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THE CRISIS OF THE CZECH POLITICS 25 YEARS AFTER THE VELVET REVOLUTION

ABSTRACT

In terms of political performance the Czech Republic of the 1990s was considered as a very successful post-communist country. Today's situation is different. The Czech Republic fell into deep political inefficiency. This paper aims to show the core and causes of the current crisis of the Czech politics. It briefly introduces the rather temporary and circumstantial success of the Czech politics in the 1990s. Then it analyzes the onset of the crisis as well as reasons, which led to a deterioration of the Czech politics at the turn of the 21st century. It recognizes three essential dimensions of the Czech political inefficiency: a crisis of confidence when it comes to politics, a crisis of the Czech party system and the weakness of the Czech parliamentary regime.

Keywords: Czech Republic, political crisis and inefficiency, confidence in politics, parties and party system, parliamentary regime

The Czech Republic is currently in a deep political crisis, although it is a country which in the 1990s belonged to the most stable Central and Eastern European countries in terms of political and economic performance. Many Czech politicians were proud of the Czech Republic's achievements and claimed that the Czech Republic became a model for other post-communist countries. In 1996 one of the most promi-

nent Czech politicians in the last twenty-five years, Václav Klaus (at that time he served as the prime minister and the chairman of the then largest political party – Civic Democratic Party (ODS)), published a well-known article in which he made a comparison between the Czech Republic of the 1990s and the interwar Czechoslovak Republic. Klaus, among others, stressed that the Czech Republic, unlike the interwar republic, was a politically stable and efficient country.¹

However, this optimism was not widely shared. Klaus's article prompted a reaction of a leading Czech political scientist, Miroslav Novák, who argued that the Czech political stability was only temporary and very fragile: *Rather than flaunting our government stability, which is caused by a number of factors, some of which are only temporary, it is more useful to take such measures (in particular to reform the electoral system), which shall increase the likelihood that the government can keep stability even under different conditions.*² Novák's article was *a short text of a great importance.*³ Indeed, this article proved to be far-sighted, because Novák not only clearly showed that the political stability was only a seeming phenomenon, but also predicted a serious trouble just about to happen. This prediction was absolutely correct and the Czech politics has been facing troubles ever since.

This paper aims to show the core and causes of the current crisis of the Czech politics. First, we shall briefly introduce the success of the Czech politics in the 1990s. Then we will analyze the onset of the crisis as well as the reasons which led to a deterioration of the Czech politics at the turn of the 21st century. Later chapters explain the essence of the Czech political crisis, with a particular focus on three issues: a crisis of confidence in politics, a crisis of the Czech party system and the weakness of the Czech parliamentary regime.

1. THE CZECH POLITICS IN THE 1990S

The 1990s Czech Republic really stood out in comparison to other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The extremely dogmatic communist regime fell apart within a few days in November 1989. Key political reforms were carried out rapidly and Czechoslovakia quite easily rebuilt its basic democratic institutions and mechanisms. Everything happened at a rapid pace. A leading dissident, Petr Pithart, mentions that even in October 1989 he was unable to foresee a regime change, which was just about to come.⁴ Another dissident Milan Uhde recalled that he had tempered his son's enthusiasm, who on 17th November 1989 was *brimming over with happiness: the re-*

¹ V. Klaus, 'Malé historické srovnání s Baťovými časy', *Lidové noviny*, 9 March 1996.

² M. Novák, 'Malá politologická úvaha o vládní stabilitě', *Parlamentní zpravodaj*, Vol. 2, No. 7 (1996), p. 297.

³ T. Lebeda, 'Malá politologická úvaha nejen o smyslu politologických úvah'. In M. Kubát, T. Lebeda (eds.), *O komparativní politologii a současné české politice. Miroslavu Novákovi k 60. narozeninám*, Praha 2014, p. 12.

⁴ P. Pithart, *Devětaosmdesátý. Vzpomínky a přemýšlení. Krédo*, Praha 2009, pp. 53-61.

