

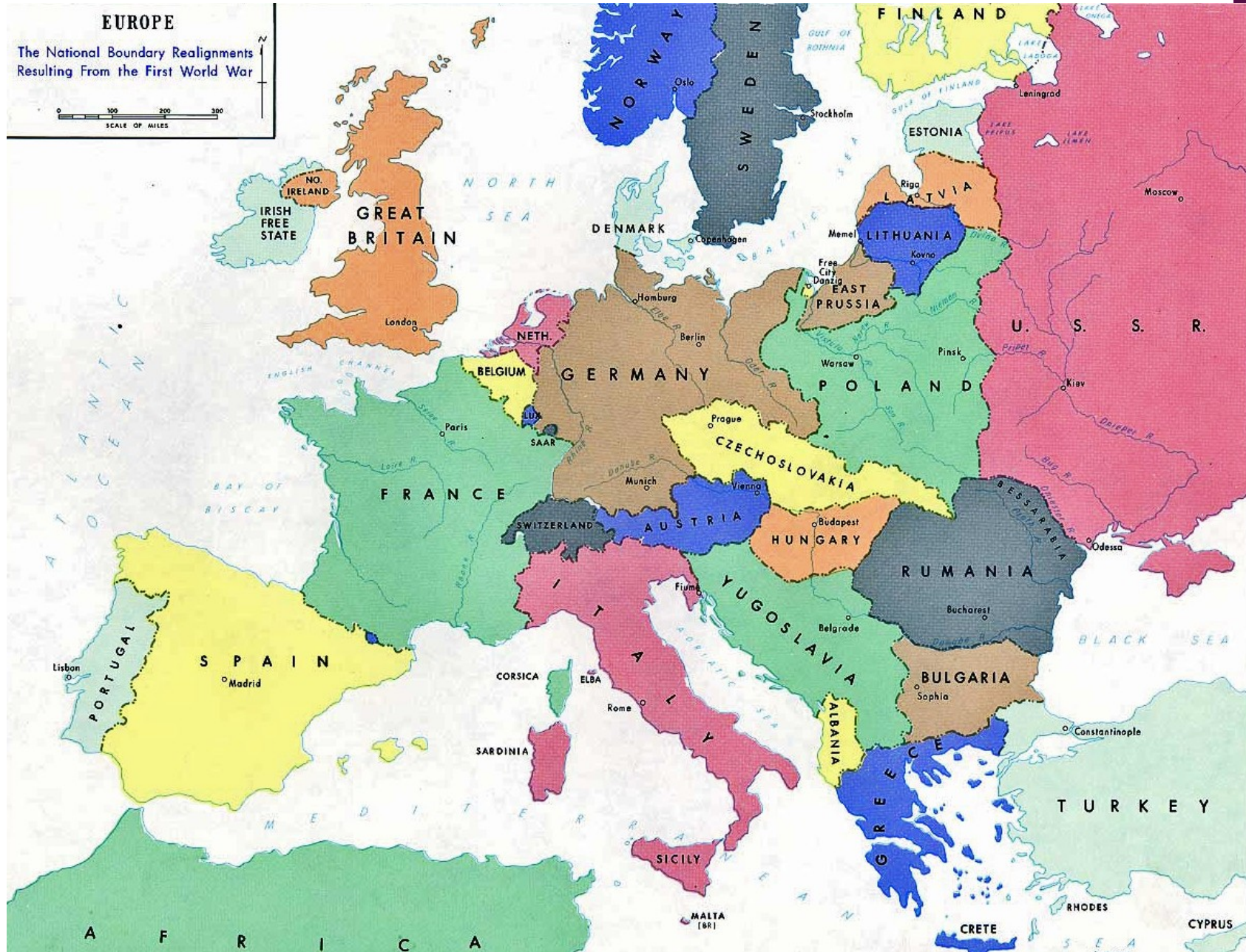
CENTRAL EUROPE
DURING THE
INTERWAR PERIOD
PART II

Jana Skerlova

EUROPE BEFORE WORLD WAR I



RESULTS OF THE WORLD WAR I IN EUROPE



POLAND

- ◉ During the WW I – exile Polish National Committee – **Roman Dmowski** – the spokesman for Polish nationalism in the Allied camp
- ◉ After German victory on the Eastern front the Russian-ruled territory of Poland was occupied by German troops – **The Kingdom of Poland** consisting of German, Austrian and Russian part of Poland was established in 1916 – German puppet state – *Mitteleuropa* scheme
- ◉ More than 1 000 000 of Poles died during the WW I
- ◉ December 1918 – **The Greater Poland Uprising** – against Germany, with the centre in the city of Poznan, successful
- ◉ the Treaty of Versailles granted a reconstituted Poland the area won by the Polish uprising plus some additional territory, most of which had been part of Poland before the partitions (from the end of 18th century)
- ◉ the **Republic of Poland** was reestablished in 1918
- ◉ the independence of Poland was one of the war goals of the Allies (it was mentioned in President Wilson's Fourteen Points)
- ◉ The western Polish borders and the borders in Baltic area were ratified by the Treaty of Versailles while the eastern and southern borders were not.



Republic of Poland and its neighboring states after WW 1.

- ◉ 27 million of inhabitants in 1921 (35 million in 1939)
- ◉ Multinational country - one third of its population were national minorities
 - Ukrainians – 14 %
 - Jews – 10 % (by 1931 Poland had the biggest Jewish population in the world – over 3 million people)
 - Belarusians – 3 %
 - Germans – 2 %
 - Others (Czechs, Lithuanians, Russians) – 3 %
- ◉ 1919 – the first elections to the Sejm (parliament)
- ◉ 1921 – the March Constitution
- ◉ The Republic of Poland was a parliamentary democracy form 1919 till 1926
- ◉ Main political parties – National Democrats, Peasant Parties, Christian Democrats
- ◉ **Several regional conflicts with neighboring states – border disputes:**
 - ❖ **Polish- Lithuanian War** – spring 1919 – November 1920
 - April 1919 – Poland captured Vilnius
 - 1922 – annexation of Vilnius (Vilno) Region from Lithuania
 - The dispute over Vilnius remained one of the biggest foreign policy issues in Lithuania and Poland.
 - Lithuania broke off all diplomatic relations with Poland and refused any actions that would recognize Poland's control of Vilnius.

