and golden years of the republic]. Praha, Libri 2003, p. 43.

not only under increasing pressure in 1937–1938.¹⁸ The economic crisis which hit Sudetenland with its dominant consumer industries (textile and glass factories) more than the rest of the country only exacerbated the feeling of alienation.¹⁹ The government was not dealing with its regional impacts consistently enough – and, unfortunately, even at the time when a regime which managed to completely eliminate unemployment in a few months and fascinated fellow Germans living across the border in many respects due to its emphasis on modernity and efficiency, established itself in neighbouring Germany.

6. Czechoslovakia's political leaders were playing a strange game with their people in September 1938, alternately stirring up and moderating their patriotic feelings – depending on where the behind-the-scenes negotiations on Czechoslovak border regions were heading at a given moment. As early as in mid-September, both Prime Minister Milan Hodža and President Edvard Beneš spoke, independently of each other, about a possibility of territorial concessions to Germany, albeit smaller than those ultimately implemented, before British Envoy Basil Newton.²⁰ Beneš addressed a similar message to the French diplomacy, probably through Ambassador Victor De Lacroix and, in particular, through his confidante and Minister of Social Welfare Jaromír Nečas, whom Beneš sent to Paris on 15 September with a secret plan for a cession of 4,000 to 6,000 square kilometers – in exchange for the transfer of 1.5–2 million Germans to Germany.²¹ However, with Czechoslovakia voluntarily resigning to defend its territorial integrity, or its historical borders hundreds of

18 The most detailed account on vain efforts of the Czechoslovak government can be found in: KUKLÍK, Jan – NĚMEČEK, Jan: *Od národního státu ke státu národností? Národnostní statut a snahy o řešení menšinové otázky v Československu v roce 1938* [From a national state to a state of nationalities? The national statutes and efforts to resolve the issue of minorities in Czechoslovakia in 1938]. Praha, Karolinum 2013.

19 KÁRNÍK, Z.: *České země v éře První republiky (1918–1938)*, Vol. 2: *Československo a české země v krizi a v ohrožení (1930–1935)* [Czechoslovakia and the Czech Lands in crisis and jeopardy (1930–1935)]. Praha, Libri 2002, pp. 45–48.

20 *DBFP*, 3rd series, Vol. II, Document No. 902, p. 358, Newton's report for the Foreign Office, 16 September 1938; DEJMEK, Jindřich: *Nenaplněné naděje: Politické a diplomatické vztahy Československa a Velké Británie (1918–1938)* [Unfulfilled hopes: Political and diplomatic relations of Czechoslovakia and Great Britain (1918–1938)]. Praha, Karolinum 2003, pp. 416–417, note 141.

21 *Documents Diplomatiques Français 1932–1939*, 2nd series (1936–1939). Paris, Imprimerie Nationale 1977–82 [hereinafter *DDF*], Vol. XI, Document No. 180, pp. 273–275, De Lacroix's telegram to Bonnet, 16 September 1938; DEJMEK, Jindřich et al. (eds.): *Dokumenty československé zahraniční politiky: Československá zahraniční politika v roce 1938* [Documents of Czechoslovak foreign policy: Czechoslovak foreign policy in 1938], Vol. II (1 July – 5 October 1938). Praha, ÚMV – UK – Karolinum – HÚ AV ČR 2002 [hereinafter *DČSZP*, 1938, II], Document No. 599, pp. 201–202, Instruction of President E. Beneš for Minister of Social Welfare of ČSR J. Nečas before his negotiations in France, 15 September 1938, Appendix III, pp. 521–526, Letter of former Minister of Social Welfare of ČSR J. Nečas for former President of ČSR E. Beneš, informing about his journey to France and Great Britain, undated (end of October 1938).

