Czech Refugees in Austria 1968–1985

Ondřej Haváč

INTRODUCTION

Troops of the Warsaw Pact invaded Czechoslovakia on a warm August night in 1968 to stop a process later called the Prague Spring, which was supposed to reform the Communist regime in the country and give it a 'human face'. The very next night on 22nd August, Zuzana Brejchová, my later narrator and film director, was lying in her bed in a flat in Prague and was reading. Suddenly she heard a gun firing, the window in her room was broken and bullets buried deep into the wall. She hid herself under the bed and, when the shooting stopped, she managed to run away to her parents. All of them survived but it was the last straw. *"Well, my father looked around the flat, which was shot to pieces* [...] *and said: We are leaving! We are not staying here any longer!"*[1] The whole family fled the country the next day. They were one of many Czech and Slovak families that left Czechoslovakia heading to the West in order to lead a better life abroad. Many of them settled in the Austrian capital Vienna. This paper deals with the Czech immigrants in Austria and its capital from 1968 to the mid-1980s and points out the problems they had to face during the process of integration into Austrian society. This article will focus on the following questions: do they feel themselves to be 'insiders' after 40 years of living in Austria? How has the integration process changed their perception of their national identity? Do they still consider themselves to be Czechs?

NATIONS, MINORITIES AND THEIR IDENTITY

To answer the above mentioned questions, it is first of all necessary to clarify the terms identity, nation, and integration. This section presents a theoretical framework of these concepts which form a key part of my study. I have omitted 'religious identity' or the religious part of one's identity (for instance, the consequences of a Czech becoming a Muslim for one's national consciousness) in this paper. As this paper focuses on the Czech minority abroad in the late 1960s and 1970s, the collected data showed there were other elements (such as language, culture, or politics) which formed the narrators' national consciousness and these are analysed in this paper. There exist many definitions of 'nation' and 'national identity', and many social and

1 Interview with Zuzana Brejchová, Vienna, 9 September 2011. Private Archive of the Author.

political scientists and historians have tried to identify a common essence of all nations. Many of the authors who dealt with these concepts were born in the Czech lands.[2] For example Miroslav Hroch, in his book *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, in which he deals with the process of nation formations, defines the term nation as 'a large social group characterized by a combination of several kinds of relation (economic, territorial, political, religious, linguistic and so on)'.[3] He also states that national identity was a new type of group identity which provided its members with new certainties and with a new system of values which corresponded to the modern age.[4] Hroch does not define the term national identity further, but he appears to have borrowed the concept from the ethnographer Anthony D. Smith.[5] According to Smith, the fundamental features of national identity are: 1) an historic territory, or homeland, 2) common myths and historical memories, 3) a common, mass public culture, 4) common legal rights and duties for all members, and 5) a common economy with territorial mobility for members.[6] His concept of national identity is based on existence of different ethnics which evolve into nations bounded by the above described features of identity. The concept of national identity, however, remains contested. Some scholars claim the concept of identity is something every group has or ought to have, and that it is at the core of every human being. In other words — there objectively exists a 'true' identity in every person and every group.[7] Others propose that identity is constructed or negotiated and thus fluid, multiple, and subjective.

In this paper, I am following the criticism of the term identity by Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper in their influential article *Beyond Identity*. They point out that nowadays, the concept of identity and its usage in human sciences *"bears a multivalent even contradictory theoretical burden"* and they argued *"Identity tends to mean too much (when understood in a strong sense), too little (when understood in a weak sense), or nothing at all (because of its sheer ambiguity)"*.[8] They advise to substitute the ambiguous term with multiple terms (which would not be as overburdened as identity). Therefore, I do not use the term 'identity' in the analysis of the collected data, but instead Cooper and Brubaker's concepts of 'identification', 'categorization', and 'self-understanding' are employed in the study of the various contexts of Czech refugees' behaviour.[9]

2 See H. KOHN, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study of Origins and Background*, New York 1944; K. W. DEUTSCH, *Nationalism and Its Alternatives*, New York 1969; F. SEIBT, *Deutschland und die Tschechen: Geschichte einer Nachbarschaft in der Mitte Europas*, Munich 1974.

3 M. HROCH, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller Nations*, New York 2000, p. 4.

4 Ibidem, p. 14.

5 M. HROCH, *Národy nejsou dílem náhody*, Praha 2009; M. HROCH, *Pohledy na národ a nacionalismus*, Praha 2003.

6 A. D. SMITH, *National Identity*, London 1991, p. 14.

7 See, for example, the famous essay: *Do Nations have Navels*?, in: E. GELLNER, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford 1983.

8 R. BRUBAKER — F. COOPER, *Beyond "Identity"*, in: Theory and Society, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2000, p. 1.

9 *"As a processual, active term derived from a verb 'identification' lacks the reifying connotations of 'identity'. It invites us to specify the agents that do the identifying.* [...] *Identification of oneself and of others — is intrinsic to social life."* BRUBAKER — COOPER, p. 14.

