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The Bavarian prime minister's visit to Prague

On 20 December Bavaria's Prime Minster Horst Seehofer met the head of the Czech government Petr Necas in Prague. It was the first official visit of the prime minister of the largest German federal state in the neighbouring Czech Republic in history. So far this has not been possible because of the divisive difference between Prague and Munich in approaching the question of the expulsions of Germans from the Czech Republic.

The expelled and their proponents have been an important political force in Bavaria and so far have had a decisive influence on this federal state's relations with the Czech Republic. Seehofer decided to split from the political direction pursued to date by Bavarian prime ministers that was a condition of normalisation with the Czech Republic on lifting the Benes decrees that sanctioned the expulsions of over 2 million Sudeten Germans after World War II.

The positive atmosphere of the meeting may be attributed to signs of empathy visible in the last months from Czech society towards the expelled Germans (among them, the commemoration of the crimes committed against German civilians) and a more balanced approach of the community of Sudeten Germans to history. During a joint press conference Necas and Seehofer emphasised that despite differences in interpreting history, present common interests require Prague and Munich to cooperate more closely. Both politicians declared that they would strive to intensify collaboration in the areas of transport, trade and energy. Petr Necas made a commitment to make information available to Bavaria about the nuclear power plant under construction in Temelin (near the Austrian and German border). Contentious issues were put aside and both parties made efforts to make this visit a symbolic opening of a new stage in relations between the Czech Republic and Bavaria. <ciechan>