

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Monetary reform 1953 – correspondence abroad

Monetary reform was announced as to 1 June 1953. All existing coins and banknotes ceased to be valid immediately. The reform had a huge impact on all areas of life and did not avoid the postal service. It came unexpectedly and the first days after its announcement were marked by a certain chaos. In the absence of the new stamps, it was decided to use the old stamps at a nominal conversion of 50:1 to pay the newly established postal tariffs for a short time, from 1 to 18 June 1953 inclusive. In view of the rapid depletion of the remaining stocks of old stamps, cash payments had to be made at some post offices. However, such stampless documents were not very attractive to most collectors, and therefore relatively fewer of them survived than stamp-paid documents. Also, the meter-stamp machines (OVS) used by companies and post offices with the old settings had to be converted in the same ratio of 50:1 as the old stamps. Only after they were cleared were they set nominally to the new currency. This clearing, depending on the type of machine and the frequency of correspondence, could have occurred before 18 June but also after that date. OVS-paid shipments to abroad are very rare.

Announcement of the monetary reform caused that the new postal tariffs were set. These were converted for domestic mail at a ratio of 5:1 (old tariffs to the new ones). Another significant change was the setting of a new conversion rate of approximately 7:1 against the gold franc, which resulted in a different conversion of postal tariffs abroad than for domestic mail. The new tariffs were announced in the Bulletin of Communications (Věstník spojů) No. 24/1953, which was issued only on 16 June 1953. The problem was, that the exact date of validity of the new tariffs was not specified! For domestic mail the change was simple (5:1), but it had a great impact for abroad shipments. Maybe the regulations could be announced in internal circulars, but they are not available now. So the abroad tariffs in this short period we can only estimate from the existing practice – all shipments between 1 and 18 June were paid at the same 5:1 ratio (stamps in 50:1 until 18 June) as domestic shipments and this practise continued until the end of June.

Correspondence to foreign countries was relatively limited at that time and mostly remained abroad, which is why only very few items have survived. In this undoubtedly difficult period, mail to foreign countries was only marginal, so it is not surprising that the calculation of the new postage (even in old stamps) caused considerable difficulties for postal staff. Although these items were carefully controlled at the post offices, a number of obscure and difficult-to-explain frankings can be found. Also a certain form of censorship for shipments to abroad took place. Letters had to be submitted open at the post office, and their inspection was confirmed by an additional postmark placed outside the stamps along with the signature of the clerk. This fact is not repeated in the descriptions of the individual documents in the exhibit.

The exhibit focuses on the different types of shipments to many countries around the world and attempts to explain the postal rates and methods of payment used at the time to different countries of the world. This exhibit presents use of many different valid stamps, including airmail stamps or OVS. The whole time period including the period between 19 and 30 June (when the old stamps lost their validity) is documented. The exhibit explains the practice at that time and documents facts not in philatelic literature published before (excluding contributions by the author of this exhibit).

Contents of the exhibit:

- I. The period shortly before the announcement of the monetary reform - the last day of the regular validity of the old stamps*
- II. Europe - reduced tariffs to the nearest friendly countries (Hungary, Poland)*
- III. Europe - reduced tariffs to nearby countries (Austria, Bulgaria)*
- IV. Europe - standard tariffs to other European countries*
- V. Overseas - tariffs to the rest of the world for different categories of shipments including different air surcharges according to destinations (to North, Central and South America, Australia, Africa)*
- VI. The period between 19 and 30 June - use of old tariffs with the new stamps*