years old, Western “appeasers” started viewing the whole matter as a question of quantity – with a chance of finding a compromise acceptable to all parties.²² Negotiations held at 10 Downing Street on 18 September thus resulted in a British-French plan for the cession of the border regions.²³ It was of course born independently on Czechoslovakia’s will, primarily as a reaction to Hitler’s pressure on Chamberlain during their meeting in Berchtesgaden, but the initiatives of the two highest representatives of Czechoslovakia gave it a semblance of acceptability even in the eyes of skeptics. The government in Prague initially rejected the plan. However, when Prime Minister Hodža, in a conversation with the French ambassador, highly likely expressed Czechoslovakia’s preparedness to accept it if presented as an ultimatum, the Czechoslovak government, facing the threat formulated as indicated above (i.e. that Czechoslovakia would have to deal with Germany on its own if it did not accept the plan), ultimately accepted the British-French plan on 21 September.²⁴ In doing so, it violated the constitution, as only the parliament could endorse border changes. Under the pressure of the public in the form of extensive demonstrations on 21 and 22 September, it resigned and was succeeded by the caretaker government of General Jan Syrový. Reacting to the British-French recommendation, the latter declared a general mobilization on the evening of 23 September, but it also continued to assure the British and the French that the consent with the cession of territory was still held. And so, while reservists were enthusiastically enlisting to defend the republic and its borders, the government in Prague was discussing which specific territories Czechoslovakia would cede in the future.²⁵ The government’s truly step-motherly attitude to the wave of patriotic enthusiasm culminated on 30 September, when the police violently intervened against a demonstration of some 8,000 people protesting against the acceptance of the Munich Agreement on Prague’s Wenceslas Square. When speaking to representatives of the Committee for the Defence of the Republic, President Beneš justified the action by the necessity not to provoke Berlin in the new circumstances.²⁶

7. Still, the proposition of Czech historian Jan Tesař (made popular by Petr Zelenka’s movie *Lost in Munich*) is not convincing. He argues that Munich was in fact a major

22 DČSZP, 1938, II, Document No. 631, p. 328, Osuský’s letter to Beneš, citing Anatole de Monzie, 19 September 1938.

23 PARKER, R. A. C.: *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, pp. 164–165; ELLINGER, J.: *Neville Chamberlain*, pp. 200–201.

24 DDF, 2nd series, Vol. XI, Document No. 232, pp. 361–362, De Lacroix’s telegram to Paris, 20 September 1938. At the same time, Jean-Baptiste Duroselle also furnishes evidence attesting to the authenticity of De Lacroix’s message, which is stored not only in the papers of Georges Bonnet, but also in that of Édouard Daladier. DUROSELLE, Jean-Baptiste: *France and the Nazi Threat: The Collapse of French Diplomacy 1932–1939*. New York, Enigma Books 2004 (first published in French in 1985), p. 469, note 128.

25 DEJMEK, J.: *Nenaplněné naděje*, pp. 330–333; TESAŘ, Jan: *Mnichovský komplex* [The Munich complex]. Praha, Prostor 2000, pp. 18–23.

26 KÁRNÍK, Z.: *České země v éře První republiky (1918–1938)*, Vol. 3: *O přežití a o život (1936–1938)* [For survival and for life (1936–1938)]. Praha, Libri 2003, pp. 618–619.

Czechoslovak diplomatic victory and that it was more or less in line with what President Beneš allegedly wanted, knowing that the war would come anyway. With this in mind, Tesař goes on, Munich basically allowed the Czech nation to survive the war at relatively low losses and to resolve the minority problem in the future by resettling the Germans.²⁷ This is, in my opinion, an *ex post* rationalization of sorts. From all we know about the last decade of Beneš's life, it is obvious that Munich was the biggest trauma of his political career, which gave birth to "his" Munich syndrome. The cornerstone of his exile efforts was a programme of the "undoing of Munich," including not only the repeal of the Munich Agreement and the restoration of Czechoslovakia within its pre-Munich borders, but also punishing culprits for the Munich humiliation, getting rid of a substantial part of Sudeten Germans by a population transfer, and ensuring the state's security against a repeated German threat by an alliance with the Soviet Union and by establishing a common border with it (through an offer to cede Carpathian Ruthenia made as early as in the autumn of 1939²⁸). British politicians are thus reminded, literally *ad nauseam*, of their "Munich debt"; Beneš's attitude to the Polish exile representation is highly mistrustful; Yugoslavs are reproached for not helping Czechoslovakia, etc.²⁹ All of them become targets of Beneš's devastating criticism during his talks with Stalin and Molotov in Moscow in December 1943 – in addition, President Beneš also orders that the Soviets pursue postwar pressure on Czechoslovakia so that it punishes all guilty Slovaks.³⁰

8. It should be noted that even Beneš subsequently doubted (albeit only in private) Soviet preparedness to come to Czechoslovakia's assistance in September 1938,

27 TESAŘ, J.: *Mnichovský komplex*, esp. pp. 84–98; the movie *Ztraceni v Mnichově* [Lost in Munich], screenplay and direction Petr Zelenka, Czech Republic 2015.

