

Tomáš Malínek

Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, Prague

ORCID 0009-0008-1998-9994

The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and Its Response to the East German Refugee Crisis in 1989

Komunistyczna Partia Czechosłowacji i jej reakcja na kryzys uchodźczy w Niemczech Wschodnich w 1989 r.

ABSTRACT: After the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, Czechoslovakia became an important transit country for East German refugees. This was even more important in the 1970s and 1980s, when Czechoslovakia was one of the few countries in the world where GDR citizens could travel without limits. The second important factor was the opening of the West German embassy in Prague in 1973/1974. The office was located in the historical centre of Prague and was easily accessible. It is no wonder that it became a very popular destination for GDR citizens who wanted to emigrate to the FRG. In 1984–1985, Prague experienced the first major East German refugee crisis. The refugees hoped for a quick departure to the FRG. However, such expectations were completely unrealistic. Without the consent of the East German government, the Czechoslovak authorities would not allow it. The refugees had to accept a compromise, return to the GDR and apply for legal emigration. On the other hand, no one was punished for attempting to escape. In terms of refugee numbers, 1989 was a very different story. In 1984–1985, hundreds of people came to Prague, in 1989 it was tens of thousands. Some of them were transported to the FRG by trains passing through the territory of the GDR. Later, the East German government allowed them to travel directly from Prague to the FRG. Initially, the Czechoslovak communists remained loyal allies of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED). Some of them truly believed that the refugee crisis was provoked by the West German government in order to damage the GDR. On the other hand, it is also true, that the Communist Part of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) always considered the refugee crisis to be rather an inter-German than a Czechoslovak

problem. The situation changed significantly at the beginning of November 1989. The leadership of the KSČ began to fear that the East German refugees and the domestic political opposition would join forces to organize some kind of anti-government riots. At this moment, the solidarity between Prague and East Berlin broke down.

KEYWORDS: Czechoslovakia, Prague, Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, German Democratic Republic, Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Federal Republic of Germany, East German refugees, Revolutions of 1989

STRESZCZENIE: Po wybudowaniu muru berlińskiego w 1961 r. Czechosłowacja stała się ważnym krajem tranzytowym dla uchodźców z Niemiec Wschodnich. Jej znaczenie wzrosło jeszcze bardziej w latach siedemdziesiątych i osiemdziesiątych, kiedy była jednym z niewielu krajów na świecie, do których obywatele NRD mogli podróżować bez ograniczeń. Drugim ważnym czynnikiem było otwarcie ambasady Niemiec Zachodnich w Pradze na przełomie roku 1973 i 1974. Placówka znajdowała się w historycznym centrum Pragi i była łatwo dostępna, nic więc dziwnego, że stała się bardzo popularnym miejscem dla obywateli NRD, którzy chcieli wyemigrować do RFN. W latach 1984–1985 Praga doświadczyła pierwszego poważnego kryzysu uchodźczego. Uchodźcy z NRD mieli nadzieję na szybki wyjazd do RFN, jednak oczekiwania te były całkowicie nierealne. Bez zgody rządu NRD władze czeskosłowackie nie mogły na to pozwolić. Uchodźcy musieli pójść na kompromis, wrócić do NRD i ubiegać się o legalną emigrację. Nikt jednak nie został ukarany za próbę ucieczki. Pod względem liczby uchodźców rok 1989 znacznie się różnił od okresu wcześniejszego. W latach 1984–1985 do Pragi przybywały setki osób, w 1989 r. były to dziesiątki tysięcy. Część z nich została przewieziona do RFN pociągami przejeżdżającymi przez terytorium NRD. Później rząd NRD wydał zgodę na bezpośredni wyjazd z Pragi do RFN. Początkowo czeskosłowaccy komuniści pozostawali lojalnymi sojusznikami Socjalistycznej Partii Jedności Niemiec (SED), niektórzy z nich naprawdę wierzyli, że kryzys uchodźczy został wywołany przez rząd Niemiec Zachodnich w celu zaszkodzenia NRD. Prawdą jest też, że Komunistyczna Partia Czechosłowacji (KSČ) zawsze uważała kryzys uchodźczy za problem raczej międzyemiecki niż czeskosłowacki. Sytuacja zmieniła się na początku listopada 1989 r. Kierownictwo KSČ zaczęło się obawiać, że uchodźcy z NRD i krajowa opozycja polityczna połączą siły w celu zorganizowania jakichś antyrządowych zamieszek. W tym momencie solidarność między Pragą a Berlinem Wschodnim zaczęła zniknąć.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Czechosłowacja, Praga, Komunistyczna Partia Czechosłowacji (KSČ), Niemiecka Republika Demokratyczna, Socjalistyczna Partia Jedności Niemiec (SED), Republika Federalna Niemiec, uchodźcy z Niemiec Wschodnich, rewolucje 1989 r.

The main topic of this study is the attitude of Czechoslovakia,¹ and especially the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ), towards refugees from the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Although the text focuses primarily on 1989, developments since the 1960s are also included.

The study is divided into four parts. The first chapter deals with the historical context. The second one provides more information about the history of the West German embassy in Prague as a destination for GDR refugees. The third chapter focuses on the first major East German refugee crisis in 1984–1985, at the time probably the biggest crisis in relations between the GDR and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) since the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. The last chapter focuses on the crisis of 1989.

The three main research questions are: How did Czechoslovakia become the most important transit country for the refugees from the GDR? What was the attitude of the Czechoslovak authorities towards the refugees? Was the KSČ a reliable ally for the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) during the 1989 crisis?

Moreover, while seeking answers to these questions, one of the main objectives of this paper is to place the topic of East German refugees in Czechoslovakia in a broader historical context. It is understandable that there is the greatest interest in 1989. However, it is important to note that the problem had existed for decades and that the crisis of 1989 was not the first crisis of its kind. It was a culmination of a long-term process.

Regarding the literature, the topic of this paper is still rather under-researched. The only book dealing with the phenomenon of German refugees in Czechoslovakia (and Czechoslovak refugees in Germany) over a long period of time (from the 1930s to the end of the 1980s) was published in 2019 as a result of the work of the Czech-German Commission of Historians.²

¹ From 1960 to 1990, the official name of the country was the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (Československá socialistická republika, ČSSR).

