

1989

Dismantling of  
barbed-wire fences

*“The result of the cold war was the same as in case of an armed conflict. The difference was in the fact that it was declared against citizens of their own state. The Iron Curtain became the front line; however, the enemy was missing on the other side.”*

**Adolf Rázek,**  
political prisoner

*“In the afternoon we were supposed to continue by train through Brno as far as the southern border and from there go on foot through woods to Austria. It was no joke to walk through woods in the dark. It was raining but it was better for our escape. We managed to bypass an armed border guard. It turned out that each of us held the holy rosary in their hands so humbly and intimately as never before.”*

**Andrej Krafčík, CSsR,**  
Greek-Catholic priest

1990

Fall of the Iron Curtain –  
remains as a remembrance

or Austria, but also against “traitors of the homeland” or emigrants. In 1970s the Border Guard developed a network of **Border Guard Assistants** organised from among the inhabitants of border districts. In cooperation with the organisation of young communists (SZM) in border areas, groups of Young Border Guards started to be organised. They participated in particular in preventive actions – observing, controlling and informing. Since 1977 the so-called scouts were included into the system of border protection – soldiers in the compulsory military service, armed, patrolling the border zone and its surroundings in civilian clothes.

## STATISTICS

### Number of Border Guard members:

1950 – around 6,000; 1951 – more than 16,000; 1965 – more than 25,000; 1966–1989 – around 16,000

### Length of the Czechoslovak section of the Iron Curtain:

920km, of which 104km was of the Slovak section

### Number of persons arrested while attempting to cross the Czechoslovak section of the Iron Curtain:

almost 49,000 persons

Number of documented civilians who died when attempting to cross the Czechoslovak border with Austria or Western Germany in the period of 1948–1989:

280 persons, of which 49 persons were in the Slovak section

Number of Border Guard members who died in service:

654 persons

## WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE?

Recommended websites:

[www.upn.gov.sk](http://www.upn.gov.sk); [www.enrs.eu](http://www.enrs.eu)



EUROPEAN NETWORK  
REMEMBRANCE AND SOLIDARITY

# IRON CURTAIN

*The Iron Curtain is a name given to the division of Europe after WWII. It split Europe into two different areas in terms of policy and economy. It stretched through the middle of the continent from the Baltic Sea to the Adriatic. It separated states under the Soviet sphere of influence and countries under the influence of democratic powers of the USA, Great Britain and France.*

*Gradually, not only the ground border (the green border), but also the air (blue border) became guarded, as well as the information space (the electronic border).*



After 1948



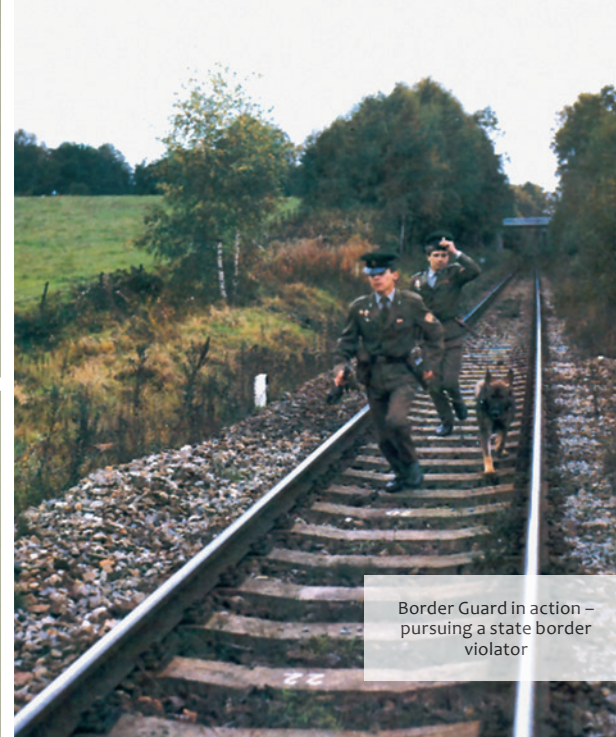
Marking the line of the Iron Curtain

1960s



Barbed-wire fence – a wall

1970s and 1980s



Border Guard in action – pursuing a state border violator

1950s



Engineering and technical barriers

1960s



Death of a person at electrical wired barrier when attempting to cross the Iron Curtain

Crossing the strictly guarded border without the necessary documents was classified as an offence after the war ended. **At the beginning of 1949, a system of obstacles that were hard to overcome started to be created at the border with the former occupation zones of Germany and Austria.**

### THE BORDER GUARD

In 1950 a new police service was created – the Border Guard, whose task was to guard the whole Czechoslovak border divided into two sections: the eastern section (the border with the states in the Soviet sphere of influence) and the western section (the border with Austria and the Federal Republic of Germany). **The guarding of the western section was transferred from the police system to a military one. It was guarded by engineering obstacles, minefields or high-voltage wire in the border barriers.** The Border Guard had police authorisation in the cross-border areas and its activities were comparable with the activities of the State Security (ŠtB). An attempt to cross the border illegally was qualified as a criminal act. Guarding the western border was similar to the guarding of a prison. **One of the means to guard the border included engineering and technical barriers.**

The most important part was a barbed barrier, built inland since 1951. It consisted of two or three fences of barbed wire, built one after the other, two or three metres high, called walls. Since 1952 the barrier was gradually “fortified” by placing electric conductors to the middle wall of a three-wall barrier. The electrification of the western border was completed in 1955. Between 1952 and 1957 the barrier was further fortified by mining the terrain. The whole system was gradually supplemented by watchtowers. At the end of 1965, the high voltage in the barriers was removed and the system was rebuilt into a two-wall barrier with a signal wall and signal installation. Another component of the protection was a ploughed control strip, 8–15m broad, established along the barrier and adjusted so that any “violin” would leave footprints when attempting to overcome the barrier. When pursuing “border violators”, members of the border guard themselves violated the state border and many times arrested or even shot the escaping persons already in the territory of the neighbouring state.

### LIFE OF CITIZENS IN THE BORDER ZONE

Until 1950 the life of inhabitants in the customs border zone, where the Border Guard was active, was not significantly limited.

Since 1951 a “border territory” was declared as a list of border municipalities. It included a “border zone” reaching deep inland. “Unreliable” inhabitants were displaced from the zone and entry was allowed only with a special permit. The Border Guard kept order in the border zone, controlling and inspecting persons. Around 2km from the border line was a “forbidden zone” completely cleared of any population. In the mid-1960s the forbidden zone was cancelled due to economic reasons and only the border zone, 1–3km from the borderline, was left.

### OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE BORDER GUARD

In 1951 the Border Guard started to establish its intelligence department. At the beginning the counter-intelligence focused on preventing any “illegal violation” of the state border and on the “cleaning” of the border zone from “unreliable” persons. Subsequently, it concentrated on discovering any such preparations and ruining any attempts to cross the border illegally. Later, its competencies were extended by Passport Control Departments which checked on persons crossing the border. The intelligence service focused mostly on obtaining knowledge from the border territory of Bavaria