

CZECHOSLOVAKIA FOUNDING FATHERS: EDVARD BENEŠ

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Edvard Beneš (May 28, 1884 – September 3, 1948) was a Czech politician and statesman. One of the three founding fathers of Czechoslovakia, he signed the declaration of independence from the Austro-Hungary Empire in October 1918 and served as the second president from 1935-1938, led the Czechoslovak government-in-exile during World War II, and resumed the presidency from 1945 until 1948.

Figure 1



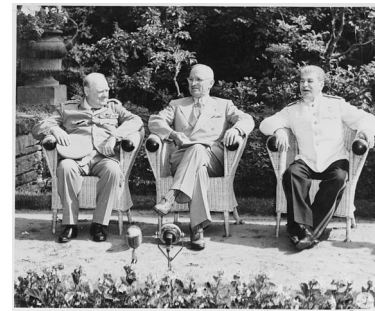
Beneš held a law degree from the University of Dijon and taught at Charles University. In 1918, he, along with **Tomáš Masaryk** and **Milan Rastislav Štefánik**, signed the Czechoslovak Declaration of Independence, also known as the “Washington Declaration” formally uniting the Bohemian, Moravian, and Slovakian people and lands.

Figure 2



Beneš served as the first Foreign Minister of Czechoslovakia and then as its second president until 1938 when he was forced to resign after the Munich Agreement. He was replaced by the Nazi German government with Emil Hácha. **Beneš** went into exile, residing first in London and then in Buckinghamshire during the London Blitz. **Beneš** led the Provisional Government of Czechoslovakia from 1939 until his return in 1945.

Figure 3



Beneš was re-elected in 1946 and served until his resignation on June 7, 1948 after the passage of the Ninth-of-May Constitution, while not a completely communist document, was close enough.

Beneš was replaced by Klement Gottwald, the leader of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.

It is important to note that while **Beneš** governed during a turbulent time for the world in general and for Europe in particular. He, as president, sanctioned and oversaw the expulsion of Germans and Hungarians from Czechoslovakia. This expulsion originated as part of the **Beneš decrees** and was confirmed by the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States as part of the Potsdam Agreement.

Figure 4



Beneš died on September 3, 1948 and is buried at his villa in Sezimovo Ústí, Okres Tábor, Jihočeský in the Czech Republic.

He left behind a legacy that is complex and mixed.

Figure 5



Figure 1 National Coat of Arms. Issued 10 April 1929. 30 haléř. Purple. SG CZ 291.

Figure 2 Flag of Czechoslovakia: Overrun Countries Series. Issued 12 July 1943. 5-cent. Blue violet, blue, bright red, and black. Scott # 910.

Figure 3 British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, President Harry S. Truman, and Soviet leader Josef Stalin in the garden of Cecilienhof Palace before meeting for the Potsdam Conference in Potsdam, Germany. Image from the National Archives and Records Administration. National Archives Identifier (NAID) 198958. Public domain.

Figure 4 President Edvard Beneš tomb at the Beneš villa. Photograph by Jitka Erbenová. Used under a CC BY-SA 3.0 license.

Figure 5 President Edvard Beneš. Issued 15 February 1948. 1-Koruna 50 haléř. Brown. SG CZ 504.