² *Uprchlíci a azylanti v zemi sousedů. Československo a Německo v letech 1933 až 1989*, ed. D. Brandes, E. Ivaničková, and J. Pešek, Prague: Česko-německá komise historiků: Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR, 2019.

Even today, the history of GDR citizens fleeing to the West via other Eastern European countries is almost exclusively addressed by German historians. Monika Tantzsch focused primarily on the efforts of the Stasi (the East German secret police) to stop and persecute refugees, not only in the GDR but also abroad.³ Human smuggling was the main theme for another German historian, Marion Detjen.⁴ Refugees and emigration are topics that can also be found in a number of other fundamental works on the history of the GDR, its foreign policy, and its armed forces. The most notable authors include Klaus Schroeder,⁵ Hermann Weber,⁶ Joachim Scholtyseck,⁷ and Jens Gieseke.⁸ There is also a relatively large number of books about the Czechoslovak Velvet Revolution 1989 that focus, among other things, on the story of East German refugees. Among Czech historians, Vilém Prečan and Karel Vodička should be mentioned.⁹ Generally speaking, research focused on relations between Prague and East Berlin usually reflects the refugee problem almost exclusively in connection with the 1989 revolution. For example, Volker Zimmermann, who dealt in great detail with the period from 1945 to 1969, paid virtually no attention to this problem.¹⁰ The importance of memoir literature is crucial. Interesting, but not always historically accurate, are the memoirs of Gerhard Ritzel, the West German ambassador in Prague from 1974 to 1977.¹¹ On the other hand, the memoirs of Hermann Huber, who was ambassador to

³ M. Tantzsch, *Die verlängerte Mauer. Die Zusammenarbeit der Sicherheitsdienste der Warschauer-Pakt-Staaten bei der Verhinderung von Republikflucht*, Berlin: Der Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der Ehem. Dt. Demokratischen Republik, Abt. Bildung und Forschung, 1998.

⁴ M. Detjen, *Ein Loch in der Mauer. Die Geschichte der Fluchthilfe im geteilten Deutschland 1961–1989*, Munich: Siedler, 2005.

⁵ K. Schroeder and S. Alisch, *Der SED-Staat: Geschichte und Strukturen der DDR*, Munich: Hanser, 1999.

⁶ H. Weber, *Dějiny NDR*, Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2003.

⁷ J. Scholtyseck, *Die Aussenpolitik der DDR*, Munich: Oldenbourg, 2003.

⁸ J. Gieseke, *Die Stasi 1945–1990*, Munich: Pantheon, 2011.

⁹ *Ke svobodě přes Prahu: exodus občanů NDR na podzim 1989: sborník dokumentů*, ed. V. Prečan, Prague: Československé dokumentační středisko, 2009; *Německý podzim 1989 v Praze: cesta východoněmeckých občanů za svobodou / Der Deutsche Herbst 1989 in Prag: der Weg der DDR-Bürger in die Freiheit*, ed. J. Hanáková, K. Cudlín, and V. Prečan. Prague, Frankfurt am Main: Československé dokumentační středisko, Exil, 2014; K. Vodička, *Die Prager Botschaftsflüchtlinge 1989: Geschichte und Dokumente*, Göttingen: V & R Unipress, 2014; H.-D. Genscher, K. Vodička, *Zündfunke aus Prag: wie 1989 der Mut zur Freiheit die Geschichte veränderte*, Munich: Deutsches Taschenbuch-Verlag, 2014.

¹⁰ V. Zimmermann, *Eine sozialistische Freundschaft im Wandel: die Beziehungen zwischen der SBZ/DDR und der Tschechoslowakei (1945–1969)*, Essen: Klartext, 2010.

¹¹ G. Ritzel, *Soweit ich mich erinnere... – Aufzeichnungen eines Dieners der Diplomatie über Länder, Erlebtes, Gehörtes, Empfundenes und Gedachtes*, Michelstadt: Stadt Michelstadt, 1998.

Czechoslovakia in 1989, are a very reliable source of information.¹² Ludwig A. Rehlinger, a former diplomat and negotiator, wrote memoirs that shed more light on West German approach to refugees from the GDR.¹³ It is no wonder that the East German refugee crisis of 1989 occupies a very special place in the memories of Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the head of West German and German diplomacy from 1974 to 1992.¹⁴

This paper is based exclusively on German and Czech archival sources. More specifically, there are documents from the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, the Security Services Archive (Czech Republic), and the Archive of the Federal Foreign Office (FRG).

The paper is based on a conference presentation, so it is not an in-depth analysis of the whole matter. However, it contains some new and interesting information, especially for the international audience. The focus is more on the consequences than on the causes of the desire of many GDR citizens to emigrate. Their reasons to leave were many and complex. Unfortunately, I cannot cover all of those matters in this short study. I also do not want to support the cliché that almost all GDR citizens wanted to emigrate. That would not be true. However, the anti-communist resistance in the GDR is also not the main theme of this paper.

Czechoslovakia as a Transit Country for GDR Refugees

The history of Czechoslovakia as an important transit country for East German refugees goes back deep into the past, more precisely to the early 1960s. Previously, the border between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic was relatively easy to cross. The first change came in 1952, when the East German government effectively closed the land border between the two German states and began to build an extensive system of fences, minefields and other barriers to make crossing it almost impossible. However, these measures did not apply to the city of Berlin. Its security was still under the control of all four Allied powers (the United States of America, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and France). In Berlin, it was still possible

¹² H. Huber, "DDR-Flüchtlinge in der Deutschen Botschaft Prag," in *Das Palais Lobkowitz: ein Ort deutscher Geschichte in Prag*, ed. H. Salfellner and W. Wnendt, Prague: Vitalis, 1999.

¹³ L.A. Rehlinger, *Freikauf: die Geschäfte der DDR mit politisch Verfolgten 1963–1989*, Halle (Saale): Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2011.