I take a closer look at their collective solidarity and self-understanding as well as the role of the Austrian state which, in Brubaker's words, as 'the modern state has been one of the most important agents of identification and categorization'.[10]

METHODOLOGY

At the beginning of my field work, the research question asks why Czechs, who came to Austria before the fall of the Iron Curtain, are considered to be successfully integrated into Austrian society and how this is linked to their lack of national pride. As mentioned above, the subjects of my research were Czechs who had settled down in Vienna in the period between 1968 and 1985. This almost twenty-year period delimited by the Prague Spring at the beginning and by the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev to the post of the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR, and the inauguration of his reform policy, at the end, allowed me to include not only the immigration wave of 1968 but also signatories of Charter 77[11] who were forced to leave Czechoslovakia some 10 years later. Moreover, there were significant changes in the Austrian immigration policy during this period, which had to be taken into account.

This paper is mainly based on data gathered during two periods of field work in Vienna which were conducted in September 2011 and 2013. I recorded twenty-one interviews with people who fled Czechoslovakia after the Soviet invasion in 1968, as well as with signatories of Charter 77 and their children who either came to Vienna with their parents or were born there. I used the oral history method of data collection and started my 'Viennese snowball'[12] in my home Department of History in Brno, which has ties to Vienna's institutions (University of Vienna) and Czech minority associations (for instance to *Bilingvní reálné gymnázium Školského spolku Komenský* [the

10 Brubaker and Cooper described the role of state as follows: *"In the ordinary ebb and flow of social life, people identify and categorize others, just as identify and categorize themselves. But there is another key type of external identification that has no counterpart in the domain of self-identification: the formalized, codified, objectified systems of categorization developed by powerful, authoritative institutions"*. Ibidem, p.15.

11 Charter 77 was an informal civic initiative in Czechoslovakia that associated various members of the Czechoslovak opposition. It criticised the Czechoslovak government for failing to implement human rights which it had agreed to observe, especially the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which took place in Helsinki in 1975. More in V. PREČAN (Ed.), *Charta 77 (1977–1989): Od morální k demokratické revoluci*, Praha 1990.

12 Snowball sampling (or chain sampling) is a method used in sociology and other social sciences to gather data which would be difficult to sample in another way. The researcher asks the initial subject for assistance and for identifying people with similar interests (or who belong to the same group or same milieu). For more on snowball sampling and about Oral History in the Czech Republic in general, see M. VANĚK — P. MÜCKE — H. PELIKÁNOVÁ, *Naslouchat hlasům paměti: Teoretické a praktické aspekty orální historie*, Praha 2007, p. 90. For literature in English about qualitative research, see, S. NAGY HESSE-BIBER — P. LEAVY, *The Practice of Qualitative Research*, London 2006.

Czech Bilingual Grammar School Komensky]).[13] At the end of my first field research, I had fifteen interviews with various members of the Czech minority, nine of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. I also conducted a survey by questionnaire at the Czech Bilingual Grammar School Komensky among seventeen-year-old students to gather data about the second generation of Czech newcomers to Vienna. The questionnaire was devised in cooperation with Vera Kapeller[14] and our questions aimed to understand the students' background and their knowledge of the Czech Republic, its culture, and its political situation.

During the second field research, in which I intended to record interviews with the same narrators, I got in touch with other members of the Czech community in Vienna who came from different social milieus (i.e. workers, Czech Catholics, artists). This expanded sample broadened my view and made me aware of slight nuances expressed in their self-understanding. In total, my corpus consists of twenty-one recorded interviews with fifteen different narrators. However, despite my satisfaction with the recordings, I did not want to rely solely on narrative resources. To expand my source base, I visited the most important Czech minority associations and relevant Austrian Institutions: the Czech sport club *Sokol*, the *Kulturní klub Čechů a Slováků v Rakousku* (The Cultural Club of Czechs and Slovaks in Austria), the Czech minority newspaper *Vídeňské svobodné listy*, and the archive of the Research Centre for the History of Minorities, as well as the Austriam National Library, Bruno Kreisky Archive, and the Vienna University Library.[15] Thanks to the second field research I could employ 'data triangulation'[16] and validate some of my previous findings.

THE PRAGUE SPRING AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

I will firstly briefly present the situation in Czechoslovakia in 1968, as the events of that year influenced both the Czechs and Slovaks who stayed at home, as well as the ones who fled, for the next two decades. When Alexander Dubček replaced Antonín Novotný as General Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC) on 5 January 1968, no one expected the scale of the changes that would follow. Along with Dubček's election, reformists within the Party gained power and started to

13 I obtained my first contact from the Head of Department of History for the Czech historian Jana Starek, who works for Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies and who was a co-founder of the Research Centre for the History of Minorities.

14 Vera Kapeller (née Mayer), is the author of many articles about the Czech minority in Vienna. See, for example, V. MAYER, *Integrační procesy na příkladě etnických menšin ve Vídni*, in: *Český lid*, Vol. 88, No. 2, 2001, pp. 148–163.

15 For instance, the Culture Club of Czechs and Slovaks in Austria (*Kulturní klub Čechů a Slováků v Rakousku*) was an association founded by Czech refugees who came after the Soviet invasion and could not get along with the old Czech generation living in Vienna which was represented by the Czech minority newspapers *Vídeňské svobodné listy* or its Communist counterpart *Vídeňské menšinové listy*.