*gime is over.*⁵ The most well-known opposition leader, Václav Havel, was released from prison in May 1989. The Velvet Revolution began on 17th November 1989 and no later than on 29th November 1989 Havel was elected the president of Czechoslovakia. Paradoxically enough, Havel was elected unanimously by the federal parliament, in which more than two thirds of the MPs were Communists.⁶

The first free and fair parliamentary elections were held in June 1990. They were characterized by an incredibly high voter turnout (in the Czech Republic up to 97%, in Slovakia the turnout was slightly lower) and the spectacular victory of the Civic Forum (OF), which was the major anti-communist movement. The Civic Forum won about 50% of the votes in the Czech Republic.⁷ The strong position of the Civic Forum created favorable conditions for the continuation of political and economic reforms. A Polish political scientist, Marek Bankowicz, draws attention to another important factor of the political transformation: an extremely high level of social acceptance of the system transformations.⁸

Soon after the Velvet Revolution Czechoslovakia ceased to exist. Unlike other countries that were falling apart – mainly in the Balkans – the Czechs and Slovaks split in a friendly way in 1993. The Czech Republic and Slovakia prepared themselves for the breakup of Czechoslovakia in advance, not only in economic, but also political terms. First of all, it should be noted that the two countries adopted democratic constitutions before Czechoslovakia split up on 1st January 1993. Slovakia adopted its constitution in September and the Czech Republic did so in December 1992.⁹ As of January 1st 1993 both countries started to build the constitutional and political foundations of the normal democratic politics. True, Slovakia was unfortunately not able to consolidate its democracy and plunged into the “Mečiarism”, i.e. a semi-authoritarian rule of the Prime Minister, Vladimír Mečiar, and his Movement for Democratic Slovakia (HZDS).¹⁰ However, the Czech Republic succeeded in the process of democratic consolidation. Hence, the Czech Republic was seen as a more advanced country. Indeed, the Czech Republic, unlike Slovakia and some other post-communist countries, was characterized by a peaceful political life without serious political conflicts. Although the Civic Forum broke up in spring 1991, it was a peaceful process – “the Velvet divorce”, a phrase coined by Václav Klaus¹¹ – that resulted in new more profiled right-wing as well as left-wing parties.¹²

⁵ M. Uhde, *Rozpomínky. Co na sebe vím*, Praha 2013, p. 477.

⁶ J. Suk, *Labyrintem revoluce. Aktéři, zápletky a křižovatky jedné politické krize (od listopadu 1989 do června 1990)*, Praha 2003, pp. 230-251, 490, *Edice Obzor*, 50.

⁷ <http://www.volby.cz>.

⁸ M. Bankowicz, *Zlikwidowane państwo. Ze studiów nad polityką Czechosłowacji*, Kraków 2003, p. 103.

⁹ M. Kubát [et al.] (eds.), *Politické a ústavní systémy zemí středovýchodní Evropy*, Praha 2004, pp. 95, 359, *Edice Politologie*.

¹⁰ L. Kopeček, *Demokracie, diktatury a politické stranictví na Slovensku*, Brno 2006, pp. 177-197, *Politologická řada*, 21.

¹¹ V. Klaus, *Kde začíná zítřek*, Praha 2009, p. 110.

¹² P. Pšejja, *Stranický systém České republiky. Politické strany a jejich vývoj 1989-1998*, Brno 2005, pp. 46-59, *Srovnávací politologie*, 1.

The chairman of the Civic Forum, Václav Klaus, attempted to convert the movement into a classic political party. He did not agree with a vague notion about the future of the OF put forward by some politicians and intellectuals who believed that the OF should remain a broad “non-political” social movement.¹³ Václav Klaus finally founded the Civic Democratic Party (ODS). The decision proved right. At the last OF congress, 126 out of 175 delegates voted for the conversion into a political party, as it was suggested by Václav Klaus.¹⁴ About two-thirds of the members as well as most of local organizations of the OF supported the foundation of the Civic Democratic Party.¹⁵ The ODS won the 1992 general elections and got about 30% of votes.¹⁶ The second heir to the OF, Civic Movement (OH), having tried to continue the idea of a broad social movement, made its way to the federal chamber of the parliament, but it gained less than 5% of the votes and did not get any MPs in the Czech National Council,¹⁷ which was transformed into the Chamber of Deputies, the major parliamentary chamber in the Czech Republic. Later the OH disappeared from the Czech politics altogether.

We share the view advocated by some Czech political scientists who believe that the foundation of the ODS – a modern political party with a clear ideology – has become one of Klaus’s most important political achievements.¹⁸ Václav Klaus significantly contributed to the consolidation of the Czech right-wing politics and established one of the key building blocks of a classic party system, which is crucial for the normal functioning of a parliamentary democracy. In addition, the largest right-wing party was carrying out moderate economic reforms and it is also credited for the peaceful division of Czechoslovakia. The ODS took victory in the 1996 parliamentary elections as well and remained a ruling party until 1998.

All in all, the Czech Republic in the first half of the 1990s was a democratic and politically stable country with a significant economic growth. However, the 1990s turned out to be the calm before the storm.