¹⁴ H.-D. Genscher, *Erinnerungen*, Berlin: Siedler, 1995.

to travel easily, both legally and illegally, between the occupation sectors. This is the main reason why Berlin was the main gateway to the West for refugees from the eastern part of Germany for almost 10 years.¹⁵

The long-term exodus had very serious consequences for the GDR. The country lost about 2.5 million inhabitants between 1949 and 1961.¹⁶ Most of them were young people with higher education and skilled workers. The massive migration also had a very negative impact on the East German economy. The situation was critical until 1961, when the Berlin Wall was built. From this point on, the last escape route to the West was closed and the mass exodus stopped. This certainly contributed to the political and economic stabilization of the GDR. However, it also meant that between 1961 and 1989 most refugees had to travel to the West via third countries.¹⁷ In most cases, Czechoslovakia was the main “transfer station. Why Czechoslovakia? There are two main reasons.

First, there were very few countries in the world where GDR citizens could travel without a visa (with ID card only, without any additional permissions). More specifically, in the 1970s, there were only two such countries, Poland and Czechoslovakia. In both cases, visa-free travel agreements had been in force since 1972. Travelling to several other Eastern Bloc countries (for example Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, the Soviet Union or Cuba) was also officially visa-free, but in reality, additional permissions were needed. Unlimited travel to Poland was suspended in 1980. The measure was a direct response of the SED to the Polish crisis (1980–1981). The East German government certainly did not want its citizens to come into contact with or to be inspired by the Polish political opposition. So in the 1980s, Czechoslovakia remained the only country in the world where GDR citizens could travel spontaneously and only with an ID card.¹⁸

If we look at the bigger picture, we will find out that the Czechoslovak visa policy made it possible for hundreds of GDR citizens to escape relatively easily even before 1972. During the Prague Spring of 1968, most Czechoslovak security forces suspended cooperation with the Stasi. In other words, arrested refugees

¹⁵ G.L. Rottman, *Berlínská zeď a vnitroněmecká hranice 1961–89*, Prague: Grada, 2009, pp. 14–20.

¹⁶ H. Weber, *Dějiny NDR*, p. 184.

¹⁷ M. Tantzsch, *Die verlängerte Mauer*, pp. 8–17.

¹⁸ J. Rychlík, “Severní hranice Čech a pohraniční styk se Saskem a Pruskem, resp. Polskem,” in *Život na československých hranicích a jejich překračování v letech 1945–1989*, ed. K. Lozoviuková and J. Pažout, Prague, Liberec: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, Technická univerzita v Liberci, 2017, pp. 84–110.

were not handed over to the GDR for criminal prosecution. At the same time, in 1968–1969, Czechoslovak border controls were anything but thorough.¹⁹

The second reason why Czechoslovakia became the most important bridge to the West, at least for GDR citizens, was the existence of an easily accessible West German embassy in Prague. However, it was not always so.

The Embassy

There was no West German diplomatic mission in Czechoslovakia until 1968. The FRG generally did not maintain official diplomatic relations with countries that recognized the GDR as a sovereign state. This foreign policy principle was also known as the Hallstein Doctrine. For a long time, the only exception from this policy was the Soviet Union (since 1955) and later also Romania (since 1967) and Yugoslavia (since 1968). The Hallstein Doctrine began to lose its relevance in the second half of the 1960s, when the FRG opened permanent trade missions in most Eastern European countries.²⁰ The mission in Prague was opened in February 1968.²¹

The West German permanent trade mission in Czechoslovakia was a rather small office with a few dozen employees. Its main task was to cooperate with the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Trade and lead business negotiations with Czechoslovak companies. The office also provided some consular services for West German citizens visiting the ČSSR. It is important to note that the trade mission did not have its own permanent headquarters. It was located in the Yalta Hotel (*Hotel Jalta*) on Wenceslas Square in the center of Prague. However, from the point of view of the Czechoslovak State Security (StB), it was a perfect location. All rooms and phone lines were bugged, and all West German diplomats were permanently under surveillance by hotel staff, mostly StB collaborators. Therefore, it is not surprising that the GDR citizens did not seek help here.²²

¹⁹ M. Tantzsch, *Die verlängerte Mauer*, p. 8.

²⁰ For more see W.G. Gray, *Germany's Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949–1969*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003; S.G. Bierling, *Die Außenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Normen, Akteure, Entscheidungen*, Munich, Vienna: Oldenbourg, 1999; C. Hacke, *Die Außenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: von Konrad Adenauer bis Gerhard Schröder*, Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 2003.

²¹ E. Bahr, *Zu meiner Zeit*, Munich: Blessing, 1996, pp. 220–223.

²² T. Malínek, "Dub v Oboře. Západoněmečtí velvyslanci v hledáčku Státní bezpečnosti v letech 1968–1989," *Securitas Imperii* 30 (1) (2017), pp. 178–181.

The West German foreign policy towards the East changed fundamentally after the 1969 federal elections. The new Federal Chancellor Willy Brandt (Social Democratic Party of Germany, SPD) was a long-time advocate of the New Eastern Policy (*Neue Ostpolitik*). The essence of his strategy is often explained as “change through proximity.” The new federal government wanted to improve relations with the East. However, the aim was not to strengthen the East politically. Quite the opposite. The building of interpersonal contacts and trade relations between the East and the West (especially between the FRG and the GDR) was intended to ‘undermine’ the Iron Curtain. The ultimate goal of the New Eastern Policy was to end the division of Europe and to establish a system of collective security.²³

One of the most important results of Brandt’s New Eastern Policy was a series of bilateral treaties between the FRG and Eastern Bloc countries: the Soviet Union (1970), Poland (1970), the GDR (1972) and Czechoslovakia (1973). All of them had a very similar content; establishment of diplomatic relations at the level of ambassadors (if not already in place), recognition of post-war borders in Europe, commitment to resolve mutual disputes peacefully, etc. The negotiations with Czechoslovakia took by far the longest and were the most complicated. The main reasons were the dispute over the invalidity of the Munich Agreement of 1938 and the reluctance of the Czechoslovak Communists to develop other than commercial relations with West Germany. The Prague Treaty was finally signed in December 1973. At the same time, the West German permanent trade mission in Prague was ‘upgraded’ to an embassy.²⁴

It was obvious that the Yalta Hotel could not be a suitable building for an embassy. However, finding a new one was not easy and took quite a long time. Finally, the Baroque Lobkowitz Palace, which is located in the historical center of the city near Prague Castle, was chosen as a permanent embassy headquarters. The building had to undergo extensive reconstruction, so it was not officially handed over to the FRG until 1974. An integral part of the

²³ For more see: H. Potthoff, S. Miller, *The Social Democratic Party of Germany 1848–2005*, Bonn: Dietz, 2006, pp. 213–224; B. Faulenbach, *Geschichte der SPD. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, Munich: C.H. Beck, 2012, pp. 85–90.