16 For more on the method of triangulation, see, for instance, A. BYRMAN, *Triangulation*, in: *Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*, http://www.referenceworld.com/sage/socialscience/triangulation.pdf, [cit. 2014–12–10].

enact reforms which later came to be known as the Prague Spring. The most important reforms were incorporated in the so-called Action Program which was adopted on 5 April 1968 by the Central Committee of the CPC. The Program condemned the previous Party line and Stalinist practices. The Communist Party as well as the country's economy was to be democratized, which meant less central planning and the development of a limited private sector. Human rights were to be guaranteed, culture was to be protected from Party interference, and censorship was limited. The relationship between Czechs and Slovaks was to be adjusted through federalization.

Since the very beginning of the reform movement in Czechoslovakia, other Communist parties in the Eastern Bloc watched the process with increasing suspicion The Soviets tried, in a series of negotiations, to limit or rather stop the reforms. The last common meeting took place in Bratislava on 3 August 1968, where the leaders of six associated socialist countries, the Soviet Union, East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia, signed the Bratislava Declaration. The Soviet Union expressed its intention to intervene in any Warsaw Pact country if a 'bourgeois' system was ever to be established. After the Bratislava conference, the leadership of Soviet Union had already decided to solve the problem of 'socialism with human face' by military intervention.

At 11pm on 20 August 1968, the troops of five member states of the Warsaw Pact invaded Czechoslovakia. Even though an armed confrontation was avoided and Alexander Dubček called upon his people not to resist, during the attack of the Warsaw Pact armies, 72 Czechs and Slovaks were killed, 266 severely wounded and another 436 were injured.[17] The occupation turned out to be a military success, but on the other hand it was tremendous ideological setback. It showed how difficult it was to reform a totalitarian regime without the approval of Moscow. The leaders of the Prague Spring were, shortly after the arrival of the Soviet troops, kidnapped and taken to Moscow where they were forced to sign the so-called Moscow Protocol. The document confirmed, among other things, the 'temporary stay' of occupation forces in Czechoslovakia, which lasted for the next 20 years until the Velvet Revolution. The protocol was the beginning of the end of all following liberal Communists' attempts to continue with the programme of 'socialism with a human face'. But people in Czechoslovakia and abroad were poorly informed about what was happening. The kidnapped leaders were allowed to return back to the country where, at Ruzyně Airport, they were welcomed and glorified like heroes by the whole nation. They promised to preserve the reforms and continue the liberalization. People believed them. The pro-reform leaders of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia enjoyed a mass support which they had never had before. But it did not last for long.

Gradually, a conservative wing in the CPC gained the upper hand and its leader, Gustáv Husák, fully supported by the Soviets, slowly grabbed power. Reformists were deprived of their high posts and later on they, together with thousands of others who did not agree with the occupation (called 'fraternal help'), were denied Communist Party membership. Alexander Dubček had to step down as General Secretary on 17 April 1969 and was replaced by Gustáv Husák. A massive party purge began at the

17 K. WILLIAMS, *The Prague Spring and Its Aftermath: Czechoslovak Politics 1968–1970*, Cambridge 1997, p. 158.

end of the year and it influenced almost half a million people. Many of them lost their jobs and were excluded from any participation in public life. Normalization, an era of restoration of conditions predating the Prague Spring, had begun. At this time, many people who fled the country right after the Soviet invasion decided not to come back. As the narrator Milan Ráček noted during our interview: *"The chances were evident in the year 1968. And suddenly it was to be over. People were keen on that social move and suddenly it was all over. We were bitterly disappointed!"*[18]

CZECH AND SLOVAK REFUGEES IN AUSTRIA

The Soviet invasion, which interrupted the process of political liberalization, caused the biggest wave of emigration from Czechoslovakia in the country's history. Thousands of people were heading to the West. They found their first shelter in Austria thanks to the Austrian Embassy in Prague, which granted hundreds of visas every day. It was due to the devoted effort of the ambassador Rudolf Kirschsläger, who ordered to issue the visas despite of reverse instructions coming from the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs led by Kurt Waldheim. Within the first months after the invasion almost 162,000 refugees came to the country.[19] Out of this number some 66,000 were people who were returning from abroad, mostly from their holidays in Yugoslavia and the news of the Soviet invasion caught them on the way. Suddenly the streets of Vienna were full of cars with Czechoslovak licence plates, the Czech and Slovak language sounded from Viennese shops and restaurants and one could see small Czechoslovak flags waving everywhere. The Austrian state managed to control this sudden wave of refugees only thanks to the participation of all of society. The government, together with various NGOs (e.g. Vienna Charity, the Austrian Red Cross, etc.), as well as many families and various individuals immediately gave a helping hand to the newcomers. Even the divided Czech minority in Vienna worked as one after many years of animosity.[20] They collected money, clothes, and other necessary things, handed out information bulletins, translated news and announcements of the Austrian government related to the situation of refugees, offered food and accommodation, the newsroom of *Vídeňské menšinové listy* served as a meeting point for many who decided to start new life in Austria. Not only the Czech minority but the Austrian society as a whole opened their country. Support came from abroad too. Vital work was done by the United Nations Refugee Agency, the International Red Cross, and the Catholic Church.[21]

18 Interview with Milan Ráček, Sitzendorf/Schmida, 14 September 2011. Private Archive of the Author.

19 See J. STAREK, *Česká menšina a československý exil po roce 1968 ve Vídni*, in: H. BASLER et al. (Ed.), *Vídeňští Češi 1945–2005: K dějinám národnostní menšiny*, Wien 2006, p. 302.