2. TURNOVER

The first problems appeared in 1997-1998. The Czech Republic fell into an economic and financial crisis. On the one hand, the very cautious and slow “velvet” economic transformation forestalled serious social conflicts. On the other hand, the “capitalism with

¹³ J. Pehe, *Klaus. Portrét politika ve dvaceti obrazech*, Praha 2010, p. 20.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁵ L. Kopeček, *Éra nevinnosti. Česká politika 1989-1997*, Brno 2010, p. 98.

¹⁶ <http://www.volby.cz>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ L. Kopeček, *Fenomén Václav Klaus. Politická biografie*, Brno 2012, p. 277; M. Novák, *Systémy politických stran. Úvod do jejich srovnávacího studia*, Praha 1997, pp. 35-36, *Studijní texty (Sociologické nakladatelství)*, 11.

a human face”¹⁹ became a source of deep structural problems of the Czech economy, such as a bank sector, which still remained in the hands of the state. It plunged into huge debts. The banks had to be rescued later by big money transfers from the public resources.²⁰

The ODS popularity began to crumble. The economic problems were accompanied by the worsening of political relations. Václav Klaus's minority government found itself in agony, intensified by intra-coalition disputes. A financial scandal in the ODS in 1997 proved to be the last straw. The position of the ODS in the Czech politics was significantly tarnished in the public's eyes. Some ODS politicians led by Jan Ruml and Ivan Pilip called on Klaus to resign. They were successful and Klaus's cabinet collapsed in November 1997.

Even though Klaus did not defend his position of the prime minister, he was able to defeat the rebels in the party. Klaus, who was at that time (when Pilip and Ruml challenged his party leadership) in Sarajevo in Bosnia immediately returned to the Czech Republic, quickly took over the initiative and in December 1997 he was confirmed as the party leader. The ODS vice-chairman Miroslav Macek, who was very loyal to Klaus, labelled the Ruml and Pilip's initiative “the Sarajevo assassination”,²¹ which was to recall the 1914 assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. The assassination became then an immediate pretext for the Great War. This 1997 event resulted in a long-term split within the Czech right-wing politics. “The Sarajevo assassination” created a conspiracy mentality in the ODS, i.e. a sense of fear of enemies surrounding the party. Lubomír Kopeček, a Czech political scientist, hence talks about “the syndrome of Sarajevo”.²² Ruml and Pilip were defeated in the ODS and established a new party – the Freedom Union (US) in January 1998.²³ In January 1998 President Václav Havel appointed a provisional (technical) government headed by the president of the Czech National Bank, Josef Tošovský. His government was expected to bridge the political crisis that followed Klaus's resignation.²⁴

In the early 1998 parliamentary elections the major opposition party, the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), which unlike its counterparts in Hungary or Poland, did not emerge as an heir to the former communist party, but as a brand new party in the early 1990s, took victory. The ODS came second. The problem was, however, that the ČSSD lacked a natural coalition partner because another left-wing party was the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), which was a direct successor of the unreformed Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ). KSČM was not acceptable as a coalition partner because of its hard-line Marxist-Leninist and even anti-

¹⁹ L. Kopeček, *Éra nevinnosti...*, p. 173.

²⁰ P. Konkolská, E. Mielcová, ‘How Much We Paid for Privatization of Big Banks in 1997-2001’ in *Future of the Banking after the Year 2000 in the World and in the Czech Republic*, 6: *Privatization of the Banking Sector*, Karviná 2001, pp. 95-100.

²¹ L. Kopeček, *Fenomén Václav Klaus...*, p. 96.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 101.

²³ J. Malíř, P. Marek [et al.], *Politické strany. Vývoj politických stran a hnutí v českých zemích a Československu 1861-2004*, Vol. 2: *Období 1939-2004*, Brno 2005, p. 1563.

²⁴ V. Hloušek, L. Kopeček, *Záchrana státu? Úřednické a polopolitické vlády v České republice a Československu*, Brno 2012, pp. 53-67.

