

## 22. THE CZECH REPUBLIC

### Základní otázky

1. Where does the Czech Republic lie?
2. How large is its area and population?
3. Which are the neighbouring states?
4. What are the beginnings of the Czech history?
5. Who was the most important king in the Czech history?
6. When was the independent Czech Republic first proclaimed?
7. What happened in November 1989?
8. What is the geography of the Czech Republic like (mountains, rivers)?
9. Which are the main industries of the Czech economy?
10. What is the political system?

The Czech Republic lies in Central Europe – it is called the heart of Europe. It is an inland country, it covers an area of nearly 79 thousand square kilometres and has a population of 10.3 million. Our republic has four neighbour states. In the North it is Poland and in the South Austria. Slovakia is in the East and Germany in the West. The country consists of three main regions: Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia.

History. Slavonic tribes came to our territory in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. The first Slavonic state was Sámó's Empire. The Great Moravian Empire was formed in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. After its disintegration, state activities were concentrated in Bohemia. When Přemysl's dynasty died out, the Czech throne was engaged by the Luxembourg dynasty. The most important Luxembourg king was Charles IV, who ruled in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. During his reign the Prague University was founded and Prague New Town was built. The Hussite Movement marks the first part of 15<sup>th</sup> century. It is named after Jan Hus (John Huss), professor, dean and later rector of the Charles University. In 1415 he was burnt at stake as a heretic. The rule of the Jagiellonian dynasty on the Czech throne was followed by the Habsburg dynasty, which lasted 350 years.

At the end of the World War I the Austro-Hungarian Empire split and in October 1918 the independent Czechoslovak Republic was proclaimed with T. G. Masaryk as the first president. But twenty years later, in March 1939 Bohemia and Moravia were occupied by the Germans and after a few months World War II started. In May 1945 the Red and US armies liberated Czechoslovakia. In 1948 the Communist Party won elections and started the 'socialistic' era. In the 1960's a more democratic period known as the 'Prague Spring' began, but the invasion of Warsaw Pact troops in August 1968 returned the country to Soviet control. After the 'Velvet revolution' in November 1989, the era of Communists ended. World famous dramatist Václav Havel was elected the president and Czechoslovakia started to build democracy. Conflicts between the Czech and Slovak nations worsened in 1991, resulting in a split. In January 1993 Czechoslovakia was divided peacefully in two sovereign republics – the Czech and Slovak Republics.

Geography. The Czech Republic doesn't have any seacoast, but it has many rivers. The largest river is the Elbe – it has its source in the Giant Mountains and leads into the North Sea. The largest and most important tributary of the Elbe is the Vltava. Several huge dams have been built on this river, for example Lipno, Orlik or Slapy. South Bohemia is known for its large and numerous ponds. Freshwater fish are farmed here, especially carps. Also two glacial lakes can be found in CR – Černé and Čertovo in the Šumava Mountains.

The terrain of our country is rather hilly. The Krušné Mountains and Šumava form the western border. Šumava is a paradise for nature lovers. It is a very old mountain range, for which rounded shapes of mountains, numerous rivers and lakes are typical. The highest mountains in the CR are the Giant Mountains, which host the highest Czech mountain – Sněžka (1602 metres high). The Jizerské and Orlické Mountains lie on the border with Poland. Other mountain ranges often visited by tourists are Beskydy and Jeseníky in Moravia.

Monuments. In the Czech Republic there are many places of interest, such as the gothic Křivoklát castle, which was first mentioned in 12<sup>th</sup> century. Castle collections include gothic and renaissance paintings on wood and sculptures. Charles IV founded another famous castle Karlštejn as a treasury for the Crown Jewels. It also became the king's favourite castle. Lány is a renaissance chateau, which the Czechoslovak government bought for President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk in 1921 and who was buried there later. Since then the chateau has been the representative residence of Czech presidents.

Industry and agriculture. The Czech Republic is traditionally an industrial country. The main industrial areas are located in northern part of the country. Fuel and energy industries are very well developed; other industries include metallurgy, the machine tool industries, chemical, construction and consumer industry. Czech beer and wine have a long tradition and popularity both at home and abroad. Our country is rich in minerals – black and brown coal, lignite, sand for glass-making or iron ore are mined here.

The lowlands are important for agriculture and crop farming. The most extensive and fertile Czech lowland