²⁴ For more see: P. Bender, *Die „Neue Ostpolitik“ und ihre Folgen vom Mauerbau zum Moskauer Vertrag*, Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1986, pp. 199–200; H. Haftendorn, *Deutsche Außenpolitik zwischen Selbstbeschränkung und Selbstbehauptung: 1945–2000*, Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2001, pp. 180–195; R. Břach, *Smlouva o vzájemných vztazích mezi ČSSR a SRN z roku 1973: od prvních rozhovorů po ratifikaci smlouvy*, Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1994, pp. 47–53.

reconstruction was the installation of about 70 microphones and several cameras, which were later used by the Czechoslovak State Security to monitor the embassy and its surroundings. However, the performance of these technical devices was not great. The embassy staff knew about the surveillance and acted accordingly.²⁵

Since when was the new embassy a destination for refugees from the GDR? The answer is very simple: literally since day one. The building is located in the centre of Prague, it is easy to find, and there were no special security measures around it. The palace also has a garden, but the fence around it is not very high. The Czechoslovak police always concentrated more on surveillance of West German diplomats and Czechoslovak citizens coming to the embassy. It did not care much about GDR citizens. However, there was a big difference between the 1970s and the 1980s in terms of refugee numbers. In the 1970s, relatively few people came. Mostly individuals, families, or small groups of people. In the 1980s, refugee numbers increased significantly.²⁶

The West German embassy in Prague was not the main destination for every refugee from East Germany. There were more ways to escape. Some people used the services of smuggling groups. This alternative was relatively safe but very expensive. The price ranged from 5,000 DM to 30,000 DM per person. For most people, it took years to save such an amount of money. The smugglers forged fake passports, which could then be used by their clients to travel through Czechoslovakia to the West. A more dangerous alternative was to transport refugees in special hiding places inside trucks or cars.²⁷

The worst and most dangerous alternative was an individual attempt to cross the Czechoslovak western border into the FRG or Austria. Many East Germans thought that the Czechoslovak border was less guarded than the East German one. However, that was a very misleading idea. Since 1969, the western border of Czechoslovakia was guarded very strictly and its illegal crossing was almost impossible. All East German citizens arrested in the border area were sent back to the GDR and prosecuted. Since 1957, leaving the GDR illegally was a criminal offence punishable by up to three years in prison.²⁸

²⁵ T. Malínek, "Dub v Oboře," pp. 182–185.

²⁶ G. Ritzel, *Soweit ich mich erinnere*, p. 168.

²⁷ Archiv bezpečnostních složek, A 34/1, 183, Zpráva o činnosti převaděčských organizací, 26 May 1982, pp. 1–38.

²⁸ M. Tantzsch, *Die verlängerte Mauer*, pp. 18–20.

The First East German Refugee Crisis (1984–1985)

In 1984–1985, Prague experienced its first real East German refugee crisis. However, the prelude to this story took place in East Berlin. In summer 1984, the West German Permanent Mission of the FRG in the GDR (*Ständige Vertretung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*) in East Berlin was temporarily closed due to the presence of 55 people who wanted to flee to the FRG. Unlike in later similar cases, the problem was solved quickly. The Western media did not pay much attention to the case, so everything was handled discreetly. The refugees left the building, went back home and applied for permission to leave the GDR legally. Most applications were subsequently granted.²⁹

The key person who helped to solve the problem was an experienced lawyer (and a longtime Stasi informant) Wolfgang Vogel. Since the 1960s, he was involved in many negotiations on humanitarian issues like exchanges of captured spies between the East and the West or the “sale” of East German political prisoners to the FRG. According to various sources, Vogel helped to exchange more than one hundred captured spies and release tens of thousands of political prisoners. It should be mentioned that the “sale” of political prisoners was a very profitable business for the GDR. Over several decades, the West German government paid about 3.4 billion West German marks (DM) for them.³⁰ Not only in this case, but also later in Prague, Vogel’s West German negotiation partner was Ludwig A. Rehlinger, a lawyer, CDU (Christian Democratic Union of Germany) politician and representative of the Federal Ministry of Intra-German Relations (*Bundesministerium für innerdeutsche Beziehungen*, BMB).

Shortly afterwards, the West German permanent mission in East Berlin adopted very strict security measures. It was no longer possible to enter the building illegally. Therefore, the attention of many potential refugees turned to Czechoslovakia. On 2 October 1984, there were 43 people at the embassy in Prague. Two weeks later this was already 140 persons.³¹ The capacity of the building was quickly reached and it had to be closed to the public. The West

²⁹ J. Boysen, *Das „weiße Haus“ in Ost-Berlin. Die Ständige Vertretung der Bundesrepublik bei der DDR*, Berlin: Ch. Links, 2010, pp. 167–181.

³⁰ H. Jenkis, *Der Freikauf von DDR-Häftlingen. Der deutsch-deutsche Menschenhandel*, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2012, p. 8.

³¹ L.A. Rehlinger, *Freikauf*, p. 163.

German media, which was very popular in the GDR, reported extensively on the events in Prague. Their attention therefore definitely contributed to the further escalation of the crisis. This time, a discrete solution was not an option. As Ludwig A. Rehlinger later wrote, the West German government was suddenly facing the biggest crisis in inter-German relations since the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961.³²

Finding a solution was difficult since the Czechoslovak, West German and East German authorities treated the refugees very differently. For the West German authorities, the East German refugees were not ordinary asylum seekers, but “countryman” (*Landsleute*). They were indeed entitled to citizenship (and a passport) according to West German law. However, the problem was that the Czechoslovak authorities would not recognize any documents issued in this way as valid. Czechoslovak police would arrest all East German citizens carrying West German passports. If not right in front of the embassy, than at least by the first attempt to leave Czechoslovakia.³³

The East German authorities certainly wanted to end the crisis, which damaged the international image of the GDR extremely. In 1984, on the 35th anniversary of the GDR, this was doubly true. Nevertheless, the main goal was to make sure that this situation would never happen again. Any solution that would look like a victory for refugees was unacceptable for the East German government. In fact, it would be an ‘invitation for other GDR citizens to come to Prague.’ In other words, a direct transfer of refugees from Prague to the FRG was out of the question.