❖ 1918 – 1919 – **Polish – Ukrainian War**

- A conflict between Polish republic and West Ukrainian People's Republic for control over Eastern Galicia (ex Austro-Hungarian province with the centre in the town of Lviv).
- 1st November 1918 - West Ukrainian People's Republic was proclaimed in former Habsburg provinces of Galicia and Bukovina
- The local Poles wanted to rule over this territory – the war conflict broke out
- Poland won this war and the territory was annexed by Poland – national conflicts
- Approximately 10,000 Poles and 15,000 Ukrainians, mostly soldiers, died during this war.

❖ **Seven day war** – January 1919

- A border conflict with Czechoslovakia for the territory of Těšín (Cieszyn in Silesia), Orava and Spiš (northern Slovakia)
- Czechoslovak units attacked the Polish part of Cieszyn Silesia to prevent the Polish elections in the contested territory
- Great strategic importance of the region – coal mining basin and the important railroad connecting the Czech lands with Slovakia
- The Czechoslovak attack was halted under the pressure from the Entente
- a new demarcation line – the western part of the disputed territory was given to Czechoslovakia while Poland received the eastern part
- Czechoslovak-Polish relations were not very good during the whole interwar period

❖ 1919 – 1921 – **Polish-Soviet War**

- Soviet Russia wanted to govern the territory of Belarus and the areas of western Ukraine
- Poland wanted to use Russian civil war to ensure its eastern borders
- Firstly the Polish army was successful (Marshall **Jozef Piłsudski**)
- but later Soviet counteroffensive – they wanted to establish Soviet Republic in Poland and marched into Polish inland
- August 1920 – *the battle of Warsaw* - the Soviet troops were defeated
- September 1920 – *the battle of Niemen river* – the Polish troops won again
- March 1921 – **the Peace Treaty of Riga** – Poland got parts of Belarus and Ukraine (4 millions of Ukrainians and 1 million of Belarussians in Poland)
- The rest of Ukraine and Belarus became a part of the Soviet Union
- The Peace Treaty of Riga left significant territories populated by Poles within the Soviet Union – almost 1 million of Poles living at the territory of the Soviet Russia (During the 1930s many of them were deported to Siberia)
- While the Treaty of Riga led to a two-decade stabilization of the Soviet-Polish conflict, the conflict was renewed during World War II

