

ČESKO VERSUS CZECHY? ON THE GEOGRAPHIC NAME OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Leoš Jeleček

*Department of Social Geography and Regional Development, Faculty of Science,
Charles University, Praha, Czech Republic*

Abstract: This article provides a general overview of discussions and problems concerning using of official geographic (one-word) name of the Czech Republic, which is Czechia (Česko in Czech). This standardised name is ignored not only by some Czech politicians and media, but also by some geographers. It resulted in using of the fully incorrect term Čechy (Bohemia) as synonym to Czech Republic in some cases. The linguistic, historic and geographic reasons why the name Czechia was chosen and activities of Czech Geographic Society in this question are described. To Polish geography using the term Czechy, as a synonym to Czech Republic the name Bohemia (Čechy) for western part of Czechia is recommended.

Key words: Czech Republic, Czechia, Czechy, geographic names.

Each branch of science forms and uses own precise and usually unambiguously defined terms and notions, without which it cannot exist and develop. In the case of geography, these terms include geographic names of different geographical objects, in our case states. Geographic names of states are used by geography for their conciseness and truthfulness both on maps and in written papers where their practical character is of advantage mainly in tables. We could expect that the Czech geographers will use for the Czech Republic, at least in their written works, also its official geographic name Česko (Czechia), and, when writing in foreign languages, its appropriate translations (see later). How else can using of geographic name of a new state be put through and currently used in both Czech and foreign languages? Up to recently, it was only rarely so. Even in tables, where in case of other states their geographical names are exclusively used, the geographers constantly used political name Česká republika (Czech Republic), or its abbreviation ČR, sometimes they took recourse to historical term české země (Czech lands), sometimes written with majuscule "Č".

Each state has, besides its official political name, also an official shortened geographic name, usually consisting of one word. Out of the 188 states of the world, the geographic names of only 25 of them are composed of two words. They are mainly African states and insular states of the Caribbean and Pacific region. Among the developed countries, they include only United States (which are nevertheless both in our countries and in the U.S.A. called America), Great Britain or United Kingdom, New Zealand and the Republic of South Africa. A list of political and geographic names of the states of the world is contained in a special document "Jména států a jejich územních částí - Names of States and their Territorial Parts" the last edition of which was published by the Czech Land Survey and Cadastral Bureau in 1993.

This publication writes in its introduction that its purpose is to "offer to large public professionally defined standardized names of states and their territorial parts. The standardized geographic names must correspond to attitudes of individual states to designation of their own state and of its territorial parts, to the positions of the Czech Republic's foreign policy, to the rules of Czech orthography and to principles for formation of geographic names elaborated by the Terminological Commission at the Czech Land Survey and Cadastral Bureau..".

It states in the same time that the list "was elaborated and modified according to the Resolution No 4 of the 1st UN Conference on standardization of geographic terms (Geneva 1967) and to the Resolution No 2 of the 11th UN Conference on standardization of geographic terminology (Athens 1977). Using of standardized names of states and their territorial parts is recommended to all users of geographic names." (Seznam 1993)

In the spring 1993, the above-mentioned Bureau and its Terminological Commission introduced into the list, in agreement with the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs and after a thorough linguistic expertise, the one-word geographical name of the Czech Republic "Česko" with its variants Czechia (in English), Tchérie (in French), Chequia (in Spanish), Tschechien (in German) and Chekhia (in Russian). It was necessary to hurry up, because the world asked what would be the shortened name of the new state. Already on the 3rd of January 1993 the then Czech foreign minister Josef Zieniec said to the leading American journal New York Herald Tribune that the English name of the new state would be Czech lands or more probably Czechia.

Why the name Česko has been selected? It is an organic name formed according to all linguistic rules where the name of the majority population inhabiting the territory of the given state (that in the past often changed) is used. Alike as in the case of the names Německo (Germany), Polsko (Poland), Slovensko (Slovakia), Rusko (Russia), Maďarsko (Hungary), Rakousko (Austria), etc., the Czech language always derives these geographic names from the name of majority nation and its adjective (Slovák - slovenský - Slovensko, Polák - polský - Polsko, Němec - německý - Německo, Rakušan - rakouský - Rakousko, et.), similarly in the case of the Czech Republic Čech - český - Česko. In addition, the form of the word is not new. It is a term known as soon as in the end of the 18th century, but till the federalization of Czechoslovakia in 1968, that is until the formation of the Czech Republic, it was not almost necessary. It is a term codified even by the Dictionary of Literary Czech Language (Slovník spisovné češtiny). It is

suitable for all historical periods and useful in all spoken and written presentations of non-formal character. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs already in February 1993 informed about it all Czech foreign missions and charged them to recommend in their countries the above-mentioned versions of the name Česko.