20 See P. HALLAMA, *Der Siegreiche Februar 1948 und die Anfänge des Kalten Krieges unter den Tschechen in Wien*, in: R. WONISCH (Ed.), *Tschechen in Wien: Zwischen nationaler Selbstbehauptung und Assimilation*, Wien 2010, pp. 155–181.

21 For example, the Pope Paul VI sent $10,000. See J. STAREK, *Nach dem Prager* Frühling, in: T. KNOZ, *Tschechen und Österreicher: Gemeinsame Geschichte, gemeninsame Zukunft*, Brno 2006, p. 201.

The government also eased the situation for refugees significantly. Everything were granted temporary residency by the Austrian Ministry of Interior and those who applied and fulfilled the conditions of the Geneva Conventions received political asylum in Austria. But, surprisingly, only a few of the refugees applied for political asylum straight after their arrival, due to the confusing situation in Czechoslovakia described above. No one knew how things would evolve. Vladimir Kusin described the strategy of Czechoslovak refugees staying in Western countries in the first months after the invasion as a 'wait and see tendency'.[22] Everyone waited to see how the situation in their homeland would turn out. Many of them wanted to return. *"Only after April 1969, in the remaining part of the year, under the impact of sweeping changes in the leading bodies of the party and the state, rank-and-file purges announced for 1970 and re-ideologised content and tone of the Czechoslovak media, were the decisions to remain in exile made en masse."*[23]

INTEGRATION AND INCORPORATION OF CZECH REFUGEES

"I must say the Austrians turned out to be very generous. After four years [of living in Austria] they started giving citizenship to everyone who applied. So I had Austrian citizenship after four and a half years".[24] In order to analyse the integration of Czech refugees into Austrian society, I am building on the theoretical framework of four authors. Richard Alba and Victor Nee have set up general criteria of successful integration; Leo Lucassen has compared Poles and Turks in the German Ruhr Area, and finally I draw on Jeffrey C. Alexander's concepts of solidary and incorporation. Many of my findings also relate to the conclusions made by Karl Brousek and later by Margitta Urbanek in her doctoral thesis.[25]

Out of 162,000 Czechoslovak refugees in Austria, the majority returned back to Czechoslovakia (in many cases just to emigrate later on) when the situation calmed down, and others continued their journey to the other Western countries, mostly to the USA, Canada, Australia, or the UK. Around 12,000 people applied for political asylum in Austria.[26] The start was difficult for most of them. They did not understand

22 V. KUSIN, *From Dubcek to Charter 77: A Study of 'Normalization' in Czechoslovakia 1968–1978*, Edinburgh 1978, p. 170.

23 Ibidem, p. 172.

24 Interview with Zdena Kaspar, Vienna, 7. September 2011. Private Archive of the Author.

25 R. ALBA — V. NEE, *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*, Cambridge 2003; L. LUCASSEN — D. FELDMAN — J. OLTMER (Eds.), *Paths of Integration: Migrants in Western Europe (1880–2004)*, Amsterdam 2006; J. C. ALEXANDER, *Theorizing the "Modes of Incorporation": Assimilation, Hyphenation, and Multiculturalism as Varieties of Civil Participation*, in: Sociological Theory, Vol. 19, No. 3, 2001, pp. 237–249; M. URBANEK, *Tschechische Flucht- und Arbeitsmigranten in Österreich*, Ph.D. thesis, Vienna 2009, http://othes.univie.ac.at/7216/, [cit. 2014–12–10]. One of the most influential books about Czech integration into Austrian society was written by K. BROUSEK, *Wien und seine Tschechen: Integration und Assimilation einer Minderheit im 20. Jahrhundert*, Munchen 1980. Vera Mayer followed up his conclusion in various articles, e.g. MAYER, pp. 148–163.

26 These figures are presented in V. VALEŠ, *Vídeňští Češi včera a dnes*, Praha 2004, p. 121.

German, they had to leave their parents and friends behind the Iron Curtain with little or no hope of seeing them again. Moreover, in some cases, they had to drop relatively well paid jobs and make a step into an uncertain future. Some refugees did not manage to cope with the new situation and returned back to Czechoslovakia, which was fuel for Communist propaganda.

Despite of the problems they had to face at the beginning, the vast majority of these 'Czechoslovak immigrants'[27] started adjusting themselves to the new circumstances. According Alba and Nee, an ethnic group is well integrated into (American) society, if its members have 1) reached a socio-economic status comparable to the majority, 2) obtained the second language, 3) were not 'spatially concentrated' (in other words they did not live in ghettoes), and 4) had a high percentage of intermarriages.[28] If we apply these criteria to Czechs living in Austria nowadays, we find out that most of these 'Wiener Tschechen' have reached the standards of the Austrian majority. This may seem like a hasty conclusion; I will elaborate the situation of Czechs in Vienna further following the example of Lucassen's description of Polish immigration to Germany.