- Many problems in Poland – economy exhausted by the war, problems with unifying of disparate economic regions, which had previously been part of different countries
- The chief parties were the left-wing Polish Peasant Party led by **Piłsudski** and the national Democracy Party led by **Roman Dmowski**
- Weak and inexperienced government had to face many problems.
- Since June 1925 – trade war with Germany
- October 1925 – **Treaty of Locarno** – Polish foreign minister **Józef Beck** said: *"Germany was officially asked to attack the east, in return for peace in the west."*
- The situation resulted in the **May Coup d'État** in 1926 – it was led by leftist politician and a popular **Marshal Jozef Piłsudski**
- he became most influential politician in Poland and became its de facto dictator till his death in 1935 though he was not a president but only a Minister of defence
- So called Sanation Government – its aim was the “moral healing“ of the Polish policy, the coalition rightist, leftist and centrists whose main focus was to eliminate the corruption and reduce the inflation
- authoritarian means
- 1932 – non-aggression pact with Soviet Union
- October 1938 – the First Vienna Award – annexation of Zaolzie, Górna Orawa, Jaworzyna from Czechoslovakia
- March 31, 1939: military guarantees from United Kingdom and France
- August 23, 1939: non-aggression pact between Soviet Union and Germany: **Ribbentrop-Molotow Pact** with a secret military alliance protocol targeting Poland



Jozef Piłsudski and other coup leaders

POLAND

The Polish nation in 1912, the territorial changes, and the boundaries of Poland since 1920

created by Carter O'Riens



..... Polish claims during Referendum of 1920

———— Boundary of Poland 1923-39

- · - · - Boundary of Poland since 1947

▨ Polish Catholic minority (20-50%) in 1912

▨ Polish majority (>50%) incl. Kashubian, Silesian, Mazurian, Goralian, in 1912

·%· Referendum for Poland or Germany in 1921 and the results for Poland

Source of statistical data of the Polish nation:

Mapa Etnograficzno-Statystyczna - S. Orgelbranda Encyklopedia Powszechna z ilustracjami i mapami 1912

- ◉ **September 1 – October 6, 1939: German Invasion of Poland**
- ◉ Poland attacked by Nazi Germany without declaring war on Poland
- ◉ 17th September – USSR attacked Poland and occupied eastern part of Poland
- ◉ so called New Partition of Poland – western part under German Reich, central part – General Gouvernement (with the capital city of Krakow) – the head **Hans Frank**,
- ◉ eastern part – occupied by USSR
- ◉ many concentration camps in Poland – Auschwitz, Majdanek, Sobibor, Treblinka ...
- ◉ segregation of Jews – a big ghetto in Warsaw – from April to May 1943 – **Warsaw Ghetto Uprising**
- ◉ of Poland's prewar Jewish population of 3 million, only about 369,000 survived the war
- ◉ **Polish resistance movement** – Polish government in exile with **Władysław Sikorski** as Prime Minister, in Poland the Home Army (Armia Krajowa) and the Peoples Army (Armia Ludowa)

◎ Readings:

- Davies, Norman: *The God's Playground. A history of Poland. Volume II (1795 to present)*. Columbia University Press 1982.
- Rothschild, Joseph: *Pilsudski's Coup D'État*. Columbia University Press 1967.
- Rothschild, Joseph: *East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars*. Columbia University Press 1974.
- Frucht, Richard (ed.): *Eastern Europe: an introduction to the people, lands and culture*. ABC- Clio, Inc. Santa Barbara, USA 2005.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

- ◉ The First **Czechoslovak republic** was proclaimed on **October 28, 1918** in Prague (Wenceslas Square).
- ◉ A new era for two nations (Czechs and Slovaks) which had previously been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire began.
- ◉ Czechoslovakia consisted of: Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia
- ◉ The first Prime Minister – **Karel Kramář**
- ◉ 1920 – the constitution (liberal) - plural parliament democracy
- ◉ General suffrage – free, direct and secret ballot, women suffrage since 1918
- ◉ President was elected by Parliament
- ◉ in 1920 – **Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850–1937)** was elected the first President (reelected in 1925 and 1929, served till 1935), he was a philosopher and a politician, very influential personality, his wife was American – Charlotte Garrigue, their son **Jan Masaryk** served later as Czechoslovak Foreign Minister
- ◉ most important and most influential political party - Peasant party, they usually had a Prime Minister – **Antonín Švehla** in 1920s, **Jan Malypetr** and **Milan Hodža** in 1930s
- ◉ Social Democrats, Peoples Party, Communist Party
- ◉ German parties – Social Democrats, Peasant Party
- ◉ Land reform – the great estates of the nobility and the Church were distributed to the peasants
- ◉ Internal problems – Slovak autonomist movement
- ◉ After the war – economic problems but not so serious as in neighbouring countries
- ◉ Czechoslovakia had developed industry
- ◉ One of the most progressive social-security and pension systems in Europe