28 *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki* [Documents on foreign policy], Vol. XXII/2, Moskva, Ministerstvo inostrannykh del SSSR 1992, Documents No. 625, 802, pp. 121–122, 326–237, from Ivan Maisky's diplomatic diary, 22 September and 21 November 1939; NĚMEČEK, Jan – NOVÁČKOVÁ, Helena – ŠTOVÍČEK, Ivan – TEJCHMAN, Miroslav (eds.): *Československo-sovětské vztahy v diplomatických jednáních 1939–1945: Dokumenty* [Czechoslovak-Soviet relations in diplomatic negotiations 1939–1945: Documents], I–II. Praha, Státní ústřední archiv v Praze 1998–1999 [hereinafter ČSSVDJ], here Vol. 1, Document No. 26, pp. 86–87, Beneš's record of his talk with Maisky, 22 September 1939. The Czech record of the second talk has never been found.

29 SMETANA, Vít: *In the Shadow of Munich: British Policy towards Czechoslovakia from the Endorsement to the Renunciation of the Munich Agreement (1938–1942)*. Praha, Karolinum 2008, esp. chapter "Planning for the Future while Looking to the Past," pp. 244–310; SOVILJ, Milan: Počátky československé a jugoslávské exilové vlády v Londýně za druhé světové války: Očekávání, možnosti a realita [Beginnings of the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav exile governments in London during the Second World War: Expectations, possibilities, and reality]. In: *Soudobé dějiny*, Vol. 26 (2019), No. 4, in print.

30 For the Soviet and Czechoslovak record of Beneš's talks in Moscow, see: *Archiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi federacii* [Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Federation], Moscow [AVP], fund Molotov's Secretariat, opis [compartment] 5, papka [stack] 33, delo [file] 401; ČSSVDJ, Vol. 2, Document Nos. 58–70, pp. 121–189.

when recalling very well the evasive answers of Soviet Envoy Sergei Alexandrovskii, who did not have anything to offer to the President in reaction to his increasingly urgent pleas in the pre-Munich days.³¹ According to available documents, Stalin was prepared to intervene only in a European war (and we do not know in which form and intensity), not to help lonesome Czechoslovakia. After all, the only warning issued by the USSR during the critical days was not addressed to Germany, but to Poland, which was the principal target of Soviet expansion – and even that warning remained unfulfilled after Munich and the Polish occupation of the Těšín/Cieszyn district in Silesia.³² On the other hand, Czechoslovak generals who flew to Moscow to negotiate with their Soviet partners in September 1938 were only greeted by toasts at best, and they had to undergo unpleasant inspections of their luggage and checks of their personal correspondence – as if they were not allies, but rather enemy spies.³³ However, the Munich solution, which completely ignored the Soviet Union, was a major blow to Litvinov's policy of collective security and most probably also an important milestone on the road toward the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact in August 1939.³⁴

9. Western politicians soon sobered from the Munich intoxication – most of them sometimes between the Crystal Night on 9 November and the occupation of Prague on 15 March 1939. And British journalists started looking for national culprits (“guilty men”) as early as in the summer of 1940.³⁵ The “lessons of Munich,” according to which it is not advisable to make concessions to any aggression or black-mailing, become a part of policies of Western statesmen confronting expansionist dictatorships, and are referred to in crises and wars, from Korea, through Suez and Vietnam to the Persian Gulf Wars. Anthony Eden pays for their application in 1956 with his Prime Minister's seat, and the other life of Munich continues to complicate the use of “negotiations” as a method of dealing with international crises

31 AVP, fund Czechoslovakia's office (0138), opis 19, papka 128, delo 6, Minister Alexandrovskii's report *Zametki o sobytijach v Čechoslovakii v konce sentjabrja i načale oktjabrja 1938 g.* [Record of the events in Czechoslovakia in late September and early October 1938], 26 October 1938, pp. 11–13; FEIERABEND, Ladislav Karel: *Politické vzpomínky* [Political memoirs], Vols. I–III. Brno, Atlantis 1994–1996, here Vol. III, Appendix 3/1, pp. 417–419, Ivan Herben's letter to Feierabend, 25 September 1965.