In this situation, the East German communists could absolutely rely on the “fraternal” help of the Czechoslovak communists. On the other hand, it would be an exaggeration to talk about big emotions on the Czechoslovak side. Most Czechoslovak politicians did not care much about the fate of refugees. The crisis was not considered a Czechoslovak problem, but rather an inter-German problem. More precisely, the Czechoslovak communists believed that the exodus was provoked and supported by the West German government in order to harm the GDR and its allies.³⁴

Klaus Meyer, the West German ambassador in Prague from 1982 to 1985, was heavily criticized by the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs for

³² Ibid., p. 168.

³³ T. Malínek, “Uprchlíci na velvyslanectví SRN v Praze objektivem Karla Cudlína,” *Paměť a dějiny* 3 (13) (2019), pp. 103–104.

³⁴ M. Jakeš, *Dva roky generálním tajemníkem*, Prague: Regulus, 1996, pp. 97–98.

reception of refugees. Indeed, he kept the building open for newcomers until it was completely full. On the other hand, as a West German diplomat, he probably could not do this in a different way. The Czechoslovak authorities certainly did not help him to solve the problem.³⁵

Just like a few months prior in East Berlin, Wolfgang Vogel had started negotiations with refugees. On behalf of the East German government, he promised impunity for those who 'voluntarily return home' and a chance to apply for legal emigration to the FRG. However, he could not guarantee a positive outcome of the process. It was no surprise that most refugees rejected the offer as insufficient. Meanwhile, the crisis escalated. In December 1984, there were already about 160 East German citizens at the embassy. Some of them went on a hunger strike, others wrote letters to West German politicians, including the Chancellor Helmut Kohl (CDU). The Austrian government offered mediation between Bonn and East Berlin. However, the East German government did not want any further negotiations. Vogel's offer was final and time-limited. The refugees had to make their decision within a few weeks. Vogel and Rehlinger visited the embassy again to talk to them in person, but they were not very successful. Only a few people returned to the GDR. The rest waited for better conditions.³⁶

Shortly before Christmas 1984, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs, visited Prague. Only thanks to his efforts did the situation calm down. Although it was not originally planned, he visited the embassy to meet the refugees. He promised that no one would be forced to leave the embassy. However, he also called for a realistic view of the situation. "It's your decision," he said.³⁷ For many, it was a clash with harsh reality. They finally understood that they could not get a better offer.

After Genscher's visit, refugees started to leave the embassy. At Christmas 1984, only about 50 people remained in Prague. The last of them left the embassy on 15 January 1985. The international crisis was over. However, the refugee story was far from over. Most importantly, the East German authori-

³⁵ Archiv Ministerstva Zahraničních Věcí, TO-T NSR 1980–1989, vol. 2, Note concerning talk with FRG ambassador in Czechoslovakia Meyer with head of the 4th Territorial Division of the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr. M. Kadnár, 10 February 1984, pp. 1–5.

³⁶ Ambassador Botschafter, Prague, to the Auswärtiges Amt, 13 December 1984, in: *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1984. 1. Januar bis 31. Dezember*, ed. D. Taschler and T. Szatkowski. Berlin, Munich, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2015.

³⁷ L.A. Rehlinger, *Freikauf*, p. 202.

ties kept their promises. Nobody was arrested and most applications for legal emigration were granted within a few months.³⁸

One more important point must be mentioned here. The “Prague solution” was originally supposed to be a one-off solution. But it became an universal solution for all similar cases in all East European countries from 1984 to 1989.

The Crisis of 1989

In 1989, the number of refugees reached unprecedented levels, as a result of the domestic and international political situation. The official rejection of Gorbachev’s perestroika made the SED even less popular among the citizens of the GDR. The second key moment was the rigged local elections in May 1989. In the late 1980s, the political representation of the GDR seemed to be the most conservative in the entire Eastern Bloc. As a result, many people lost hope for a rapid improvement of living conditions in the country.³⁹

Most West German embassies in Eastern Europe experienced a new wave of refugees. This was true not only Prague, but also in Warsaw, Budapest, and Sofia. Things were changing fast, especially in Hungary. In the spring of 1989, the removal of barriers on the border with Austria began. Many GDR citizens vacationing in Hungary immediately took advantage of the situation. It became obvious that the Hungarian government was no longer a reliable ally for the GDR. On September 10, Hungarian Foreign Minister Gyula Horn announced that all GDR citizens sojourning in Hungary were allowed to travel to the West. The decision was made without the consent of the East German government. The West German government, on the other hand, welcomed the move.⁴⁰

The situation in Prague began to escalate in August 1989. On 17 August, about 70 refugees were hiding in Lobkowitz Palace. Two days later, there were already 123 persons.⁴¹ Just like in 1984, Wolfgang Vogel came to Czechoslovakia to try to solve the problem. Indeed, he managed to convince several people to return to the GDR. However, the problem was that every day more people came to the embassy than left. On 23 August, the office had to be closed to the public.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 203–205.

³⁹ J. Scholtyseck, *Die Aussenpolitik*, pp. 46–47.

⁴⁰ H. Haftendorn, *Deutsche Außenpolitik*, pp. 345–351.

⁴¹ H. Huber, “DDR-Flüchtlinge,” p. 42.