-system²⁵ appeals and advocacy of the *ancien régime*. However, even the center-right parties failed to create a majority coalition government. Even though they controlled 102 out of 200 MPs in the Chamber of Deputies, irreconcilable positions taken by the ODS and US effectively thwarted a logical three-party coalition (together with the centrist Christian democrats – KDU-ČSL).²⁶

The way out of the post-election stalemate proved to be simple and somewhat logical. The ODS and the ČSSD concluded the so-called Opposition agreement. The ODS enabled the creation and maintenance of a single-party minority cabinet formed by the ČSSD and in return it received, among other functions in the parliament (including the position of Chairman of the Chamber of Deputies for Václav Klaus), key positions in government agencies and state-owned enterprises. The Opposition agreement was deepened in 2000, when the ODS and the ČSSD concluded the “Patent of Toleration”, openly declaring the active cooperation of both parties that in fact shared the political and economic power in the country.²⁷

The Opposition agreement caused a storm of criticism, especially among intellectuals and publicists. It was seen as undemocratic and unexpected and so far as the biggest power cartel concluded by hitherto rival political parties that now shared political and economic power, thus controlling the entire country. The Opposition agreement concluded “the era of innocence”²⁸ of the 1990s Czech politics and marked the beginning of the political crisis, which peaked in 2013. This crisis is not a “normal” political or cabinet crisis. It rather turned into a breakdown of the Czech politics.

3. THE CRISIS OF THE CZECH POLITICS

What does the “crisis of the Czech politics” mean? In our opinion, there are three main features of the phenomenon. Firstly, the public confidence in politics has been fatally undermined. Secondly, there has been a crisis of political parties and the party system. Thirdly, the parliamentary regime has become chronically unstable and ineffective. Let us discuss these issues in detail.

3.1. Lack of confidence in politics

In 1997 President Václav Havel (in an interview for the Czech Television) said that the Czech society had an uneasy feeling about the Czech Politics: *as if the Czech society*

²⁵ According to the Sartori’s strict definition of anti-system party. See G. Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems. A Framework for Analysis*, Cambridge 1976, pp. 132-133.

²⁶ J. Bureš [et al.], *Česká demokracie po roce 1989. Institucionální základy českého politického systému*, Praha 2012, p. 404.

²⁷ L. Kopeček, ‘Opoziční smlouvy “za kopečky” II.: Byl pakt ČSSD a ODS z let 1998-2002 demokracickou deviací?’, *Středoevropské politické studie*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (2013), at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5817/CEPSR.2013.4.284>>.

²⁸ Idem, *Éra nevinnosti...*

was in a bad mood.²⁹ “Bad mood” has become one of the most well-known and often recalled notions of the Havel’s speech.

At the beginning, the bad mood was sustained by the economic and financial crisis that hit the Czech Republic in 1997 and 1998. The second circumstance deteriorating the atmosphere in the society were financial scandals of political parties (mostly the ODS and later other parties, too), which received money from highly suspicious sponsors of a hidden identity. Media speculated that these sponsors were in fact beneficiaries of privatization of originally state-owned enterprises.³⁰ Thus, the political parties could hardly get rid of the label of corrupt cheaters. The final blow to the overall reputation of the large political parties proved to be the Opposition agreement between the ODS and ČSSD in 1998, which deprived the public of any illusions about the nature of politics. The agreement triggered public protests and mobilized large sections of society. There were initiatives such as “Thank you, go away!” (*Děkujeme, odejděte!*), or “Czech TV –The Public Matter” (*Česká televize, věc veřejná*). In Prague demonstrations were held involving tens of thousands of participants.³¹ Most of the protests and criticism were targeted at the protagonists of the Opposition agreement, embodied by the heads of both parties Václav Klaus (ODS) and Miloš Zeman (ČSSD).

The Czech sociologist, Lukáš Linek, very aptly described the situation which was a consequence of all these events and especially the Opposition agreement. Linek labeled the situation as a “betrayal of dreams”.³² A “betrayal of dreams” turned out to be so deep that social discontent did not improve despite economic recovery and resumption of political rivalry between the ODS and the ČSSD in 2002.

Moreover, the Czech Republic again plunged into an economic crisis that started in 2008 and consequently intensified political problems. A new phenomenon labelled as “Godfathers” (*Kmotři*) appeared and illustrated the misery of the Czech politics and especially greater influence of crime upon political parties, which became increasingly tied to (often suspicious) businesses whose activities above all involved a mafia-style lobbying and corruption (in order to control public sector contracts) than normal entrepreneurship. As a result, suspicious businessmen and lobbyists became patrons (e.g. godfathers) of political parties whose activities were not controlled by grass-roots, but rather by these godfathers seeking their narrow business interests. Most of the godfathers were associated with the ODS. It is not by chance that Mírek Topolánek, the ODS leader between 2002-2010, was first to label these behind-the-scene lobbyists

²⁹ See: Newton Media. Mediasearch, at <<http://mediasearch.newtonmedia.cz.ezproxy.is.cuni.cz/news.php?uqid=B5BEA8D3-1B44-469A-BCFB-0602D3232463&q=blbou+n%E1ladu&qt=&qsmpl=&qsr=&qsc=&qca=>>>.

