

## Detlef BRANDES

# Sudetští Němci v krizovém roce 1938

---

Praha: Argo 2012. 428 pages.  
ISBN 978-80-257-0605-3

---

Czech-German relations or, more precisely, life of the German minority in the First Czechoslovak Republic were and certainly still are a much discussed topic. Several monographs on this phenomenon have been published recently – compare for example “Národnostní menšiny v Československu 1918–1938. Od státu národního ke státu národnostnímu?” (Praha 2012) from Andrej Tóth, Lukáš Novotný, Michal Stehlík, “Sudetoněmecké nacionalistické tělovýchovné organizace a československý stát v letech 1918 až 1938” (Praha 2012) from Michal Burian, or J. Benda, “Útěky a vyhánění z pohraničí českých zemí 1938–1939. Migrace z okupovaného pohraničí ve druhé republice” (Praha 2013) from Jan Benda.

Detlef Brandes, author of the book “Sudetští Němci v krizovém roce 1938” is one of the leading experts on the history of Central Europe; his books published in Czech include “Cesta k vyhnání 1938–1945. Plány a rozhodnutí o ‘transferu’ Němců z Československa a z Polska” (Praha 2002), “Češi pod německým protektorátem. Okupační politika, kolaborace a odboj 1939–1945” (Praha 2000) or “Exil v Londýně 1939–1943. Velká Británie a její spojenci Československo, Polsko a Jugoslávie mezi Mnichovem a Teheránem” (Praha 2003). The monograph *Sudetští Němci v krizovém roce 1938* is a Czech translation of a work published in Munich in 2008. The author presents a detailed analysis of political, social and cultural behaviour of Sudeten Germans in the troubled and ground-breaking year of 1938. The book thoroughly analyses not only attitudes of Sudeten German leading political representatives, who strove for the annexation of the Sudetenland to the Third Reich, but also examines positions of municipal representatives and common Germans living in the Sudetenland. It also analyzes the transformation of mentality and attitudes of selected small communities in the Sudetenland under the increasing pressure of the Sudeten German Party (Sudetendeutsche Partei).

Detlef Brandes based his work on thorough study of unpublished archival materials and a substantial amount of published sources and specialized literature. Such a heuristic enabled him to focus on particular attitudes and behaviour of common Germans and to make an attempt at answering one of the crucial questions of interwar Czechoslovak history: How could a relatively peaceful coexistence of the Czech and German ethnic groups in the Sudetenland lead into gradual prevalence of sharply anti-Czech sentiments and demanding of the Sudetenland annexation to the Großdeutsches Reich. However, the author also looked into the frequently ambiguous attitudes of Czechoslovak political parties, which failed to effectively address problems associated with the economic depression of the

1930s that affected the Sudeten regions much more strongly than inland Bohemia. Its consequences were felt more oppressively among the Sudeten population than in Bohemia and leftist communists or social democrats could easily lose their jobs or fail to find any as unemployed if they did not join the SdP.

The monograph proceeds chronologically, from the initial chapters outlining ethnic disagreements in the First Czechoslovak Republic and mentioning the February Agreement with German activist parties (1937), which was supposed to be a starting point for the improvement of Sudeten Germans' position, particularly in three areas (proportional employment of Germans in public service, education and the language question), but failed to meet the expectations put in it, because the basic prerequisite for a peaceful settlement – time – was missing. As indicated by the title, at the core of the work is the actual year 1938, particularly an analysis of its most important events with respect to Sudeten Germans and their relation to the Republic.

In conclusion, I have to note that Detlef Brandes' book presents a vivid picture of the year 1938 from the perspective of Sudeten Germans. However, it cannot be seen as an exhaustive work; a detailed analysis of the proposed status of national minorities which, if implemented, was to transform Czechoslovakia in an ethnic state, or a comparison of the stances adopted by Sudeten Germans and the Hungarian minority in the course of the year 1938 being at least two other topics that can be further examined by historians. At the very end, I have to say that Detlef Brandes' monograph meets demanding requirements and certainly deserves attention not only of readers who are experts in the First Republic but also of the lay public.

**Lukáš NOVOTNÝ**