Rumors quickly spread among the GDR population that there would be a total travel ban. This had two serious consequences. More people tried to leave the country as soon as possible. Those GDR citizens who were already in Prague refused to believe the promises of the East German government. In early September, Wolfgang Vogel visited Prague again, this time accompanied by prominent East German lawyer Gregor Gysi.⁴² They were not very successful. More and more refugees believed that they would be able to get permission to travel directly to the FRG. Moreover, the flow of people did not stop. They were no longer arriving by the dozens, but by the hundreds. The Czechoslovak government was certainly interested in a quick solution of the problem. But the “Hungarian solution” was not an option. Prague and East Berlin were still close allies.⁴³ During talks with West German diplomats, Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Jaromír Johanes repeatedly stressed that the occupation of the embassy was “not a promising path” and “there is no other option than to return to the GDR.”⁴⁴ A temporary solution to the humanitarian crisis could be to move the refugees to the other more suitable buildings in Prague. However, the Czechoslovak government refused to make these buildings available.⁴⁵

It is a well-known fact that the solution was found during several meetings of the West German, East German, Czechoslovak and Soviet ministers of foreign affairs in New York at the end of September 1989. The meeting between Hans-Dietrich Genscher and Eduard Shevardnadze was particularly crucial. On 29 September, Genscher came to Prague to announce to more than 4,000 refugees that the way to the West was open. The following explosion of happiness was enormous. Even today, especially in Germany, this moment is considered to be the one of the most important and greatest moments in modern German history. However, things were not as easy as they seemed. The East German government had some conditions. The refugees were allowed to go to the FRG but had to travel by train through the territory of the GDR.

⁴² In December 1989 Gysi was elected chairman of the SED.

⁴³ H. Kohl, *Erinnerungen 1982–1990*, Munich: Droemer, 2005, pp. 943–944.

⁴⁴ Director in the Foreign Ministry Kastrup, temporarily in Prague, to the Federal Minister Genscher, 7 September 1989, in *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1989. 1. Januar bis 31. Dezember*, ed. A. Wirsching, H. Miard-Delacroix, and G. Schöllgen, Berlin, Munich, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020, <https://www.degruyterbrill.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783110662818/html>.

⁴⁵ Talk between state secretary Sudhoff and Czechoslovak ambassador Spáčil, 29 September 1989, in *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1989*.

In this way, the East German government probably wanted to demonstrate its control over the fate of its citizens.⁴⁶

The following day, the refugees were transported by buses from the embassy to the train station in Prague–Libeň.⁴⁷ In total, this was 5,273 people. The buses were not Czechoslovak, but East German, probably provided by the Stasi. To make the refugees feel safe, the West German ambassador, Hermann Huber, traveled with them to the Libeň train station. German Red Cross (DRK) staff were also present. At Libeň station, another 50 to 60 East German citizens who happened to be there joined the transport. Then the train started its 253 km long journey. At the beginning, the passengers were very nervous. Many feared that they would be arrested when they arrived in the GDR. But that was not what happened. The train passed through the territory of the GDR and did not stop anywhere. All the stations along the way were closed and empty. Only some East German policemen (*Volkspolizei*) on patrol duty stood on the platforms. The train finally stopped in Reichenbach im Vogtland, a station near the inner-German border. Several Stasi officers boarded the train and collected passports from the passengers. All ties between the refugees and the GDR were dissolved by this act. When the passport collecting was over, the refugees started to throw East German coins, banknotes, keys and other things related to their “old lives” out of the train windows.⁴⁸

Then the train started going again, crossed the inner-German border and stopped in the town of Hof, the first station in Bavaria. Here everything was ready for a big welcome. Food was prepared for the refugees, their children got toys. The town was also full of West German journalists, who covered the event with great enthusiasm. The arrival of the refugees from Prague became the number one story for all West German TV channels, radio stations and newspapers. On the other hand, the East German media did not pay much attention to the event. If there were any reports, the SED's decision to let the refugees leave was presented as a “humanitarian act” and an “one-off solution.”⁴⁹ In fact, it was just the beginning.

In the meantime, the situation in Prague did not settle down. It took only a few hours before the embassy and all surrounding streets were once again filled with refugees. The barriers around the embassy, although guarded by police,

⁴⁶ H.-D. Genscher, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 13–24.

⁴⁷ Libeň is a Prague northern district.

⁴⁸ Documentary film *Zug in die Freiheit*, dir. by M. Schmidt, S. Dehnhardt (2014).

⁴⁹ “Humanitärer Akt,” *Neues Deutschland* 2 October 1989, p. 2.

were soon broken down. At this point, the Czechoslovak government started to be afraid that the domestic opposition might join the East German citizens to organize some kind of anti-government riots. The East German political leadership saw no other way to deal with the situation than to close the border with Czechoslovakia. The travel ban came into effect on 3 October 1989.⁵⁰

The question was what to do with people who were already in Prague. It was decided to resolve the situation in the same way as a few days earlier. There was no better solution, anyway. On 4 October 1989, 8 trains transported 8,270 refugees from Prague to Hof. The transport route was still the same, but the internal political situation in the GDR had changed a lot. Since September, more and more people were involved in anti-government protests, especially in Leipzig and East Berlin. When the first train with refugees arrived in Dresden, violent clashes broke out between police and demonstrators around the train station. In this situation, transporting refugees through the territory of the GDR was no longer something which would strengthen the position of the SED, but rather the opposite.⁵¹

To make sure it would not happen again, the East German government decided to allow its citizens to renounce their citizenship at the GDR embassy in Prague. Something previously unthinkable suddenly became a reality. It was no longer necessary to transport people through the GDR. On 27 October, the first bus with refugees went from Prague to West Germany directly.⁵²

On 18 October 1989, Erich Honecker was dismissed from the post of General Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany. The official reason was “poor health.” On the same day, Egon Krenz was elected the new leader of the party. Unfortunately, no one in the SED leadership still knew how to solve the refugee crisis. On 1 November, Krenz decided to reopen the border with Czechoslovakia. It was a desperate decision and its consequences were easily predictable. Thousands of refugees were about to cross the Czechoslovak border again.⁵³

At this point, the previously very strong solidarity between the SED and the KSČ began to crumble. The Czechoslovak party leader Miloš Jakeš asked Krenz for a quick solution. However, the problem was that Krenz, like everybody else in

⁵⁰ J. Rychlík, “Severní hranice,” p. 101.

⁵¹ V. Prečan, “Německý podzim v Praze 1989. Jedna z cest občanů NDR ke svobodě,” in *Německý podzim 1989 v Praze*, p. 8.

⁵² H. Huber, “DDR-Flüchtlinge,” p. 49.

⁵³ J. Rychlík, “Severní hranice,” p. 101.

the SED leadership, had no proposal for a solution. A few days later, East Berlin received an official request from Prague to let its citizens travel directly to the FRG, not through Czechoslovakia. In other words, the Czechoslovak government did not want to deal with East German refugees anymore and wanted to concentrate on its own domestic problems. A bilateral agreement between both German states would be the best solution, at least from the Czechoslovak point of view. However, that did not need to happen. For Czechoslovakia, the refugee crisis ended a few days later, on 9 November 1989, with the fall of the Berlin Wall.⁵⁴

Conclusion

Czechoslovakia became an important transit country for East German refugees in the 1960s after the construction of the Berlin Wall. It became even more important in the 1970s and 1980s, when Czechoslovakia was one of the few countries in the world where GDR citizens could travel without limits. The second important factor was the opening of the West German embassy in Prague in 1973/1974. The office was located in the historical centre of Prague and was easily accessible. It is no wonder that the embassy became a popular destination for GDR citizens who wanted to emigrate to the FRG.

In 1984–1985, Prague experienced the first major East German refugee crisis. The lawyer Wolfgang Vogel, one of the most important players in the secret diplomacy between East and West during the Cold War, was heavily involved in the negotiations with the refugees. However, the turning point was the visit of the West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher. He was able to convince the refugees to return to the GDR and apply for legal emigration.

In terms of refugee numbers, 1989 was a very different story. In 1984–1985, hundreds of people came to Prague, while in 1989 it was tens of thousands. Initially, the Czechoslovak communists remained loyal allies of the SED. It was unrealistic to expect the Czechoslovak government to do what the Hungarian government did – just let the refugees go to the West. On the other hand, it is also true that the KSČ always considered the refugee crisis to be rather an inter-German than a Czechoslovak problem.

The situation changed at the beginning of October 1989, when the second large wave of refugees arrived in Prague. The party leadership began to fear that the refugees from the GDR and the domestic political opposition would

⁵⁴ V. Prečan, “Několik vět o tématu, pramenech a literatuře k jeho studiu,” in *Ke svobodě přes Prahu*, pp. 30–31.

join forces to organize some kind of anti-government riots. The East German government temporarily solved the problem by closing the border with Czechoslovakia. In early November 1989, the border was reopened and the third large wave of refugees was on the way. At this moment, the solidarity between Prague and East Berlin broke down. The KSČ would welcome any quick solution based on a bilateral agreement between the GDR and the FRG that would stop the influx of people into the country. On the other hand, the SED leadership was helpless and did not know how to meet Czechoslovak requirements. Since the fall of the communist regimes in both countries was only days away, there was not enough time for a major dispute escalation.

Ultimately, the refugee crisis of 1989 did not come “out of the blue.” It was rather a culmination of a long-term process. There were many reasons why Czechoslovakia became an attractive transit country for East German refugees. Most of these reasons have been already mentioned: geographical proximity, a relatively liberal visa policy towards the GDR (not only in the 1970s and 1980s, but also in 1968–1969), and the easily accessible premises of the FRG embassy in Prague. The role of West German media should not be underestimated either. Most people in the GDR watched West German television. Thanks to its news coverage, many believed that it was actually quite easy to cross the western border of Czechoslovakia. However, after 1969, this was no longer true.

Compared to other Eastern European communist parties, the KSČ proved to be a reliable ally of the SED until November 1989. This was certainly related to the conservative nature of the party leadership. At the same time, however, there was actually no reason to make concessions in foreign policy in favor of the FRG. Yes, it was a very important trading partner, but the Czechoslovak economy was never dependent on West German loans, unlike Hungary, for example.

There is a significant difference in how the refugee crisis of 1989 is remembered in Germany and in the Czech Republic. For Germans, 29 September 1989, the day when Hans-Dietrich Genscher came to Prague to announce that refugees could leave the embassy and go to the FRG, is one of the most important moments in modern German history. A true symbol of the fall of the Iron Curtain. On the other hand, the Czech way of remembering these events is much less emotional. The main symbol of the exodus were the hundreds of abandoned Trabants, small East German cars made mainly of plastic, in the streets of Prague. Most of them were stolen by Czech thieves.

Bibliography

Sources

Archival sources

Archiv bezpečnostních složek, A 34/1, 183.

Archiv Ministerstva Zahraničních Věcí, TO-T NSR 1980–1989, vol. 2.

Published sources

Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1984. 1. Januar bis 31. Dezember. Ed. Daniela Taschler and Tim Szatkowski. Berlin, Munich, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2015. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110345766>.

Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1989. 1. Januar bis 31. Dezember. Ed. Andreas Wirsching, Hélène Miard-Delacroix, and Gregor Schöllgen. Berlin, Munich, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110662818>.

References

Bahr, Egon. *Zu meiner Zeit.* Munich: Blessing, 1996.

Bender, Peter. *Die „Neue Ostpolitik“ und ihre Folgen vom Mauerbau zum Moskauer Vertrag.* Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1986.

Bierling, Stephan. *Die Außenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Normen, Akteure, Entscheidungen.* Munich, Vienna: Oldenbourg, 1999.

Boysen, Jacqueline. *Das „weiße Haus“ in Ost-Berlin. Die Ständige Vertretung der Bundesrepublik bei der DDR.* Berlin: Ch. Links, 2010.

Břach, Radko. *Smlouva o vzájemných vztazích mezi ČSSR a SRN z roku 1973: od prvních rozhovorů po ratifikaci smlouvy: studie.* Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1994.

Detjen, Marion. *Ein Loch in der Mauer. Die Geschichte der Fluchthilfe im geteilten Deutschland 1961–1989.* Munich: Siedler, 2005.

Faulenbach, Bernd. *Geschichte der SPD. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart.* Munich: C.H. Beck, 2012.

Genscher, Hans-Dietrich, and Vodička, Karel. *Zündfunke aus Prag: wie 1989 der Mut zur Freiheit die Geschichte veränderte.* Munich: Deutsches Taschenbuch-Verlag, 2014.

Genscher, Hans-Dietrich. *Erinnerungen.* Berlin: Siedler, 1995.

Gieseke, Jens. *Die Stasi 1945–1990.* Munich: Pantheon, 2011.