POLICY OF AUSTRIAN STATE AS A POWERFUL PULL-FACTOR

The period from 1968 to 1985 favoured refugees' integration into Austrian society. Thanks to the state's liberal and open policy towards newcomers which helped them to settle down, the refugees started slowly to identify with their new home. As mentioned above, it seemed the refugees were welcomed from the very first step they made beyond the Iron Curtain. They were granted temporary residency by the Austrian Ministry of Interior as soon as they crossed the border and if they fulfilled the conditions given by the Geneva Conventions, they got political asylum. It is true that some of them ended in the refugee camp (*Bundesbetreuungsstelle für Asylwerber*) Traiskirchen, but it was only a temporary stay and the living conditions of Czechs, though not perfect, were much better than of those who left the country after the Communist coup in 1948. Moreover, after only four years of living in Austria they could apply for naturalization.

The situation of signatories of Charter 77 was even better because former Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky offered political asylum to all persecuted dissidents who were willing to leave Czechoslovakia. It meant when they arrived at the main station in Vienna, the Czech social democrat Přemysl Janýr, appointed by government, was waiting to assist newcomers with all necessary paperwork, and brought them to their new flat where they could temporarily stay. Bruno Aigner, the spokesman of recent Austrian president Heinz Fischer, who cooperated with Přemysl Janýr in an effort to smoothly integrate Charter signatories, told me in our interview: *"It would be much more difficult today. It was not so difficult because also the bureaucracy in Austria was*

27 It is estimated that the ratio of Czechs to Slovaks was 3:1, which meant there were some 8,000 Czechs and a little bit less than 3,000 Slovaks.

28 See more ALBA — NEE.

guided by the thinking of Bruno Kreisky — we have to help the people of Czechoslovakia."[29] Many of my narrators shared this experience—even though they did not speak the language, did not know anyone and had nothing or very little at the beginning—the state made them feel welcome. There were approximately 400 Czech dissidents and their family members coming to Austria.[30]

Moreover, in 1976, the Austrian government passed the Austrian Ethnic Groups Act (*Volksgruppengesetz*), which declared Czechs and Slovaks in Vienna as an 'autochthonous Austrian ethnic group' which, together with Hungarians, Croats, Slovenians, and Roma in Austria, was to be supported not only financially. Czechs in Vienna also got the right to establish their own Minority advisory boards to the Chancellor's office. Due to animosity within the Czech minority, which is presented later in this paper, the foundation of the board took an incredible seventeen years. If we look at the presented information through Alexander's concepts of solidarity, recognition, and incorporation, we see that straight after the Soviet invasion, there was a strong sense of solidarity felt by the core group (the Austrian majority) towards the newcomers and this, together with the high motivation of refugees themselves,[31] helped to incorporate most of them into the 'main stream'.

LABOUR MARKET, SCHOOLING, AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

According to records of the Czechoslovak State Security Service, 70% of all the people who fled were under the age of 35. They were mostly students or young families with one or two children, had higher education and were experts in their professions.[32] There was a great number of what we would today call 'white-collar workers': managers, engineers, scientists, and many previous leaders of the suppressed Prague Spring. In combination with the Austrian economic boom and demand for labour, it was quite easy for newcomers to find a job even though some did not speak the language at all. As Gustav Libal stated: *"My father went to an employment office and they sent him straight to work. Just imagine! He went to work to introduce himself for the first time and they kept him there. Today, if you say this story to someone who has been searching for work for two years.* [...] *We weren't a month in Austria and I had already attended school and my whole family [his father, mother, and brother, note of the author] had jobs."*[33]

29 Interview with Bruno Aigner. Vienna, 20 September 2013. Private Archive of the Author.

30 More information about signatories of Charter 77 in I. MEDEK, *Chartisté v Rakousku*, in: BASLER, pp 323–324.

31 When we analyse the reasons of their willingness to integrate, we have to look closer at the motives *why* they were fleeing the country — the so called 'push factors'. According to Vladimir Kusin the motives for emigration among the people who were deciding whether to leave or not consisted of three basic factors: 1) disgust over the forcible termination of the reformist experiment; 2) fear of the turn which future events in Czechoslovakia could take, 3) and the vision of material betterment for themselves and their children. Later he also adds that a great majority would probably fall into a category embracing all three motives. See KUSIN, p. 171.

32 VALEŠ, p. 57.

33 Interview with Gustav Líbal, Vienna, 22 September 2011. Private Archive of the Author.

In 1996 the Austrian Ethnic Group Centre published a 'hand-book' dedicated to Czechs in Austria and especially in Vienna.[34] It brought interesting (and for this paper crucial) information about the development of the Czech minority in the country between 1971 and 1991. Out of presented data, it is obvious that Czechs in general (all different groups within the Czech minority) had reached the socio-economic level of 'German-speaking' citizens. For example, the 55% of Czechs worked in service businesses and the civil service, which is almost the same percentage (56%) as for 'German-speaking citizens'.

The book also shows similar data in the case of education. In the year 1981, which falls within the surveyed period, 6% of Czechs graduated with a university degree and other 29.9% completed secondary education (compared to 5.4% German-speaking students with a university degree and 24.1% with secondary education). The author described the increase of scholarship among Czechs in Vienna as "*Bildungsexplosion*".[35] This data is also a good indicator of Czechs' language skills—most of them learned German as their second language and their children were entirely bilingual. If they had language difficulties, it was mostly with Czech, as parents wanted them to speak solely German at home. The minority also had (and still have)[36] their own primary and secondary school Komensky, which was extended to the Czech Bilingual Grammar School. But its position is quite unique because it reflected a complex situation in the minority. This why it is described separately in the last part of this paper.