CZECHOSLOVAKIA



The first Czechoslovak republic consisted of: Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia (Sub-Carpathian Rus)



Proclamation of the first Czechoslovak Republic on October, 28 1918 in Prague (Wenceslaus Square).

CZECHOSLOVAKIA



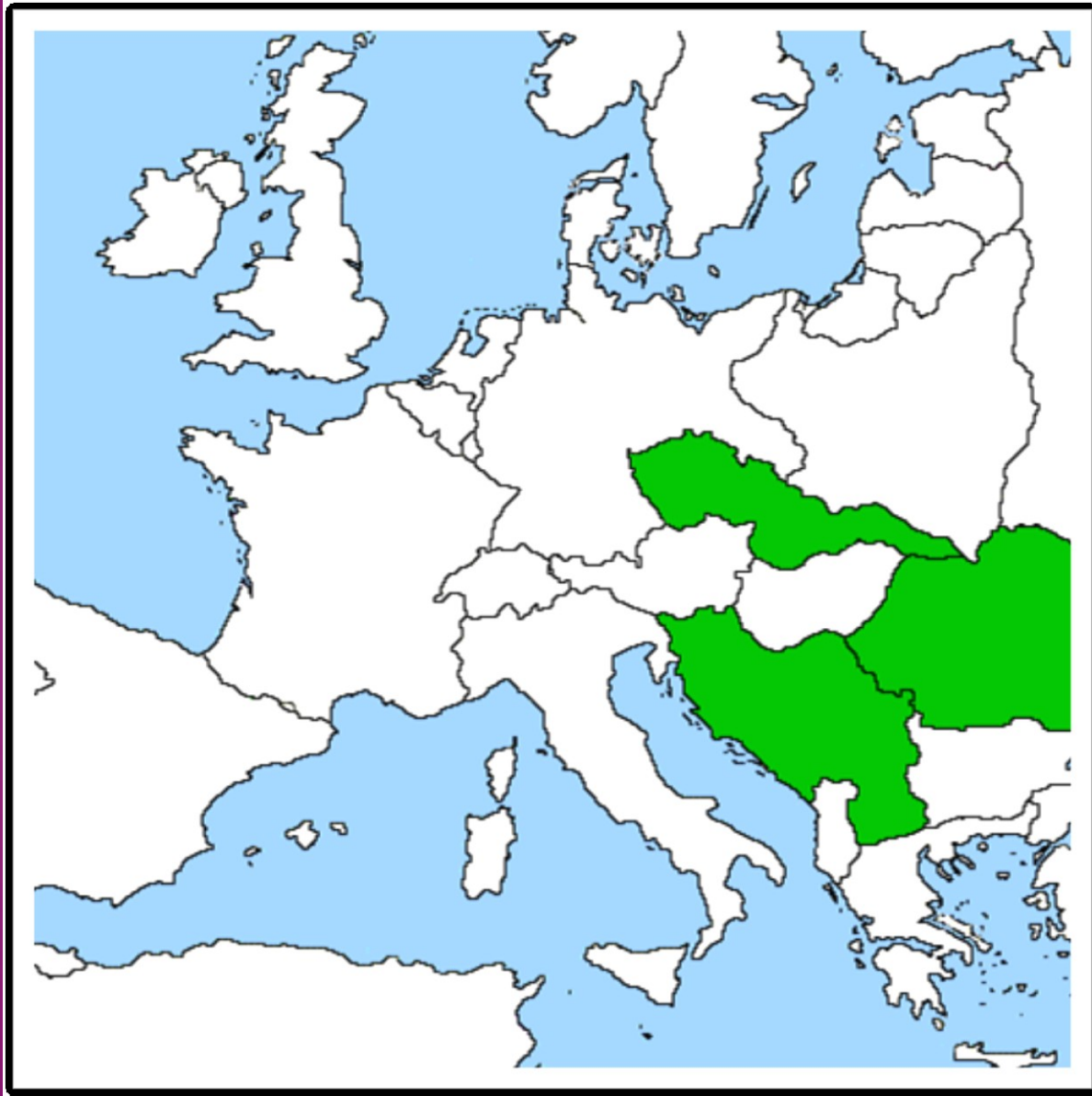
Tomaš Garrigue Masaryk
1st President of Czechoslovakia
(1920–1935)



