

The Munich Agreement (September 29, 1938)

Abstract

Czechoslovakia's favorable strategic position made it a promising stepping-stone on the way to Hitler's desired eastward expansion. Acting on Hitler's orders, Reich Minister of War Werner von Blomberg had drawn up plans for an invasion of Czechoslovakia as early as June 1937. After easily annexing Austria on March 12, 1938—with no resistance from the Western powers—Hitler was convinced that the time was right to move into Czechoslovakia.

To give his planned actions the sheen of legitimacy, however, he propagated the right of self-determination for the approximately 3 million Sudeten Germans living in Czechoslovakia. At Hitler's instigation, the Sudeten German Party started to agitate inside the country for autonomy and restitution. On April 24, 1938, under the leadership of Konrad Henlein (1898–1945), the party issued the so-called Carlsbad Program, a list of demands that included full autonomy for the Sudetenland, substantial changes in Czechoslovak foreign policy, and reparations for damages suffered by Sudeten Germans since 1918, when the region was incorporated into the newly formed state of Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovak government, which had no illusions about Hitler's aggressive intentions, rejected all of the party's demands and looked for protection from the Western powers, especially its ally France. France, however, was unwilling to get involved in a military conflict without England's participation, and the British government under Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain wanted to avoid a European war at all costs. As part of Britain's policy of appeasement, Chamberlain met with Hitler three times in September 1938 in the hopes of finding an acceptable compromise in the matter of the Sudeten Germans. At the same time, he tried to prevail upon the Czech government to accept Germany's demands.

Hitler sabotaged all of Chamberlain's attempts at mediation, and war seemed inevitable after the British cabinet rejected the so-called Godesberg Memorandum, in which Hitler demanded Germany's entry into the Sudetenland on October 1, 1938. Italian Prime Minister Benito Mussolini, however, managed to persuade Hitler to agree to international negotiations. With Mussolini as mediator, Hitler, Chamberlain, and the French Prime Minister Édouard Daladier convened in Munich and signed the following agreement, which allowed the Sudetenland to be ceded to the German Reich without the involvement of the Czechoslovak government. In return, Hitler renounced any territorial claims on the rest of the country. Chamberlain regarded the agreement as a great diplomatic success and upon returning to England delivered a famous speech describing it as a guarantee of "peace for our time." Hitler, however, felt cheated out of his war in spite of his ostensible triumph. He flouted the terms of the agreement and pursued the liquidation of Czechoslovakia in March 1939.

Source

Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Italy, taking into consideration the agreement, which has been already reached in principle for the cession to Germany of the Sudeten German territory, have agreed on the following terms and conditions governing the said cession and the measures consequent thereon, and by this agreement they each hold themselves responsible for the steps necessary to secure its fulfillment:

(1) The evacuation will begin on October 1st.

(2) The United Kingdom, France and Italy agree that the evacuation of the territory shall be completed by October 10th, without any existing installations having been destroyed, and that the Czechoslovak

Government will be held responsible for carrying out the evacuation without damage to the said installations.

(3) The conditions governing the evacuation will be laid down in detail by an international commission composed of representatives of Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Italy and Czechoslovakia.

(4) The occupation by stages of the predominantly German territory by German troops will begin on October 1st. The four territories marked on the attached map will be occupied by German troops in the following order: the territory marked number I on the 1st and 2nd of October, the territory marked number II on the 2nd and 3rd of October, the territory marked number III on the 3rd, 4th and 5th of October, the territory marked number IV on the 6th and 7th of October. The remaining territory of preponderantly German character will be ascertained by the aforesaid international commission forthwith and be occupied by German troops by the 10th of October.

(5) The international commission referred to in paragraph 3) will determine the territories in which a plebiscite is to be held. These territories will be occupied by international bodies until the plebiscite has been completed. The same commission will fix the conditions in which the plebiscite is to be held, taking as a basis the conditions of the Saar plebiscite. The commission will also fix a date, not later than the end of November, on which the plebiscite will be held.

(6) The final determination of the frontiers will be carried out by the international commission. The commission will also be entitled to recommend to the four Powers, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy, in certain exceptional cases, minor modifications in the strictly ethnographical determination of the zones which are to be transferred without plebiscite.

(7) There will be a right of option into and out of the transferred territories, the option to be exercised within six months from the date of this agreement. A German-Czechoslovak commission shall determine the details of the option, consider ways of facilitating the transfer of population and settle questions of principle arising out of the said transfer.

(8) The Czechoslovak Government will, within a period of four weeks from the date of this agreement, release from their military and police forces any Sudeten Germans who may wish to be released, and the Czechoslovak Government will within the same period release Sudeten German prisoners who are serving terms of imprisonment for political offences.

Adolf Hitler
Ed. Daladier
Mussolini
Neville Chamberlain

Source of English translation: "Agreement signed at Munich Between Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy," September 29, 1938. In United States Department of State. *Documents on German Foreign Policy: From the Archives of the German Foreign Ministry*. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1957–1964. Series D (1937–1945), Germany and Czechoslovakia, Volume 2: 1937–1938. Document Number 675, pp. 1014–1016. English translation credited to US Department of State Division of Language Services.

Source of German text: German Foreign Ministry. "Abkommen zwischen Deutschland, dem Vereinigten Königreich, Frankreich und Italien, getroffen in München, am 29. September 1938," October 1, 1938. In *Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, 1918–1945*. Baden-Baden: Imprimerie

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