The last criterion presented by Richard Alba and Victor Nee is 'spatial concentration' of an ethnic group. Because the Austrian state took a census every ten years in the second half of twentieth century, there exists detailed data on the place of living of those, whose "Umgangssprache"[37] was Czech. The highest concentration of Czech-speaking citizens was in tenth district, where it was 990 out of 8,110. The rest of the Czech-speaking population was located in all twenty-three Viennese districts. Compared to the beginning of twentieth century when there were thousands of Czechs living in tenth district (23,437), there were no Czech ghettoes after the Second World War.[38] To sum up all the findings I reverse and paraphrase Lucassen's conclusion: The Czechs and their immigration wave were not seen as unwanted and as a danger to the ethnic/national homogeneity of Austrian society. The successful integration process was characterised by high intermarriage rates, unlimited upward social mobility, and the low perseverance of transnational ties due to the Iron Curtain.[39] The more success-

34 K. SMOLLE (Ed.), Österreichische Volksgruppenhandbücher: Tschechen, Wien 1996.

35 Ibidem, p. 53.

36 The Czech Komensky School evolved into one of the most important Czech institutions in Vienna and in the whole of Austria. Today the Komensky association administers a Czech nursery school, an elementary and secondary school, and since 2000 even a bilingual grammar school, and provides education for more than 400 Czech students.

37 '*Umgangssprache*', according to Austrian authorities, was the language people used at home. It was one of the main criteria for defining nationality.

38 Archiv Forschungszentrum für historische Minderheiten, *Tschechen in Wien: Nach amtlichen Zählungen 1880–1981*, sg. 13/662.

39 L. LUCASSEN, *Poles and Turks in the German Ruhr Area: Similarities and Differences*, in: LUCASSEN — FELDMAN — OLTMER, pp. 27–46.

ful the integration of immigrants was, the more striking was the later division within the Czech minority.

GENERATIONAL DIVIDES IN THE CZECH MINORITY

Integration into 'the old Czech minority' was far more difficult and it is surprising that Czech refugees integrated more easily into the Austrian majority than into the existing Czech minority in Vienna. There were several reasons for that. First of all, the 'old' (*Alteingesessene*) Czech minority and its clubs and associations had been divided into two antagonised groups of approximately the same size since 1951. The stumbling block was the Communist regime in Prague established after the Communist takeover in 1948. As soon as Communists got into power, they started to shape Československý ústřední výbor (the Central Committee of Czechoslovaks), the umbrella organisation of Czechs (and some Slovaks) in Vienna. This led to many disputes among its members and eventually it paralysed the whole organization. The Communists founded their own organisation: *Sdružení Čechů a Slováků v Rakousku* (the Union of Czechs and Slovaks in Austria) in 1949, which was supposed to gather all Czechs and Slovaks with a 'positive attitude' towards the new regime. The Union, founded by some 50 people, soon evolved into one of the biggest minority organisations with almost 5,000 members in different Austrian cities in 1953.[40] The reason for such growth was cooperation with Czechoslovakia. It offered many benefits to its members, including getting a visa, the possibility of regular visits for their family members, and also financial support for the activities of their clubs. There were clubs such as *Klub československých turistů* (the Club of Czechoslovaks Tourists), the theatre club *Vlastenecká omladina* (Patriotic Youth) and even Školský spolek Komenský (the Komensky Czech School Association), which ensured that all Czech schools and Czech education in Austria as a whole were financially and materially supported by Communist Prague. From its very beginning, the Union was under the influence of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia as well as the Communist Party of Austria.

The other organization, the Minority Council of Czechs and Slovaks in Austria, was founded in 1951 and was strictly anti-Communist. It refused to maintain any relationship with Communist Czechoslovakia and it cut all its previous connections off. It had gathered members of non-Communist parties (Socialist, National Socialist, Democrats), refugees who fled after the Prague Coup in 1948 and many of the so-called autochthon Czechs living in Vienna since the nineteenth century. The Minority Council linked together clubs such as České srdce (the Czech Heart), *Máj — Barák* (the Association May — House), the *Sokol* Regional Organisation of Austria and many others. Since the beginning of the 1950s, two antagonised organizations existed, which had their own sport clubs, drama clubs, and newspapers. The antagonism was so strong that it survived even the fall of the Iron Curtain.[41] Moreover, there was also

40 It had union branches in Vienna, Linz, Graz, Wiener Neustadt and Berndorf. For more about the Union of Czechs and Slovaks in Austria, see VALEŠ, p. 115.

41 See H. TICHY, *Česká národnostní menšina*, in: BASLER, pp. 275–278.

a third group of Czechs and Slovaks who had no desire to join any of the two. According to Vlasta Valeš it was almost one third of the Czech minority.[42]

That situation had lasted until 21 August 1968. Suddenly there were thousands of Czech and Slovak refugees in the streets of Vienna and other Austrian towns. Both Czech minority groups did their best to ease the newcomers in their first days in the new country. They also hoped to integrate them into their minority structures, which would have been a welcome reinforcement for aging Czech minority clubs and associations. But very soon the first conflicts appeared between them and the newcomers, who had lived all their lives in a totalitarian state which controlled every aspect of the public sector and demanded artificial loyalty from its citizens. That was one of the reasons why they had no desire to participate in minority life in the same way the old generation did. Naturally they avoided any cooperation with the Communist Union of Czechs and Slovaks in Austria, whose leadership followed an official Czechoslovak policy which was under control of pro-Soviet forces. More and more, the rhetoric of the Union's newspaper, *Svobodné menšinové listy*, resembled the 'normalized' press in Czechoslovakia and it evoked the detested system the refugees had escaped from.