³⁰ ČT 24, *Exkluzivně ČT24 – Jak dnes vzpomínají na tzv. “sarajevský atentát” ti, kteří byli při tom?*, 28 November 2012, at <<http://m.ceskatelevize.cz/ct24/exkluzivne-na-ct24/205273-jak-dnes-vzpominaji-na-tzv-sarajevsky-atentat-ti-kteri-byli-pri-tom/>>.

³¹ V. Hloušek, L. Kopeček, ‘Krise politiky: odejde zlo s politickými stranami?’ in M. Kubát, T. Lebeda (eds.), *O komparativní politologii...*, p. 29.

³² L. Linek, *Zrazení snu? Struktura a dynamika postojů k politickému režimu a jeho institucím a jejich důsledky*, Praha 2010, *Studie (Sociologické nakladatelství)*, 62.

(exerting great influence upon the party members) as “godfathers” in 2009. The godfathers were especially powerful on the regional level, since regional governments were mostly in the hands of the ODS.³³ The ODS was originally a stable and large political party, whose reputation was hit hard by these close connections with the godfathers and which soon found itself in a crisis. In the last parliamentary elections in 2013 it received 8% of votes³⁴ only.

It appears extremely significant that the crisis of traditional political parties has improved public attitudes towards politics recently. According to a survey from May 2014 the level of respondents satisfied with the political situation in the Czech Republic amounted to 36%. This is the best result in the last eight years. A similar level of satisfaction was reported in 2006.³⁵

3.2 The collapse of the party system

From the mid-1990s until 2013 the Czech party system seemed to be very stable and clear at first glance. The main parties were the left-wing ČSSD and the right-wing ODS. The left part of the political spectrum is completed by the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM). The center of the political spectrum has traditionally been occupied by the Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL). The only unstable segment of the Czech party system were changing right-wing parties located next to the ODS. At the beginning it was the Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA) (in the 1990's), then the Union of Freedom (US) between 1998 and 2006, shortly the Green Party (SZ) (2006-2010) and finally (from 2009) the TOP 09 (the TOP 09 is currently the largest right-wing party). Except for these small center-right parties, the major political parties have enjoyed a long and stable support of voters. The Communists obtained regularly about 15% of votes, ČSSD and ODS 30%, KDU-ČSL 10%, and small right-wing parties about 10%.³⁶

The first significant change appeared in the 2010 elections. Both major parties (the ČSSD and ODS) clearly remained the largest parties, but with a lower support of about 20%. The KDU-ČSL for the first time in history did not get over the 5% legal threshold and did not obtain parliamentary representation in the lower chamber. It was only temporarily though. The party returned to the Chamber of Deputies in 2013. However, the real victors of the 2010 were the new parties: TOP 09, a conservative political party which received 17% and the Public Affairs (VV), a populist party which got 11% of votes.³⁷

³³ V. Hloušek, L. Kopeček, 'Krise politiky...', pp. 30-31.

³⁴ <http://www.volby.cz>.

³⁵ 'STEM: Spokojenost s politikou stoupá, je stejná jako před osmi lety', iDNES.cz, 13 April 2014, at <http://zpravy.idnes.cz/spokojenost-s-politikou-stoupa-je-stejna-jako-pred-osmi-lety-zjistil-stem-1tb-/domaci.aspx?c=A140513_133705_domaci_jpl>.

³⁶ <http://www.volby.cz>.

³⁷ Ibid.

Rapid changes were also obvious in the early 2013 elections. The only party, which kept approximately the same result, was the KSČM (15%). The KDU-ČSL returned to the parliament (7%), TOP 09's support dropped (13%), and the VV (after a series of scandals) lost all their seats in the Chamber of Deputies. Although the ČSSD won the elections, its overall result was poor: 20%. The ODS dramatically dropped to 8%. Moreover, for the first time since 1998, an extreme right-wing party entered the lower chamber – the Dawn of Direct Democracy (ÚPD) with 7%. However, the real winner of the elections was a brand new political movement, ANO 2011, which won 19% and entered the government coalitions with the ČSSD and KDU-ČSL.³⁸

The elections to the European Parliament in 2014 more or less confirmed the evolution of the party system, which started one year earlier. The winning party was the ANO 2011 (16%) with few votes ahead of the TOP 09 (16%), followed by the Social Democrats (14%), the Communists (11%), the KDU-ČSL (10%), the ODS (8%) and the eurosceptical Party of Free Citizens (SSO 5%). However, it should be borne in mind that, in comparison with the elections to the Chamber of Deputies, the EP elections are second-order elections³⁹ and the results were distorted by an extremely low turnout of just 18%.⁴⁰

The changing party system may not be automatically a consequence of the political crisis. Evolution is a natural feature of the politics. Still, the Czech Republic is not the case. The overall climate in the Czech society in terms of its attitudes towards political parties has been rather negative and clearly favorable to an anti-political or anti-political party paradigm. The results of regular sociological surveys conducted by the Public Opinion Research (CVVM) show a strong anti-party sentiment in the Czech Republic. About 80% of people believe that political parties are (1) interested in what people think only shortly before elections, (2) corrupt and (3) interested only in the benefits for their own members.⁴¹ The 2013 results are consistent with previous surveys and the Czech public attitudes have been quite stable in recent years.

The new parties that have entered the parliament in recent years quite precisely reflect these attitudes. Indeed, an attentive observer might find a trend in the Czech party system. Both new political movements the Dawn of Direct Democracy (ÚPD) and ANO 2011 (previously also the VV) have one distinctive feature in common: an anti-corruption and anti-political populism in the sense of “anti-party sentiment”,⁴² which seems quite appealing to wide sections of the electorate.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ K. Reif, H. Schmitt, 'Nine Second-Order National Elections – A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Election Result', *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1980), pp. 3-44, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.1980.tb00737.x>>.

⁴⁰ <http://www.volby.cz>.

⁴¹ N. Čadová, 'Postoje k politickým stranám – září 2013'. CVVM, 16 X 2013, at <<http://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/volby-a-strany/postoje-k-politickym-stranam-zari-2013>>.

⁴² G. Pasquino, 'Populism and Democracy' in D. Albertazzi, D. McDonnell (eds.), *Twenty First Century Populism. The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, Houndmills 2008, p. 21.

The catchwords put forward by Tomio Okamura, the leader of the ÚPD, (apart from a classic extreme right-wing xenophobia against Roma and foreigners) are related to democracy. A weak and corrupt representative democracy should be replaced with a direct democracy: the people shall take decisions in referenda, politicians have to be directly responsible to the people, i.e. the people shall have the right to recall politicians. In general, this is the same political program (but devoid of xenophobia and nationalism) with which the VV entered the parliament in 2010.

Anti-political populism and anti-party rhetoric of the ANO 2011 are a bit different. The ANO 2011 is making a distinction between politicians (incompetent, selfish and often corrupt) and experts/professionals (with opposite characteristics), who can manage the government like a private enterprise. Andrej Babiš, the chairman of the ANO 2011, a Czech businessman and billionaire of Slovak origin, embodies this ideal as a wealthy businessman who manages large companies. He became the deputy prime minister and the Minister of Finance. If he succeeds in keeping the unity of his movement and retains his popularity among voters, he might have a good chance to become the Prime Minister in the future.

The populism of ANO 2011 seems more sophisticated and, at first glance, less radical than that of the ÚPD. However, one may observe the elements of anti-party, anti-parliamentary and even anti-democratic attitudes. The “bad mood” in the Czech society directed against political parties runs so deep that the society is not bothered by the fact that one of the most influential Czech businessmen (among others Andrej Babiš is the owner of a number of media) is the Minister of Finance (sic!). The society does not seem to be aware of the danger of these anti-party and anti-democratic attitudes either.⁴³

Thus, what appears to be the essence of the breakdown of the party system and the crisis of traditional political parties is a crisis of the classic “political” politics. The reason is the above-mentioned weakness of traditional Czech parties and their vulnerability to political corruption. The collapse of the party system is only a part of a wider phenomenon – the crisis of the parliamentary regime.

3.3. The inefficiency of the parliamentary regime

The Czech parliamentary regime functioned well in the first half of the 1990s. The party system appeared stable and effective. It was embodied by the strong ODS, led by Václav Klaus, who was at that time the Prime Minister and a major architect of the economic transformation. Still, the seeming stability of the party system came to an end just a few months after Klaus had published his article mentioned above about the Czech Republic as almost the only workable country in the post-communist Central and Eastern Europe.

Between 1992 and 1996 Klaus led a majority right-wing coalition that carried out a number of reforms. Klaus chaired the cabinet even after the 1996 parliamentary elec-

⁴³ Although ANO 2011 is not an authoritarian movement and Babiš is not a “dictator”.

tions, but only due to the “tolerance” of the Social Democrats, whose MPs left the Chamber of Deputies in order to decrease the quorum required for the vote of confidence. Hence, they helped the Klaus’s minority coalition to win the vote of confidence in July 1996. For the first time a minority cabinet was created. It could rely on the support of only 99 members of 200 MPs. The cabinet remained in power until January 1998.⁴⁴ Hence, a period of unstable cabinets started.

This phenomenon has persisted in the Czech Republic until the present day and has become the most visible feature of the Czech parliamentary system. Why? Czech cabinets are not based on a clear and consistent parliamentary majority: cabinets are often minority governments (1996-2002, 2006-2009), politically inconsistent, i.e. connecting right-wing and left-wing political parties (2002-2006), based on controversial grounds (the Opposition agreement 1998-2002), based on shaky coalitions or they are even dependent on a single MP (e.g. in 2002, 2004, 2005 but later, too). Besides that there were already three technical cabinets (1998, 2009-2010, 2013-2014).⁴⁵ The result of all of this is the chronic inefficiency and instability of cabinets.

Between 1996 and 2014 the Czech Republic had 11 cabinets and 10 Prime Ministers. The average durability of cabinets is about one and a half year.⁴⁶ Two cabinets failed to win confidence of the Chamber of Deputies (2006 and 2013). Between 2006 and 2009 the Chamber of Deputies attempted five times (sic!) to pass vote of no-confidence in a coalition cabinet (led by Mirek Topolánek, ODS).⁴⁷ The left-wing opposition supported by several defections from the government camp eventually brought the cabinet down in March 2009. However, the cabinet was forced to resign during the Czech Presidency of the European Union and the opposition (above all the ČSSD) was unable to compose an alternative cabinet. The presidency was rescued by a technical government sustained by the ODS, ČSSD and SZ.⁴⁸

There are political and constitutional reasons for this instability.⁴⁹ From a political point of view, the problems are as follows. Firstly, there has been an institutional weakness of the political parties, which have – in addition to the above-described vulnerability (e.g. succumbing to corruption) – an extremely small membership base, a poor organization and a lack of discipline. The second problem is a high ideological polarization of the party system, mainly due to the still Marxist-Leninist KSČM having so far zero coalition potential at the national level. The consequence of this is that about 15% of parliamentary seats are blocked by the communists, who are a priori excluded from any coalition. Hence, the ČSSD, which was not established as a moderate successor to the former communist party, but as a renewed party (the ČSSD traces its origins back

⁴⁴ J. Bureš [et al.], *Česká demokracie po roce 1989...*, pp. 395-396.

⁴⁵ M. Kubát, *Současná česká politika. Co s neefektivním režimem?*, Brno 2013, pp. 68-69.

⁴⁶ T. Lebeda, *Malá politologická úvaha...*, p. 12.

⁴⁷ M. Kubát, *Současná česká politika...*, p. 69.

⁴⁸ V. Hloušek, L. Kopeček, *Záchrana státu?...*, pp. 67-86.

⁴⁹ See M. Brunclík, ‘Mezi Berlínem a Paříží. Kam kráčí český politický režim?’ in M. Kubát, T. Lebeda (eds.), *O komparativní politologii...*; M. Kubát, *Současná česká politika...*

to the late 19th century. The party ceased to exist as an independent party in 1948), does not have a natural left-wing coalition partner. Consequently, the ČSSD had to form minority (including the Opposition agreement with the ODS) or ideologically inconsistent cabinets.

As far as the Czech constitution is concerned, it can generally be said that the Czech constitution has some shortcomings. The constitution is to a large extent based on the constitutional traditions of the interwar Czechoslovakia. This finding is particularly relevant for the principle of proportionality and compromise, advocated by president Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk.⁵⁰ Still, Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic are completely different countries, not only in political terms, but also in terms of cultural and ethnic heterogeneity (Czechoslovakia), resp. homogeneity (the Czech Republic). In addition, the standards of democracy and parliamentarianism were then different from today.⁵¹ The inspiration from the interwar constitutional setting resulted in a strong asymmetry between the legislature and the weak executive. The Czech constitution provides for a parliamentary regime, but not for a prime ministerial type of the parliamentary regime. This type of parliamentary regime is completed with a relatively strong president (the heritage of the interwar period).⁵² The constitutional authority of the executive – the government led by the Prime Minister – is comparatively weak and heavily dependent on the Chamber of Deputies. Likewise, the Prime Minister is rather weak because he/she is not the real boss of his/her ministers. Furthermore, the Chamber of Deputies operates under very loose regulations of giving flexibility to individual MPs. In addition, the proportional electoral system works in favor of the large parties, but very moderately, so it does not facilitate the formation of parliamentary majorities. All this leads to a dual fragmentation of the Chamber of Deputies (political and personal). This fragmentation is not conducive to the stability of the government. The second factor acting to the detriment of the government's political position is the president, whose power was in 2013 enhanced by the introduction of direct presidential elections. The president does not hold an executive power and cannot govern because the Czech Republic is not a semi-presidential regime.⁵³ However, the strong legitimacy of the president and the legacy of activist presidents, who occasionally get into conflicts or disputes with the cabinet, in turn weakens the chief executive – the cabinet. It seems as if the Czech Republic experienced a backlash, coming back to the earlier era of transition of democracy in a number of post-communist countries, which were characterized by weak nascent political parties and high expectations of citizens from national leaders

⁵⁰ J. Wintr, *Principy českého ústavního práva*, Plzeň 2013, p. 42, *Vysokoškolské učebnice (Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleš Čeněk)*.

⁵¹ E. Broklová, *Československá demokracie. Politický systém ČSR 1918-1938*, Praha 1992, *Studie (Sociologické nakladatelství)*, 2.

⁵² L. Kopeček, J. Mlejnek, 'Different Confession, Same Sins? Václav Havel and Václav Klaus as Czech Presidents' in: V. Hloušek [et al.], *Presidents above Parties? Presidents in Central and Eastern Europe, their Formal Competencies and Informal Power*, Brno 2013, pp. 33-37, *Monographs Series*, 56.

⁵³ M. Kubát, 'Co je a co není poloprezidentský režim a proč je dobré to vědět nejen v souvislosti s českou politikou' in: M. Kubát, T. Lebeda (eds.), *O komparativní politologii...*, pp. 54-55.

(mostly presidents). As Klaus von Beyme argued: *the greater the number of floating voters and the less consolidated the parties, the more likely it was that a semi-presidential system was chosen. This was even more the case when a charismatic leader was at the head of movement, such as Walesa, Landsbergis and Yeltsin. The semi-presidential system ex post facto has been justified in a "Gaullist" way: when an interest representation is diverse the popularly elected president has to serve as a representative of the "common good"*.⁵⁴

Furthermore, the non-concurrent electoral cycles of the president and the parliament increase the risk of a conflict between the two branches.⁵⁵ *The government branch, which went through the electoral test more recently, is tempted to claim its political superiority and even to demand extra constitutional powers on the grounds that its legitimacy has more recent origins.*⁵⁶ And this is what exactly occurred in 2013, when the first directly elected president Miloš Zeman was elected. Miloš Zeman got immediately in conflict with a right-wing coalition government. In sum, the government is thus situated between two mill wheels – the Chamber of Deputies and the President.

Therefore, the Czech crisis of the parliamentary regime resides not only in the instability of the government, but also – and perhaps above all – in the political and constitutional weakness of the cabinet and the Prime Minister. The consequence of all this is a permanent crisis of the executive, parliamentary ineffectiveness, disillusionment with politics, and breakdown of politics itself.

4. CONCLUSION

The picture of the Czech politics is ambivalent. On the one hand, the Czech Republic is a democratic country with free and fair elections, competitive party system, independent media, etc. Political problems, including the above-mentioned ones, are to some extent similar to the problems of the "old" Western democracies. By the way, the Czech Republic is no longer a post-communist country. In 2005, the Czech political scientist Petr Fiala at a conference organized on the fifteenth anniversary of the breakdown of communism, said that a *Czech society is just as post-communist as Spain or Germany are "post-francoist", or "post-Nazi" [...] The difference between the Czech and Irish society (assessed on the basis of any qualitative or quantitative relevant criteria) is surely not greater than the difference between the Portuguese and Finnish or between British and Italian societies.*⁵⁷

⁵⁴ K. von Beyme, *Parliamentary Democracy. Democratization, Destabilization, Reconsolidation 1789-1999*, Houndmills 2000, p. 13.

⁵⁵ M. Shugart, 'The Electoral Cycle and Institutional Sources of Divided Presidential Government', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 89, No. 2 (1995), pp. 327-343.

⁵⁶ O. Protsyk, 'Prime Ministers' Identity in Semi-Presidential Regimes: Constitutional Norms and Cabinet Formation Outcomes', *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 44, No. 5 (2005), pp. 721-748, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2005.00245.x>>.

⁵⁷ P. Fiala, 'Demokracie v zemích střední Evropy' in L. Mrklas (ed.), *15 let poté. Sborník k patnáctému výročí pádu komunismu v zemích střední a východní Evropy*, Praha 2005, p. 24.

The Czech democracy is highly “consolidated” or “standard” and certainly has had some success. