

Austrian, Czech Towns Are 40 Miles And Worlds Apart: Differences ...

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Differences Across Border Reflect Division of Europe

By Michael Dobbs
Washington Post Foreign Service

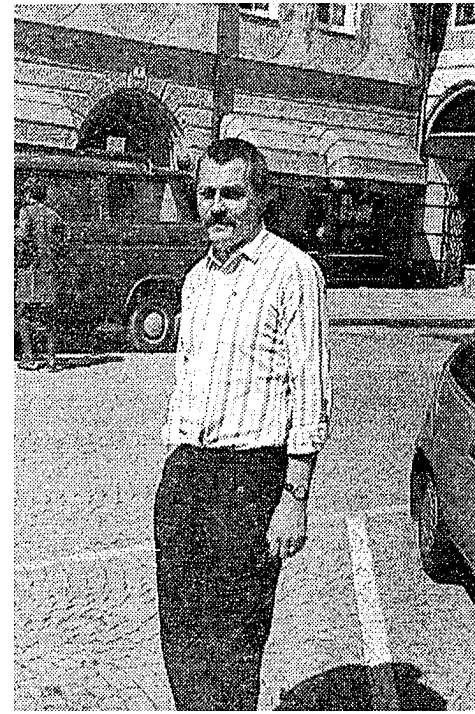
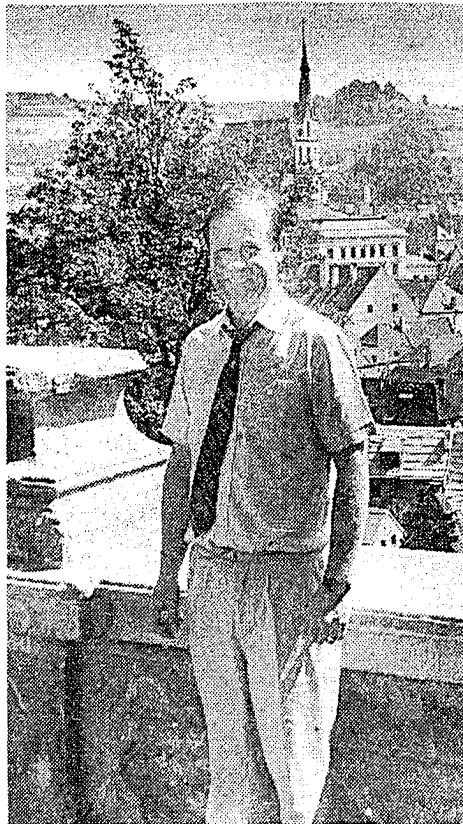
CESKY KRUMLOV, Czechoslovakia—Jaroslav Prokopius and Ernst Duschlbauer live less than 40 miles apart, but the worlds they inhabit have little in common.

Prokopius is the mayor of this small town in Czechoslovakia that, by one of those historical accidents that have lasting consequences, found itself part of the Soviet Bloc after World War II. A loyal communist, he is suspicious of free enterprise and favors state control over the economy.

Duschlbauer is the deputy mayor of the Austrian town of Freistadt, just across what used to be known as the "Iron Curtain." As a member of the conservative Austrian People's Party, he regards private initiative as the motor of a prosperous and dynamic economy.

The two men, and the towns of which they are leading citizens, are the products of seven centuries of shared political and economic traditions. It is only during the last 3½ decades, since the Soviet Army withdrew from Austria in 1955, that Cesky Krumlov and Freistadt have gone their separate ways.

The differences between Cesky Krumlov and Freistadt, which range from the trivial to the profound, reflect the political division of Europe into



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL DOBBS—THE WASHINGTON POST

Jaroslav Prokopius, left, mayor of the Czechoslovak town of Cesky Krumlov, favors state control over the economy, while Ernst Duschlbauer, deputy mayor of Freistadt, Austria, views private initiative as key.

East and West. To travel between the two towns—both with small populations of about 10,000 inhabitants and both situated in beautiful, rolling countryside—is to experience the contrast between communism and capitalism.

On a recent Sunday, the garbage cans in Krumlov (*Cesky* simply means "Czech") were overflowing. Red

banners proclaimed Czechoslovakia's allegiance with the Soviet Union. Away from the main square and a castle, both of which have been restored by the state, many medieval houses were in bad repair, their facades blackened by pollution. Shop windows seemed drab and uninviting.

See TOWNS, A35, Col. 1

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Shoppers find a wide choice of goods in Freistadt's well-maintained stores, left, while stores in Krumlov's deteriorating buildings offer fewer products.