But it was surprising the newcomers also did not integrate into the 'democratic' Czech minority. This can partly be attributed to a generational gap. The older generation (its anti-Communist wing) held the traditions of the First Czechoslovak Republic and tried to follow ideals of its first president — the founder of the state Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. The interwar period was, and is still seen by many Czechs, as a golden age of the modern Czech nation. They celebrated Masaryk's birthday, marched as '*Sokols*' in parades and danced at Czech balls. All of this was unfamiliar to the newcomers, who were mostly born after the Second World War, and who could not identify themselves with these practices. They tried to start a new life and integrate into Austrian society as soon as possible. As the narrator Milan Ráček noted: *"Personally, the clubs were foreign for me. Yes, the clubs such as the Czech Heart or so. The traditional clubs would rehearse some comic opera and it was quite nationalistic and that was something that just didn't speak to me."*[43]

On the contrary, members of the old Czech minority could not understand this point of view and regarded the newcomer's strategy as a lack of national consciousness caused by the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia. They saw the refugees as selfish materialists who cared only for themselves. The word 'emigrant' became pejorative and almost a synonym for a Communist, a gold-digger or even a traitor. Some incidents, when the help of some members of the old minority was misused by refugees, only supported this argument.

This attitude of the old minority led the newcomers to establish their own clubs and associations. The main and the most influential one became the Cultural Club of Czechs and Slovaks in Austria, founded and led by the Czech social democrat Přemysl Janýr. Mostly post-1968 refugees from Czechoslovakia gathered there and it was oriented towards social rather than national activities. Other clubs of the new immi-

42 VALEŠ, p. 120.

43 Interview with Milan Racek, Sitzendorf/Schmida, 14 September. 2011. Private Archive of the Author.

gration wave were *Jirásek — knihovní spolek ve Vídni* (the Jirásek Library Association in Vienna) and *Nová vlast* (New Homeland). Both of them were exceptional because they were run by members of the old minority as wells as newcomers. Since the beginning of 70s, there were 3 different groups within the Czech minority. Jana Starek, an expert on Czech exile in Austria, has diplomatically summed up the situation as follows: *"In general, the relationship between clubs of the old Czech minority and clubs of newcomers since the late 60s could be labelled as an encounter of contradictory political and life opinions."*[44]

THE SECOND GENERATION

This generational divide between the old and new Czech minority in Austria, which created three separate groups and caused a lot of bitterness among them, does not hold for the second generation of newcomers. Their sons and daughters who were born in Austria or even the ones, who fled with their parents in late 1960s as little children, today feel not only to be a part of Austrian society, but actually proudly say: *"I am an Austrian!"*[45] The first step was made by their parents. After their arrival they rather sent their children to Austrian elementary schools that to the Czech one. There were two reasons for this behaviour: they wanted their children to be able to speak fluent German, and the Czech Komensky School was under the influence of the Union and was supported financially as well as materially from Czechoslovakia. The school was actually forbidden from accepting children of refugees in the late 1960s. Many narrators told me they sent their children to an Austrian school because they understood how important it was for their offspring to obtain a second language, even though it was quite difficult for them at the beginning: *"Well, I came home and I was really pissed off. I took my brother's tape recorder and started to read out loud and then started listening to myself. Simply, I learned to listen to myself so then I would correct what I was saying. So I learned that and, in fact, I don't have any accent. Nobody would recognise that* [...] *well, it was tough."*[46]

The Czech accent was actually the only thing that distinguished them from other Austrian pupils. In Jeffry C. Anderson's terms, they didn't have to purify themselves in the sense of depriving themselves of their 'polluted primordial qualities' (such as the colour of their skin) in the process of assimilation.[47] Once they lost the accent, then nobody recognised they had a different origin. Naturally, they also made new friends in schools and many of these friendships have lasted for years. In comparison with their parents they have reached an even higher position in society and have become an example of successful integration thanks to their education combined with their motivation. This is what their parents wanted, to integrate them into society but at

44 STAREK, *Česká menšina*, p. 313.

45 This was one of the findings of the questionnaire survey carried out in the Czech Grammar School Komensky.

46 An Interview with Zuzana Brejchová, Vienna, 9 September 2011. Private Archive of the Author.

47 ALEXANDER, p. 243.

the same time to teach them the Czech language. In fact, language was one of the most important categories through which Czech refugees identified their Czechness, and they endeavoured to preserve it.

"Those days we had a school just next to our block of flats, some Volksschule, an elementary one. So my kids could just pop in and out and I didn't have to worry. Moreover, I also wanted them to be fully integrated, to have friends at school and in our block of flats and in the neighbourhood and to speak German with them. It was easily available in this way."[48]

In many cases it worked well and children became bilingual. On the other hand, it happened, especially when a Czech married an Austrian, that the parents spoke German at home and their children didn't learn the language. These cases were considered by the old Czech minority as an example of apostasy so typical for the refugees — emigrants.