However, it is naturally not possible either to impose to another state or to the Czech citizens to use the new uncommon word, here the one-word name of his or her new state, neither to direct its using. This is only possible in the case of political name stipulated by constitution. One must become used to the abbreviated name. Moreover, he or she can become used only when he or she hears it and reads it, when it is used by politicians and at school. At schools, it should be mainly in the lessons of geography, when the pupil finds it in textbooks and on maps. It is good that the term Česko has been codified in the Dictionary of Literate Czech Language. Its German form Tschechien figures, as abbreviated version of the name Tschechische Republik, in the last edition of the normative Dudendeutsch Worterbuch Dictionary, that it can be found in dictionaries of literary language of other nations, including the Irish.

Because of the generally lax attitude of politicians, media, teachers and geographers, the development after 1993 lead to the fact that media used more and more the name Čechy (Bohemia) as synonym of the political name Česká republika (Czech Republic), which is an absolute political, geographical and historical nonsense (see Jeleček, Rubín 1998). This situation provoked in 1997 in Brno foundation of the "Civil Initiative Czechia", the aim of which was to promote the name Česko. In that period, the name Česká republika (Czech Republic) or its abbreviation ČR, were frequently used.

When the struggle of linguists in favour of using the term Česko had been practically lost, the community of Czech geographers, historians, other specialists and cultural people came to help. On the 29th of January 1998, the Czech Geographic Society organised a scientific meeting in the main building of the Faculty of Science, Charles University, and invited all leading Czech media. The "Stanovisko geografů, jazykovědců, historiků a pracovníků dalších vědních oborů k otázce jednoslovného geografického názvu pro Českou republiku" - The attitude of geographers, linguists, historians and scientists of other branches to the problem of the official one-world geographic name of the Czech Republic (further Stanovisko) summing up all major scientific and other arguments for using the name Česko was presented at this occasion.

The meeting resulted in the final version of the Stanovisko that was sent, together with other supporting materials, including the appropriate page of the above-mentioned list of names of states, to all the principal representatives of the state, including the president Václav Havel, ministries, the Czech Olympic Committee, principal media, etc. More information about the meeting sees in Chromý 1998. A summary of this Stanovisko was published, among others, in the revue *Mosty* of the 7th of April 1998.

The meeting was medially followed, one of its organizers appeared on television, several discussions in radio followed, a more detailed information was brought by several newspapers, mainly *Lidové noviny*, *MF Dnes* and *Hospodářské noviny*. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs again sent the Stanovisko to Czech diplomatic missions with instruction to recommend using of the appropriate forms of the term Česko to authorities

of the state they worked in. But passion broke out - some personalities of the Czech culture qualified the propagators of the name Česko as linguistic and cultural barbarians and introduced into the discussion improper aspects of attractiveness or unattractiveness of the scientific term. Readers' letters have been a tribune of sometimes very passionate discussion. Propositions of "nicer" one-word names have poured: the famous traveller Miroslav Zikmund even proposed, quite seriously, an apparently "much nicer" name Čechrava, other proposed Českozemsko, Čemsko, Čechie.

The name Českomoravsko was also frequently proposed. Then the political name of our state should be Českomoravská republika (Czechmoravian Republic). But the names of states are not composed or derived from the names of its parts. Would it be nice if Germany for instance would be called Bavsachshessbaden? In the same logic of those calling the Czech Republic Čechy (Bohemia), Germany should be called for instance Bavaria or Saxony. Some Czechs living in Moravia - Moravians (the census of 1991 having in fact codified the Moravian and Silesian nationalities) have objected that Moravia is absent in the term Česko. However, they do not mind that Moravia is also absent in the political name the Czech Republic.

Many Czech citizens only do not like the name Česko. No wonder, the term is unfamiliar and rare, because they could not get used to it as they could neither hear nor read it. The term Česko was sporadically used after 1968 after federalization of Czechoslovakia and after formation of the Czech (Socialist) Republic. The Czech politicians of the so-called normalization period exclusively used the name Czech Socialist Republic. The one-word Česko was probably considered as too apolitical. After all, after formation of Czechoslovakia in 1918, its name was at the beginning written Česko-Slovensko (Czecho-Slovakia) and the term Czechoslovakia was criticized even by Karel Čapek (Čižmárová 1999).

Older persons are somehow influenced by sentiments regretting disintegration of the common state. The term Česko nostalgically remembers them Czechoslovakia, but also Czecho-Slovakia from the period after Munich. They did not need Česko, they were satisfied with the historic term České země (Czech lands). It is composed of two words, but it is equally universal as the term Česko. It is not possible to say, ". at the beginning of the 15th century, the Hussite revolution broke out in the Czech Republic". This one could break out only in Czech lands or in Czechia. The book called "History of France" can treat the whole historic period, the book called "History of the Czech Republic" only the history of Czechia (Czech lands) since 1968. This fact as well shows the need of an abbreviated one-word name of the state, which would be universal in time and in space.

