

VIVA HK MUN Background Guide

Prague Spring



HISTORICAL SITUATION

Antonio Novotny/ The Beginning

Antonio Novotny, a communist leader, was extremely unpopular within the country. There were mass amounts of backlash against his policies, including censoring the press and depriving people of personal freedoms. This caused the Czech economy to become quite volatile, given that citizens were dissatisfied by USSR's increasing economic intervention to bolster their influence. Even farmers had to follow the Soviet Union's guidance on what to produce, engendering widespread protests.

Action Plan

Alexander Dubcek, who replaced Antonio Novotny, came up with an Action plan, aimed to drastically reduce state control and reinforce freedom of speech. These successive actions elevated Soviet suspicion, as Dubcek allowed the formation of non-communist political parties and also welcomed **Marshal Tito**, president of Yugoslavia, to Prague, after saying that Czechoslovakia would remain in the Warsaw Pact. (Yugoslavia has been a communist country since WW2, but is not a part of the Warsaw Pact) This heightened concerns amongst the general public.



A map depicting the location of Czechoslovakia and Cold War political alignment

The Soviet Crackdown

In light of fears that Czechoslovakia was escaping Soviet influence, Brezhnev, the Soviet leader, announced that nations of Eastern Europe would not be able to reject communism. To reinforce his position, a staggering force of **500,000 troops from Warsaw Pact countries** was sent into Czechoslovakia. Knowing that forceful dissent could end up in a bloodbath, the Czechs handed flowers to the soldiers to protest peacefully. Dubcek was then arrested and sent off to Moscow, who was promptly replaced with a pro-Soviet leader.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Event
March 5, 1953	Joseph Stalin , the leader of the Soviet Union died after his gradual deterioration of health, culminating in a fatal stroke. The USSR abandoned Stalinism under Nikita Krushchev , the new First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union .
1950 -1960	The process of destalinization began in Czechoslovakia after the death of Stalin, under President Novotny , a hardline communist with USSR support. His policies were characterized by strict regulations, emphasis on heavy industry, censorship of the press, crackdown on dissenters and a lack of personal freedom.
1965	Following an economic recession and growing discontent, Novotny introduced several liberal reforms, such as decentration - the increased freedoms for companies and businesses to decide on prices and wages, something which was formerly controlled by the government.
1967	Demonstrations against Novotny began to emerge, supported by members of the Party itself, including Alexander Dubcek . The Soviet Union refused to offer aid in quelling these demonstrations.
January 5, 1968	Novotny is replaced by Dubcek as the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia . Novotny later resigned from the Central Committee in March, which ended his influence in Czechoslovakian politics.
April 1968	Dubcek announced a programme of ' socialism with a human face ', and implemented a series of sweeping liberal reforms in his 'Action Programme'. These included abolition of censorship, emphasizing freedom of speech, freedom of movement, rehabilitation of political dissidents and economic emphasis on consumer goods as opposed to heavy industry.
March 23, 1968	The Warsaw Five (USSR, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria and East Germany) met in Dresden to question Czechoslovakia over Dubcek's reforms, which were suggested to be anti-soviet, especially since the abolition of censorship allowed the press to criticize the regime, instead of disseminating propaganda.
July 29, 1968	Bilateral talks were held between Soviet and Czechoslovakian representatives. Dubcek defended his reforms, while reaffirming commitment to the Warsaw pact.
August 20, 1968	Wary of Czechoslovakia breaking free of Soviet influence, Leonid Brezhnev , the General Secretary of the Communist Party sent 500,000 troops from the USSR, Bulgaria, Poland and Hungary to invade Czechoslovakia on the night of August 20, which was justified by an alleged request sent by Czechoslovakian officials for immediate assistance with armed forces .

August 21, 1968	Czechoslovakia had become occupied by the Soviet forces, as the government had failed to make any military preparations in spite of the threat of invasion. Its people resorted to passive resistance, including giving incorrect directions to soldiers and standing in front of tanks. Over 70 civilians were killed, and 250 were wounded. Dubeck was arrested, but was allowed to remain in office as long as he abandoned his reforms.
April 1969	Eventually, Dubeck was replaced by the pro-Soviet Gustav Husack , who repealed Dubeck's reforms in a period of 'normalization'. This included the purging of liberal party members, re-centralizing the economy and reinstating censorship of the press.

MAJOR CLASHES

An initial clash would be the **immediate aftermath of the situation**. Despite Czechoslovakia being *de jure* an independent state, it was effectively a satellite state, under immense amounts of Soviet influence, demonstrated when it became occupied by Soviet forces in 1968 after large amounts of bloodshed. Increasingly, citizens also became very defiant of government authority, which could have contributed to the escalating violence of the Prague Spring

Furthermore, the clash regarding the **long-term impacts of the situation** is also quite controversial. For instance, following the devastating incident, the nation returned to its state of authoritarianism, with all mentions of the Spring removed from public discourse. Even quite recently, the Czech Republic's President (**Milos Zeman**) refused to attend any ceremony in remembrance of the Prague Spring, refusing to give speeches regarding the humanitarian toll as well.

This could be due to geopolitical interest: despite its membership in the European Union, some have perceived it to be **lagging behind Western European counterparts in terms of GDP per capita and other indexes**. With the EU becoming increasingly volatile in the wake of incidents such as Brexit, the Republic may want to enhance relations with Russia in order to bolster the supply of its natural resource, at the possible expense of self-censorship.

A final clash would be the **efficacy of humanitarian aid and oversight**. While some welcomed Western powers (such as the NATO bloc) to attempt to intervene, such as by providing aid and increasing border patrols near the '**Iron Curtain**', others worried that this would simply increase tensions to a point of no return, potentially provoking both powers and disparagingly increase the possibility of nuclear warfare.

KEY PARTIES

Stakeholder(s)	Involvement in the issue
Czechoslovakia	Saddled between East Germany, Hungary, Poland and Romania, Czechoslovakia was a European country that was part of the Soviet Bloc during the 1940s. The Czech people disliked the restrictive Communist system and attempted to

	exert control over their own lives by rebranding Communism as 'Socialism with a human face'. This involves maintaining a socialist government while guaranteeing a better delivery of goods, services and freedoms to the Czech people. However, these reforms placed them at conflict with the rest of the Warsaw Pact countries, namely the Soviet Union, East Germany, Poland, and Hungary.
Soviet Union	The Soviet Union worried that Czechoslovakia was slipping from their grasp, so their Soviet leader, Leonid Brezhnev, declared that they will not allow the countries of Eastern Europe to reject communism 'even if it meant a third World War'. They later got socialist countries to sign a declaration affirming unshakable fidelity to Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism. However, Czechoslovakia still continued with their reforms, so the Soviets began to consider a military alternative - invasion.
Other Warsaw Pact Countries: Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary, East Germany, Romania, Albania	Several delegations from the Warsaw Pact - Poland, East Germany, and Hungary - expressed their concern at the recent reforms in Czechoslovakia. They later took part in the invasion of Czechoslovakia. However, other Warsaw Pact countries, such as Albania and Romania, did not take part in the invasion. The Socialist Republic of Romania was already a staunch opponent of Soviet influence and declared itself on Dubček's side. Meanwhile, Albania was already feuding with Moscow over suggestions that Albania should focus on agriculture to the detriment of industrial development, and so was expelled in 1962, before the Prague Spring.

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