CZECH 'IDENTITY' ABROAD

The presented data brings us closer to answering the initial question this paper set out to examine: was the successful integration of Czech refugees—and the data shows it was relatively successful—due to a lack of national pride or national feelings? The answer depends on how we imagine national feelings, which meant different things for different parts of the Czech minority. For members of the old Czech minority who remembered the era of President Masaryk, the category of the nation was similar to the ideals of Masaryk's First Czechoslovak Republic. Czechs, according to this view, were a nation with long democratic tradition and the "First Republic" as a parliamentary democracy embodied these ideals. This part of the Czech minority fully identified with these traditions and for them 'to be a nationally conscious Czech' meant to keep them — to hold Czech balls, to march in the streets of Vienna in national and *Sokol* costumes, celebrate Masaryk's birthday, etc. In Brubaker's words they identified themselves with a state which was long gone for refugees after 1968 who were a post-war generation and this notion of the Czechoslovak state lived only in memories of their parents.

The new refugees experienced a completely different Czechoslovak state under the Communist regime. Every part of public life was controlled by the state and its Security Service. Participation at meetings and parades was compulsory for most members of society. Soon after the beginning of normalisation in 1969, the regime lost its legitimacy in the eyes of many Czechs and Slovaks and the new government and state authorities in general had become for many of its citizens just Soviet-led puppets. Identification with such a state was difficult, even for some (reformed) Communists.[49] Many people lost interest in public affairs out of fear or frustration and

48 Archiv Forschungszentrum für historische Minderheiten Wien. Matěj Kundračik, *Interview with Dáša Vokatá*, TschechInnen und SlowakInnen in Wien — Identitätskonstruktionen und Migrationserfahrungen, Vienna, 20 January 2009.

49 One of them was a writer P. KOHOUT, *Kde je zakopán pes*, Praha 2002 describes not only the situation in Czechoslovakia in 60's and a process of Prague spring but also omnipresence and absolute power of Security Service after the Soviet invasion which finally forced the author to leave the country.

retired into privacy.[50] After the Soviet invasion it was clear that "Socialism with a human face" could not been realised without approval from Moscow. That is why the new immigrant wave in Vienna after 1968 could hardly identify with either the old Czech minority following the traditions of the First Republic, or with the pro-regime group led by Communists. But it did not mean they 'lost their Czech identity'. During many interviews I heard the narrators claim they had always felt to be Czechs, they identified themselves with other refugees—a group of people who spoke the same language and had the same experience and history. This is the reason why newcomers founded their own clubs and associations. They wanted to be part not only of the Austrian majority but also of a group which bore the same characteristic. This was a key for their self-understanding as 'Czechs'. It was not necessary to march in the streets. As Ladislav Holý wrote: *"Czechness has not needed to be openly asserted."*[51]

CONCLUSION

This paper presents some of the problems linked to the Czech minority in Austria. It described how well the Czech refugees, who fled Czechoslovakia after the Soviet invasion in 1968, integrated into Austrian society and what influenced their self-understanding. The life stories of the narrators outlined motives for leaving the country and showed the reasons for their smooth integration into Austrian majority. Today, former refugees and their children feel like Austrian citizens. Vienna has become their new home. Of course, there were troubles as well. The relative smoothness of their integration was in striking opposition to complicated relations between the refugees and the old Czech minority, which manifested through a generational gap deep enough to survive even the fall of the Iron Curtain. After the settlement of the newcomers, the minority in Vienna had been divided into three antagonistic groups for many years and this situation changed only after the Velvet Revolution. Today, when borders are open and their former homeland is a member of EU, it is much easier for Czechs in Austria to associate with the country which they once called their motherland. Even the second generation of refugees that identify fully with the Austrian nation have gradually discovered the country of their parents.

CZECH REFUGEES IN AUSTRIA 1968–1985
ABSTRACT
After the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, which ended up Prague spring in August 1968, thousands of Czech (and Slovak) citizens went into exile. Out of estimated 162,000 people, who came to Austria within the next few weeks, some 12,000 refugees decided to stay there. The majority of them chose Vienna to be their new home. My paper deals with this group of Czech refugees and analyses a process of their integration into Austrian majority and how the process, which they had to undergo, changed their national identity. In the paper, which is based on various archive materials and my two field researches among Czechs in Vienna, I also deal with different concepts of national

50 See a chapter *Nation against State*, in: L. HOLÝ, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 16–55.

51 Ibidem, p. 279.

identity and integration. I applied Cooper and Brubaker's concepts of 'identification' and 'self-understanding' to analyse deeper the various contexts of Czech refugees' behaviour and to answer a research question, why it was more difficult for Czech refugees to integrate into existing Czech minority associations in Austria than into Austrian majority itself.

KEYWORDS
The Prague Spring; Charter 77; Czech Exile in Austria; the Czech Minority in Vienna; Integration; National Identity; Oral History; Identification; Self-understanding; Incorporation

Ondřej Haváč | Department of History, Faculty of Philosophy and Arts, Masaryk University, Arna Nováka 1, 602 00 Brno, Czech Republic, havac@mail.muni.cz