The by many citizens and journalists wrongly used name Čechy (Bohemia) is, according to the above mentioned Stanovisko (1998) "quite erroneous from several serious reasons:

1. historically, geographically and linguistically it does not correspond to the term Czech Republic;
2. it is a manifestation of a rude tactlessness toward the inhabitants of Moravia and Silesia ("Brno is the second most important town in Bohemia!");

3. it manifests a deep ignorance of history of one's own nation and state and a broken conscience of historical continuity;
4. it does not term a sovereign subject of international law (for that reasons, the sentence "Poland, Bohemia and Hungary enter the NATO" is absurd, imprecise and legally not binding);
5. it casts doubt upon the integrity of our state (the territory of Čechy, in English and Latin Bohemia, in French Boheme, in German Böhmen, is not identical to the whole territory of the Czech Republic);
6. it breaks the UN terminological norms "which might lead to very undesirable political effects."

However, the problem is not trifling. It is a problem with deep cultural, political and geopolitical connections and consequences. The term Česko clearly expresses the national Czech character of our state, Czech Republic. The world does not care much whether we are republic or kingdom. We must thus put the question, if our politicians avoiding up to now to use the term Česko do not put it, whether we really are a mature and self-conscious state when we even do not know what is our "familiar" name. The non-existence of an abbreviated name for the territory of Czech people in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia can be thus understood as an expression of inferiority of our national identity.

If it evidently does not mind to some of our politicians and to many journalists, it would at least strongly mind to Czech geographers, for whom using standardized geographical terms should be a question of expertness and not of prettiness or of a sort of nationalism, would it be only regional. For that reason as well, the 19th Congress of the Czech Geographical Society in 1998 recommended to use the term Česko especially in textbooks and everywhere where it is suitable.

The word Čechy (Bohemia) is wonderful, melodious and touching for everybody, but it simply cannot be used as synonym of the Czech Republic. Bohemia is only a historic territory, historic land (land system was abolished in 1948), the western part of the Czech Republic, of Czechia, the eastern part of which is formed by historic territories, historic lands of Moravia and Czech Silesia. The name Česko thus expresses the territorial unity of the Czech State. Experience from modern history (Yugoslavia, Russia) shows that in the present world, our several hundred years old land system could represent certain risks. A negative attitude to its renewal in discussions about the so-called higher territorial administrative units can be thus considered as provident.

The Slovak media started in 1993 to use mostly the term Česko. For Czech enemies of this name it was a good argument because they affirmed that by this name Slovaks would like to offend us in the same way Hitler had by using the name Tchechei. However, it is evident, that the term Česko has not been becoming familiar among the Slovak population. So, people living along the frontier with Czechia (Moravia) "go to drink beer "do Čiech" (to Bohemia in Slovak). On the reverse side of the ticket of the Tatra Electric Railway, we read we can buy tickets not only to Hungary, Austria and Poland, but also "do Čiech" (to Bohemia in Slovak). Nevertheless, to come to Bohemia, one must cross Moravia! Dear friends do not mind to "offend" us and whenever you feel

in your speech the contextual unfitness of the term Czech Republic, use without hesitation the term Česko.

More complicated is the problem of Polish geographic term for the Czech Republic which sounds Czechy. It is a new term of the 1990's, because it cannot be found in any Polish dictionary or encyclopaedia of the 19th or 20th centuries (Malicki 1998). In the case of European countries, the Polish forms in a similar way the names of Germany (Niemcy), Italy (Włochy) and Hungary (Węgry). It is not possible to instruct another nations what geographical name to use for our state. The Polish geographers could nevertheless think about opening discussion with Polish linguists whether not to form the abbreviated name of the Czech Republic similarly as it is the case of the majority of European states: Grecja, Bulgaria, Francja, Dania, etc., and thus also Czechia.

I am not a linguist, but another way seems to me more negotiable. Because of an already quite familiar term Czechy as synonym for the Czech Republic, the Polish could use for naming of Bohemia itself (Čechy) a widely known and in other languages used term Bohemia. I think geographers above all are competent to create geographic names that, in case of their wide acceptance by the society in linguistic practice, are then codified in dictionaries of the given language.

At the end a few words to us - geographers. According to Stanovisko (1998), "a state not having beside its full official name also its one-word variant appears to be somehow official, artificial, lacking its evidence, intimacy and generally perceived cohesion. Using the political name of one state together with geographic names of the other ones is unsuitable, stylistically awkward, affected and non diplomatic... Generally, using of the one-word geographic name unites, strengthens and consolidates states, and that independently on their social and state system". The geographic name of a state is simply more durable, more permanent, is does not change with the change of the state system or regime - and this is its great political, cultural and national significance, not to mention its practical value in science, especially in geography and history.

References

- Čížmárová, L. (1999): K peripetiím vývoje názvů našeho státu a postojů k nim od roku 1918 (To the problems regarding development of names of Czech state and attitudes to them since 1918). In: Naše řeč, 82, No. 1, pp. 1-15.
- Chromý, P. (1998): Čechy, Čechrava, Česko. In: Geografické rozhledy, 7, 1997/98, no. 4, pp. 98-99.
- Jeleček, L. - Rubín, J. (1998): Čechy jako synonymum pojmů Česká republika, Česko, české země... (Bohemia as synonym of names Czech Republic, Czechia, Czech lands...). In: Geografické rozhledy, 7, 1997/98, no. 4, pp. 100-102.
- Jména států a jejich územních částí. Names of States and their Territorial Parts. Český úřad zeměměřický a katastrální, Praha 1993, 113 p. + map. appendices. (3. přepracované vydání, zpracovali P. Boháč, J. Kolář)
- Malicki, J. (1998): Diskusja o nazwie państwa czeskiego (Discussion about the name of the Czech state). In: Poradnik językowy. Zeszyt 1-2, s. 66-71.

Stanovisko geografů, jazykovědců, historiků a pracovníků dalších vědních oborů k otázce oficiálního jednoslovného geografického názvu pro Českou republiku. (The attitude of geographers, linguists, historians and scientists of other branches to the problem of the official one-world geographic name of the Czech Republic). In: Geografické rozhledy, 7, 1997/98, č. 4, s. 99-100.

Resume

Česko versus Čechy? Ke geografickému názvu České republiky

Česká republika je snad jediným státem světa, který má sice normativně ustanovený jednoslovný geografický název, jímž je Česko, avšak jeho přední politici a žel i mnozí geografové, tím pak média a mnozí občané jej nepoužívají.

Pojem Česko není proto dosud vžitý ani v hovorové češtině, z cizojazyčných mutací zejména jeho anglická forma, Czechia, i zde díky našim diplomatickým službám i geografům. Přitom je od roku 1993 uveden např. ve zvláštním dokumentu "Jména států a jejich územních částí - Names of States and their Territorial Parts", který naposledy vydal Český úřad zeměměřický a katastrální v roce 1993. Jako jednoslovné synonymum České republiky je tu uveden název "Česko" s cizojazyčnými variantami Czechia (angl.), Tchèque (franc.), Chequia (špaň.), Tschechien (něm.) a Čechija (rus.).

Článek proto pojednává o problematice prosazování užívání oficiálního jednoslovného geografického názvu Česko nejen v běžné mluvě politiků, médií a občanů českého státu, nýbrž i samotných geografů v textech a výstupech odborných. Geografický název státu je pojmem odborným. Každý vědní obor se snaží mít přesně definované pojmy, aby bylo vůbec možná diskuse v daném oboru i bádání samotné. Je proto s podivem, že někteří geografové v případě geografického pojmu jako je Česko argumentují aspekty libivosti apod., které v odborné terminologii nemají místo. Článek podává jeho lingvistické, historické (první doložený výskyt je z konce 18. století) a geografické zdůvodnění. Je to název ústrojný, vytvořený podle všech jazykovědných pravidel, kde základem je název většinového národa, který obývá území daného státu: Čech - český - Česko, Slovák - slovenský - Slovensko, nebo Polák - polský - Polsko apod. Informuje i o aktivitách České geografické společnosti při prosazování tohoto názvu, vyvolaných v r. 1998 narůstajícím užíváním nesprávného synonyma pro Českou republiku, kterým se postupně stávalo slovo Čechy.

Článek obsahuje hlavní závěry "Stanoviska geografů, jazykovědců, historiků a pracovníků dalších vědních oborů k otázce oficiálního jednoslovného geografického názvu pro Českou republiku", přijatého na zasedání ČGS v Praze na Albertově dne 29. 1. 1998, které bylo zasláno všem významným politickým představitelům ČR a hlavním médiím. Od té doby nastal pozitivní obrat a název Česko se stále více užívá. Z cizojazyčných mutací je nejvíce vžitá německá Tschechien. V případě polského jazyka, kde je jím pojem "Czechy", článek doporučuje používat v polštině pro vlastní Čechy název Bohemia. U slovenštiny je Česko dosti používáno médií, veřejností však málo, zde převládají "Čechy" (více viz Jeleček, L.: Zápas o Česko. Diskusia o jednoslovnom názve Českej republiky. Slovo č. 37, Bratislava 1999, s. 9).