32 For further details, see: SMETANA, Vít: *Ani vojna, ani mír: Velmocí, Československo a střední Evropa v sedmi dramatech na prahu druhé světové a studené války* [Neither war, nor peace: Great Powers, Czechoslovakia, and Central Europe in seven dramas on the eve of the Second World War and the Cold War]. Praha, Nakladatelství Lidové noviny 2016, pp. 41–69; KUKLÍK, Jan – NĚMEČEK, Jan – ŠEBEK, Jan: *Dlouhé stíny Mnichova: Mnichovská dohoda očima signatářů a její dopady na Československo* [Long shadows of Munich: The Munich Agreement through the eyes of its signatories and its impacts on Czechoslovakia]. Praha, Auditorium 2011, pp. 62–67.

33 SMETANA, Vít: *Ani vojna, ani mír*, pp. 58–59.

34 HASLAM, Jonathan: Soviet-German Relations and the Origins of the Second World War: The Jury Is Still Out. In: *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 69, No. 4 (1997), pp. 785–797.

35 CATO: *Guilty Men*. London, Gollancz 1940.

by Western politicians at numerous other moments of the Cold War. And it is not just the content, but also the form: afraid of Chamberlain's analogies, American politicians and diplomats take the utmost care not to be caught with an umbrella in their hand, especially when meeting the Soviets.³⁶

10. Munich has had, and unfortunately continues to have, a fundamental influence on the Czech "mental map" of Europe and the Czech place on it. The story about the united nation determined to defend its borders and betrayed by unreliable Western "friends" at the crucial moment, colourfully depicted by Czechoslovak propaganda even in the years of exile, was soon joined by the myth of Yalta concerning the alleged writing off of Eastern Europe as a part of the Soviet sphere of influence by Western powers as early as in February 1945 – together with the fact that Americans did not help fighting Prague in May 1945 (when General Eisenhower complied with the request of the Red Army command that falsely informed him, on 5 May, that the Prague operation had already begun).³⁷ The lesson according to which the West should not be trusted and it would therefore be advisable to look for protection and alliance in the East, is something Edvard Beneš arrived at already in the post-Munich days. He steered the state's foreign policy accordingly almost until the very end of his days.³⁸ And this "lesson" obviously still lives on in minds of a number of Czech politicians and of a not negligible segment of the public.

This is an updated and expanded version of the article Deset tezí o Mnichovu 1938: Smutné výročí bez legend a národních stereotypů [Ten propositions about Munich 1938: The sad anniversary without legends and national stereotypes], published in Dějiny a současnost, Vol. 40, No. 10 (2018), pp. 10–14.

Translated by Jiří Mareš

36 RECORD, Jeffrey: *The Spectre of Munich: Reconsidering the Lessons of Appeasing Hitler*. Washington, Potomac Books 2008; MAREŠ, Petr: American Policy, Korean War, and the Lessons of Munich. In: *Czech Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. V (2017), pp. 5–62; ADAMEC, Jan: Americký mnichovský syndrom [The American Munich syndrome]. In: *Lidové noviny – Orientace* (29 September 2018), p. V/23.

37 For details, see: HRBEK, Jaroslav – SMETANA, Vít et al.: *Draze zaplacená svoboda: Osvobození Československa 1944–45* [Dearly paid freedom: The Liberation of Czechoslovakia 1944–45], Vols. I–II. Praha, Paseka 2009, here Vol. I, pp. 65–69.

38 Compare: HAUNER, Milan: "We Must Push Eastwards!" The Challenges and Dilemmas of President Beneš after Munich. In: *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (2009), pp. 619–656.