Austrian, Czech Towns So Near, Yet So Far

TOWNS, From A29

Freistadt, by contrast, was a picture of tidiness. Its buildings and back streets were in meticulous condition. Flower boxes, a rarity across the border, hung from every other balcony. The facades of the old walled town looked as if they had been scrubbed clean. For anyone arriving from Czechoslovakia, the shop windows offered a cornucopia of plenty.

"Up until World War II, Krumlov was like Freistadt. In some ways, it was even more prosperous. But today they have fallen behind," said Leopold Tischberger, a Freistadt postman who has visited Krumlov on many occasions, both before and after it came under communist rule.

Even more startling than the material contrasts are the different mental attitudes. They reflect a fundamentally different understanding of the relationship between the individual and the state.

The citizens of Krumlov regard the government as a kind of authoritarian father figure—a scourge, but also a benefactor. The state guarantees them a job, provides them with housing and controls the distribution of practically all goods and services offered in the town. In Freistadt, the emphasis is on the individual providing for himself.

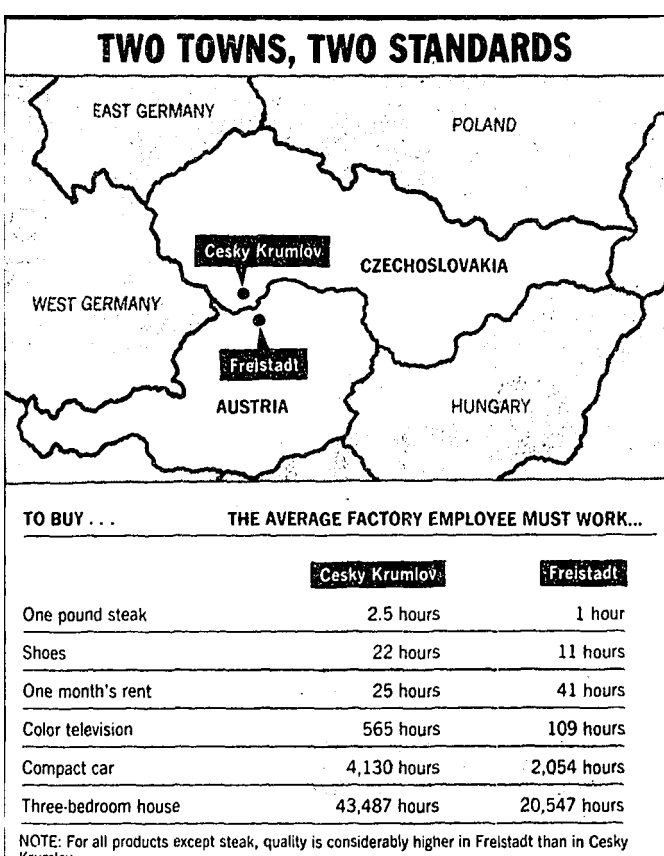
The contrasts between East and West are most visible at the international border, midway between Krumlov and Freistadt. The Austrian side is manned by a single border guard. He is matched, on the Czechoslovak side, by an army of gun-toting soldiers and pen-wielding bureaucrats.

Approaching from the Czechoslovak side, there is a preliminary checkpoint a mile from the frontier. The Iron Curtain turns out to be an 800-yard-wide zone of barbed wire, watchtowers and flat, smoothly tilled land. The process of filling out forms, changing money and passing through customs can last one or even two hours. The same formalities on the Austrian side usually take less than five minutes.

"It's sad," said Josef Knoll, a former mayor of Freistadt. "Before the war, it was very easy to cross the border. People would go to Czechoslovakia just to have a beer or go to church. Today, that's impossible. You'd be shot if you tried to cross the border without a visa."

The artificiality of the border is accentuated by the common historic heritage of the lands on either side. Founded in the first half of the 13th century, both Freistadt and Krumlov lie along the old salt-trading route running from the Alps to the Baltic. Both belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and both were freed from Nazi occupation by U.S. troops under Gen. George S. Patton.

When the victorious Allies carved up Europe after World War II, the Americans pulled back from both Krumlov and Freistadt by agreement with the Soviets. The Soviets



eventually left Austria under the 1955 state treaty that guaranteed the country's neutrality. Czechoslovakia, however, was incorporated into the Soviet Bloc.

Over lunch at his home in Freistadt, Deputy Mayor Duschlbauer produced photos taken during the period of the Soviet occupation. There were pictures of the Russian military commander flanked by his Austrian assistants, of poverty-stricken German refugees arriving in Austria after being expelled from Czechoslovakia and, finally, of "the day we regained our freedom" when the Russians left.