Edvard Beneš
2nd President of Czechoslovakia
(1935–1938, 1945–1948)

- ◉ **foreign policy** – led by Minister **Edvard Beneš** from 1918 to 1935 – one of the most important European diplomats during the interwar period, in 1936 he was elected second President of Czechoslovakia
- ◉ Czechoslovakia was faced with Hungarian demands for the return of parts of Slovakia
- ◉ To protect the borders **the Little Entente** was formed in 1921
- ◉ It was an alliance of Czechoslovakia, Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia) and Romania – against Hungary and its revanchism and against restoration of Habsburgs
- ◉ Little Entente was supported by France (1924 – Czechoslovak-French Agreement)
- ◉ the Little Entente was an idea of Czechoslovak Foreign Minister **Edvard Beneš**
- ◉ It was also an attempt to establish internationally important organization with some influence in European politics.
- ◉ The most important Czechoslovak ally was France
- ◉ since 1925 – economic growth, cultural development
- ◉ the great depression since 1930
- ◉ since 1933 – Czechoslovakia was threatened by Nazi Germany
- ◉ CZE built border fortification
- ◉ 1935 – mutual security pact with Soviet Union

LITTLE ENTENTE



Czechoslovakia +
Yugoslavia + Rumania

CZECHOSLOVAK BORDER FORTIFICATION

Czechoslovak fortification – Hanička

<http://www.hanicka.cz/>



Czechoslovak fortification –
Bouda

<http://www.boudamuseum.com/>

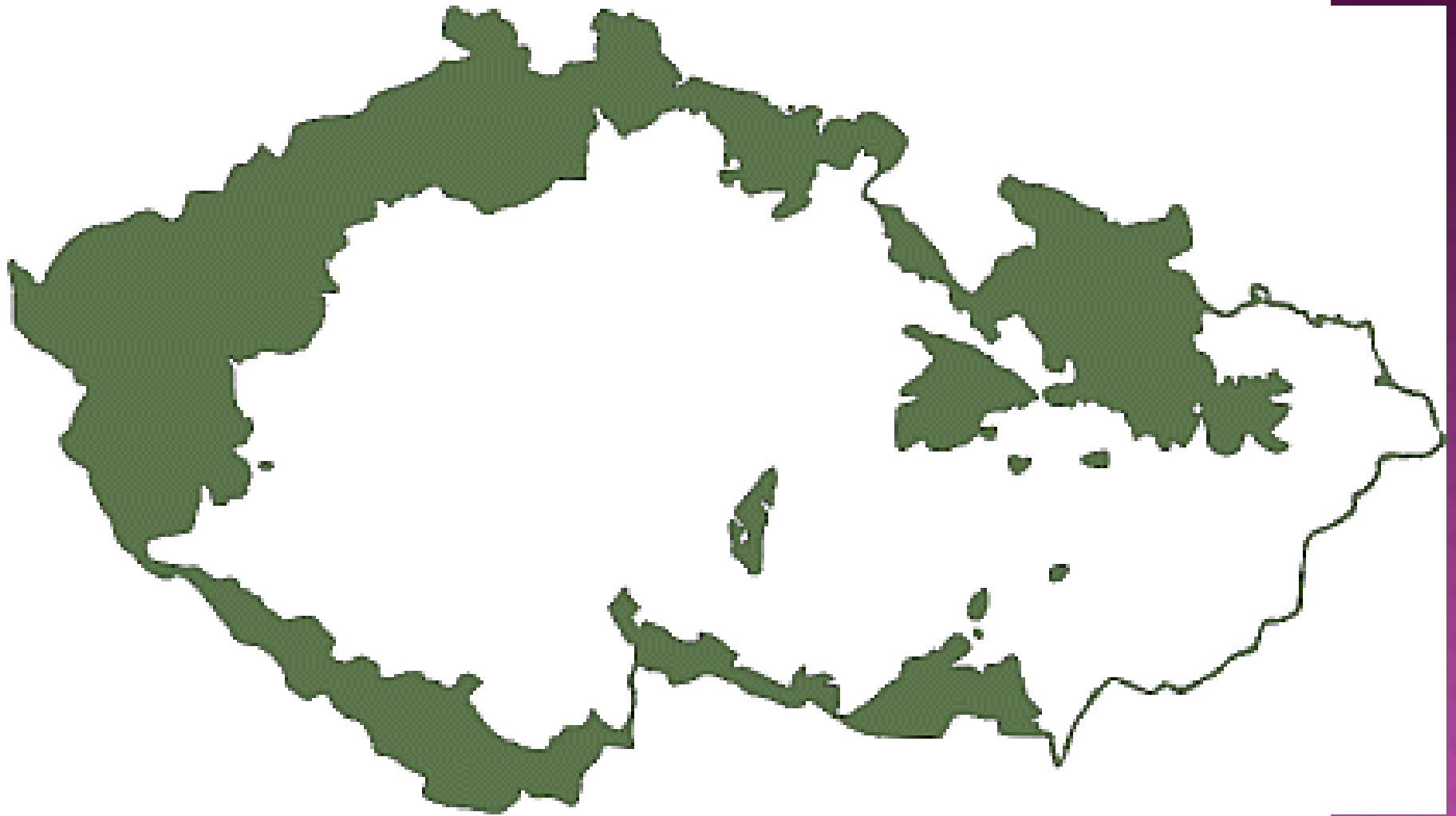
NATIONAL MINORITIES IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

