

Eva Taterova
Mendel University in Brno

Jews under Communism: The Case Study of Czechoslovakia 1956-1967

Czechoslovak Jews were one of the reasons why Czechoslovak diplomacy paid significant attention to geographically remote and, after 1948, economically expanding Israel in comparison to most other non-European countries. The late 1940s demonstrates a period of extraordinary friendship and cooperation between the two countries. The situation changed dramatically at the beginning of the 1950s. During a relatively short period of time the bilateral Czechoslovak-Israeli relations significantly decreased. The fundamental reason for such a shift was the oppression of the alleged opponents of the communist regime including a number of Czechoslovak Jews.

In mid 1950s a partial revision of Stalinism came and led to a certain normalization of the two countries relations. Still the Jews in Czechoslovakia had to face up various difficulties and everyday obstacles as they were perceived as a foreign and potentially a dangerous element by the communist regime. Nevertheless, even at that time, Israeli diplomats sought to improve the situation. They aimed to mediate the legal emigration for those Czechoslovak Jews who had expressed their desire to move to Israel; and to protect the human rights of those who had chosen to stay in Czechoslovakia despite of the unfavorable circumstances. In 1960s Czechoslovakia experienced a partial liberalization and a relaxation of the communist regime in various areas such as politics, economy, culture, etc. known as Prague Spring. However, these changes did not touch Czechoslovak foreign policy towards Israel significantly, and improved only moderately the status of Jewish minority in Czechoslovakia.