"The Russian occupation was the worst thing that could have happened to us," said Duschlbauer, echoing the views of most Freistadt residents who are old enough to remember it. "We lost 10 years. They dismantled whatever they could dismantle—things like furniture, industrial equipment—and took it back to the Soviet Union. The Austrian government was reluctant to invest in Soviet-controlled regions. The bureaucracy was very great."

Since 1955, Austria's economic development has resembled that of Western Europe. Czechoslovakia, by contrast, introduced a Soviet-style planned economy in 1948. The system has remained in place ever since, despite several unsuccessful attempts at reform.

Digging into a plate of roast pork and sauerkraut, the Czechoslovak national dish, Mayor Prokopius discussed his plans for Krumlov. He conceded that some private enterprise might be a good idea—limited, naturally, to such services

as shoe repair or a small cafe, and strictly controlled.

"There have to be certain rules of the game," he said, making clear that the town council would assume responsibility for such details as prices. "Otherwise, these private businessmen might make too much money."

The idea that a free market might exercise its own discipline, driving entrepreneurs who tried to exploit their customers out of business, is difficult for Prokopius to accept. Before being elected mayor by unanimous vote of the town council, he was an economic planner, supervising the output of local factories.

"There is no sense of private initiative in Krumlov," said Knoll, the former mayor of Freistadt who knows both towns well. "It's particularly visible on the farms. They don't have private farms."

In Austria, the land looks manicured. The landscape is an immaculate patchwork quilt of fields, farms and forests. On the Czechoslovak side, a sense of disorder takes over. Tidiness gives way to untidiness. Some of the land looks as if it has been abandoned.

Compared with citizens of other communist countries, Czechoslovaks live well. Czechoslovakia is self-sufficient in food, enabling communist leaders to claim that they have "solved" the agricultural problem. But Czechoslovaks do not enjoy the abundance that one finds in Austria, where farmers have to be actively discouraged from producing too much.

Motivating people to work is relatively easy in Freistadt, where there are many different things to spend one's money on. In Krumlov, it is much more of a problem. With consumer goods in relatively short

supply, many Czechoslovak workers prefer a quiet life and plenty of leisure time to high salaries earned through hard work.

"It is sometimes difficult to get people to work hard," acknowledged Stanislav Trnka, manager of a picture frame factory in Krumlov. "There is a certain philosophy here. People are satisfied with what they have and do not automatically strive after more."

Living standards in Czechoslovakia are not nearly as high as in the West—but people are not expected to work so hard, either. "They pretend to pay us, and we pretend to work," runs a popular joke.

By Friday evening, Krumlov is half-empty. Residents desert their modern apartment blocks en masse for weekend cottages in the country. Freistadt residents tend to stay at home. Their houses are more spacious, and the need to escape somehow seems less pressing.

In Krumlov, an architectural jewel set in a bend of the Vltava River, responsibility for the upkeep of the town's 315 listed historic buildings falls on the state. In Freistadt, which claims to be the second oldest town in Austria, the cost is largely borne by private individuals.

When Duschlbauer, Freistadt's deputy mayor, was told that restoration work accounted for half of Krumlov's \$5 million municipal budget, he was incredulous. In Freistadt, it is less than 1 percent of the town's \$8 million budget.

Despite the huge sums spent on restoration work, much of Krumlov seems to be in poor repair. In Freistadt, it is a matter of pride for individual homeowners to ensure that their properties are well maintained.

"The historic center of Krumlov is falling down because there is no private interest in maintaining it—and the state does not have enough money," said Knoll, the former mayor of Freistadt.

In Krumlov, Mayor Prokopius acknowledged that some of the town's historic buildings are in "poor condition." He blamed a shortage of qualified builders and inadequate restoration work in the 1950s and '60s, when industrialization was a much more pressing problem for Czechoslovakia.

Freistadt's citizens exude a bourgeois smugness about the immaculate upkeep of their town. But they complain about clouds of poisonous sulphur they claim are blown in their direction from Czechoslovakia by the prevailing northeasterly winds.

"Our forests are dying," said Duschlbauer. "The Czechs don't use filters on their oil-fired power stations—and 95 percent of our air pollution comes from over there. It's a very serious problem. We're thinking of paying them to install filters on their power plants."

Cesky Krumlov and Freistadt do, after all, share one characteristic in common. Air pollution is one 20th century byproduct that pays no attention to geopolitical borders, however tightly they may be sealed.