- ◎ More than 3 million of ethnic Germans were living in Bohemian lands, they were called **Sudeten Germans**.
- The German minority living in Sudetenland demanded autonomy from the Czech government, claiming they were suppressed and repressed by the Czech government.
- 1938 - Munich Agreement

- ◎ Other national minorities in Czechoslovakia:
 - 750 000 of Hungarians in southern Slovakia
 - 450 000 of Ruthenians in Karpathian Ruthenia
 - 75 000 of Poles
 - Jews, Gypsies

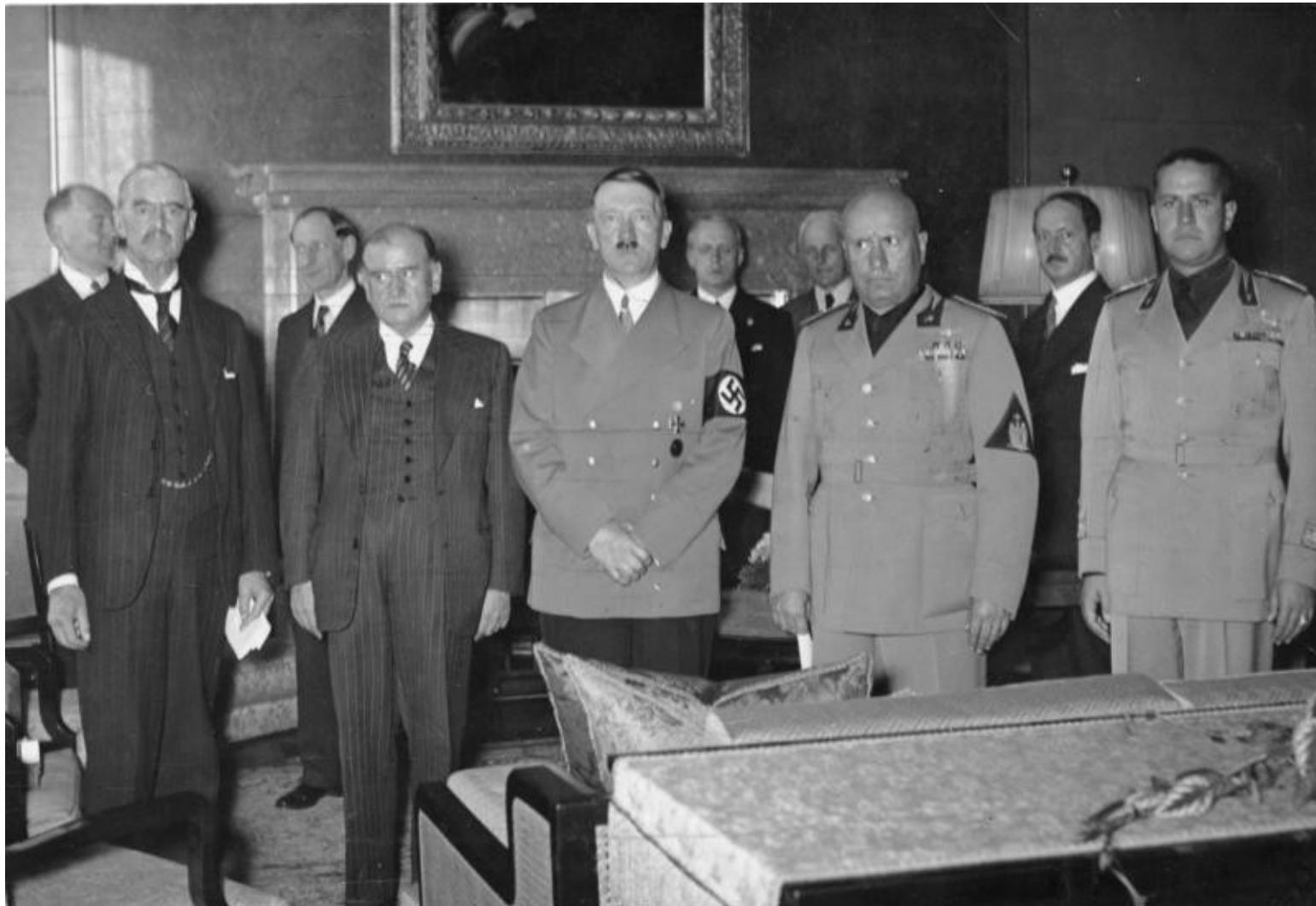
- ◉ There was a numerous German minority in Czechoslovakia, **Sudeten German Party** with the leader **Konrad Henlein** was established in 1935
- ◉ 1935 – Parliamentary elections, the newly founded Sudeten German Party under leadership of **Konrad Henlein**, financed with Nazi money, won an upset victory, securing over 2/3 of the Sudeten German vote, which worsened the diplomatic relations between the Germans and the Czechs.
- ◉ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cS5GglsNKyo>
- ◉ April 1938 – **Karlsbader Decrees** demanding the authonomy for Sudeten Germans and the freedom to profess Nazi ideology, Sudeten Germans expected that President Beneš will refuse their exaggerated requirments
- ◉ Czechoslovak government was forced to coclude an agreement with Henlein but he refused all their suggestions according to Hitler's instructions
- ◉ Hitler accused Czechoslovak government of „oppresing“ the Greman minority and demanded ceding of the Sudetenland to Germany
- ◉ Czechoslovak Government responded that Germany had no legal claims to that region
- ◉ Great powers – Great Britain, France – were affraid of the new war → politics of **appeasement**

- ⊙ **Appeasement** – a diplomatic policy of making political or material concessions to an enemy power in order to avoid conflict
- ⊙ several negotiations on Czechoslovakia between Hitler and British Prime Minister **Neville Chamberlain** during September 1938