Gray, William Glenn. *Germany's Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949–1969.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

Hacke, Christian. *Die Aussenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: von Konrad Adenauer bis Gerhard Schröder.* Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 2003.

- Haftendorn, Helga. *Deutsche Außenpolitik zwischen Selbstbeschränkung und Selbstbehauptung: 1945–2000*. Stuttgart, Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2001.
- Huber, Hermann. "DDR-Flüchtlinge in der Deutschen Botschaft Prag." In *Das Palais Lobkowitz: ein Ort deutscher Geschichte in Prag*. Ed. Harald Salfellner and Werner Wnendt. Prague: Vitalis, 1999.
- "Humanitärer Akt." *Neues Deutschland* 2 October 1989.
- Jakeš, Miloš. *Dva roky generálním tajemníkem*. Prague: Regulus, 1996.
- Jenkis, Helmut. *Der Freikauf von DDR-Häftlingen. Der deutsch-deutsche Menschenhandel*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2012.
- Ke svobodě přes Prahu: exodus občanů NDR na podzim 1989: sborník dokumentů. Ed. Vilém Prečan. Prague: Československé dokumentační středisko, 2009.
- Kohl, Helmut. *Erinnerungen 1982–1990*. Munich: Droemer, 2005.
- Malínek, Tomáš. "Dub v Oboře. Západoněmečtí velvyslanci v hledáčku Státní bezpečnosti v letech 1968–1989." *Securitas Imperii* 30 (1) (2017). https://www.ustrcr.cz/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/SI_30_s176-200.pdf.
- Malínek, Tomáš. "Uprchlíci na velvyslanectví SRN v Praze objektivem Karla Cudlína." *Paměť a dějiny* 3 (13) (2019). https://www.ustrcr.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/PD_3_19_s103-111.pdf.
- Německý podzim 1989 v Praze: cesta východoněmeckých občanů za svobodou. *Der Deutsche Herbst 1989 in Prag: der Weg der DDR-Bürger in die Freiheit*. Ed. Jiitka Hanáková, Karel Cudlín, and Vilém Prečan. Prague, Frankfurt am Main: Československé dokumentační středisko, Exil, 2014.
- Pothhoff, Heinrich, Miller, Susanne. *The Social Democratic Party of Germany 1848–2005*. Bonn: Dietz, 2006.
- Prečan, Vilém. "Několik vět o tématu, pramenech a literatuře k jeho studio." In *Ke svobodě přes Prahu: exodus občanů NDR na podzim 1989: sborník dokumentů*. Ed. Vilém Prečan. Prague: Československé dokumentační středisko, 2009.
- Prečan, Vilém. "Německý podzim v Praze 1989. Jedna z cest občanů NDR ke svobodě." In *Německý podzim 1989 v Praze: cesta východoněmeckých občanů za svobodou. Der Deutsche Herbst 1989 in Prag: der Weg der DDR-Bürger in die Freiheit*. Ed. Jiitka Hanáková, Karel Cudlín, and Vilém Prečan. Prague, Frankfurt am Main: Československé dokumentační středisko, Exil, 2014.
- Rehlinger, Ludwig A. *Freikauf: die Geschäfte der DDR mit politisch Verfolgten 1963–1989*. Halle (Saale): Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2011.
- Ritzel, Gerhard. *Soweit ich mich erinnere... – Aufzeichnungen eines Dieners der Diplomatie über Länder, Erlebtes, Gehörtes, Empfundenes und Gedachtes*. Michelstadt: Stadt Michelstadt, 1998.
- Rottman, Gordon L. *Berlínská zeď a vnitroněmecká hranice 1961–89*. Prague: Grada, 2009.
- Rychlík, Jan. "Severní hranice Čech a pohraniční styk se Saskem a Pruskem, resp. Polskem." In *Život na československých hranicích a jejich překračování v letech 1945–1989*. Ed. Kateřina Lozoviuková and Jaroslav Pažout. Prague, Liberec: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, Technická univerzita v Liberci, 2017.

- Schlotysek, Joachim. *Die Aussenpolitik der DDR*. Munich: Oldenbourg, 2003.
- Schroeder, Klaus, and Alisch, Steffen. *Der SED-Staat: Geschichte und Strukturen der DDR 1949–1990*. Munich, Vienna: Hanser, 1998.
- Tantzscher, Monika. *Die verlängerte Mauer. Die Zusammenarbeit der Sicherheitsdienste der Warschauer-Pakt-Staaten bei der Verhinderung von Republikflucht*. Berlin: Der Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der Ehem. Dt. Demokratischen Republik, Abt. Bildung und Forschung, 1998.
- Uprchlíci a azylanti v zemi sousedů. Československo a Německo v letech 1933 až 1989*. Ed. Detlef Brandes, Edita Ivaničková, and Jiří Pešek. Prague: Česko-německá komise historiků: Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR, 2019.
- Vodička, Karel. *Die Prager Botschaftsflüchtlinge 1989: Geschichte und Dokumente*. Göttingen: V & R Unipress, 2014.
- Weber, Hermann. *Dějiny NDR*. Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2003.
- Zimmermann, Volker. *Eine sozialistische Freundschaft im Wandel: die Beziehungen zwischen der SBZ/DDR und der Tschechoslowakei (1945–1969)*. Essen: Klartext, 2010.

Film

Zug in die Freiheit. Dir. by Matthias Schmidt, Sebastian Dehnhardt. 2014.

TOMÁŠ MALÍNEK – Dr., historian. He graduated in Modern History at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague. Since 2016, he has been working at the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes in Prague. He specializes in the history of the Czechoslovak State Security (StB) and Czechoslovak-German relations after World War II. As an author and co-author, he has published several monographs and studies on these topics.

TOMÁŠ MALÍNEK – doktor, historyk. Ukończył studia z zakresu historii współczesnej na Wydziale Nauk Społecznych Uniwersytetu Karola w Pradze. Od 2016 r. pracuje w Instytucie Badania Reżimów Totalitarnych w Pradze. Specjalizuje się w historii czechosłowackiej służby bezpieczeństwa (StB) oraz stosunkach czechosłowacko-niemieckich po II wojnie światowej. Jest autorem lub współautorem kilku monografii i opracowań na te tematy.