 - 15th September – Berchtesgaden – Great powers were putting pressure on Czechoslovak government to accept Hitler's requirements – he wanted Sudeten, firstly Czechoslovak government refused British and French pressure but on 21st September was forced to accept Hitler's requirements
 - 22nd September – Bad Godesberg – new Hitler's requirements – he wanted to occupy Czechoslovak fortification and some border areas for Poland and Hungary
- ⊙ Hitler announced that he would attack Czechoslovakia on 28th September (according to the *Fall Grün* prepared already in April 1938)



- **Sudetenland** – the areas inhabited by Germans in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia during the interwar period

- ◉ change of the government in Czechoslovakia – Prime Minister **General Syrový**
- ◉ 23rd September – **general mobilization** in Czechoslovakia
- ◉ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AvQMjamGjI8>
- ◉ 29th to 30th September – negotiations of four Great powers in Munich (Germany – Hitler, Italy – Mussolini, Great Britain – Chamberlain, France – Daladier) – about Czechoslovak frontiers and German requirements but without Czechoslovakia – France and Great Britain were Czechoslovak allies but they signed the agreement with the enemy: **the Munich Agreement**
- ◉ Czechoslovakia (Czechoslovak troops) had to evacuate Sudeten and cede it to Germany
- ◉ the USSR did not reply for the Czechoslovak application for the help
- ◉ from 1st to 10th October Czechoslovak borderland was occupied by German troops and annexed to Germany, Poland got the area around Těšín and Spiš, Hungary got Carpathian Ruthenia and southern parts of Slovakia
- ◉ The Munich agreement shattered Czechoslovakia's democratic system and created profound disillusionment with the West
- ◉ The great powers were convinced that they had „saved the peace for our time“ (Neville Chamberlain)
- ◉ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLR0Vt2sXWQ>



Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler, Mussolini and Ciano pictured before signing the Munich Agreement (from left to right)

DISSOLUTION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA IN 1938



- Czechoslovakia lost 1/3 of its area, 1/3 of light industry
- in southern Slovakia fertile soil important for agriculture was lost
- the First Czechoslovak republic was dissolved
- so called **Second Czecho-Slovak Republic** was proclaimed - till March 1939 – President **Emil Hácha**
- no parliamentary democracy anymore
- 7th October – autonomy of Slovakia was proclaimed – **Czecho-Slovakia**

PROTECTORATE BOHEMIA AND MORAVIA, SLOVAK STATE

- ◉ 13th March 1939 – Slovak Prime Minister **Jozef Tiso** was invited into Berlin – he was made to enforce the separation of Slovakia
- ◉ 14th March 1939 – **Slovak State** was separated from Czecho-Slovakia, formally was independent but really the satellite of Nazi Germany
- ◉ 14th March 1939 – President Hácha and Foreign Minister Chvalkovský were invited to Berlin – Hitler threatened with bombing of Prague – they were forced to sign the document asking Germany for protection what was in fact forced capitulations
- ◉ 15th March 1939 – German army occupied Bohemia and Moravia – dissolution of Second Czechoslovak Republic
- ◉ 16th March 1939 – the occupants proclaimed **Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia**
- ◉ it was part of German Reich, formally autonomous state with so called State President Emil Hácha and Prime Minister Rudolf Beran
- ◉ but the real power was in hands of Reichsprotektor **Konstantin von Neurath** and later **Reinhard Heydrich**
- ◉ Czech administrations and economy entirely subjected to the German war machine
- ◉ Many Czech political and cultural leaders were imprisoned or executed

- ◉ **Jews** were dismissed from the civil service and placed in an extralegal position
- ◉ Special concentrations camps for Jews and Romas - **Terezín**
- ◉ the Czechs launched secret resistance movement to Nazi occupation
- ◉ Czechoslovak Government in exile in London (President in exile **Edvard Beneš**, Prime Minister – **Jan Šrámek**)
- ◉ mass demonstrations in October 28, 1939 – an anniversary of establishing of Czechoslovakia – one student Vojtěch Sedláček was shot to death and the second one – Jan Opletal was seriously injured and died later, his funeral on 15th November became a new mass manifestation against nazism
- ◉ the Nazis started an intervention against students on 17th November 1939 – 9 students were executed, 1200 of them deported into concentration camp in Sachsenhausen
- ◉ all the Universities in Protectorate were closed (→ November 17 is International Students' Day)
- ◉ Terror, omnipresent Gestapo
- ◉ 1942 – Reichsprotector **Reinhard Heydrich** was mortally wounded by two members of Czechoslovak Army Abroad who had been trained in Great Britain and then were parachuted into Bohemia
- ◉ In retaliation the Nazis executed thousands of Czech patriots and razed the town of **Lidice** to the ground, destroying its entire male population, women were deported into the concentration camps and children to „re-education“ to German Nazi families
- ◉ August 1944 – an armed uprising against Nazis erupted in central Slovakia – suppressed

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Readings:

- ⊙ TUMA, Oldrich – JINDRA, Jiri (eds.): *Czechoslovakia and Romania in the Versailles System*. Prague 2006.
- ⊙ LUKES, Igor: *Czechoslovakia Between Stalin and Hitler: The Diplomacy of Edvard Beneš in the 1930s*. New York 1996.
- ⊙ LUKES, Igor – GOLSTEIN, Erich (eds.): *The Munich Crisis, 1938: Prelude to WWII*. London 1999.
- ⊙ Voráček, Emil and others: *The Disintegration of Czechoslovakia in the end of 1930s. Policy in Central Europe*. Prague 2009.
- ⊙ <http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/toc.html>
- ⊙ <http://www.radio.cz/en/static/october28/>
- ⊙ A movie: *Paradisecamp* (1986) – a documentary about Terezin concentration camp - written and directed by the Australians Paul Rean and Frank Heimans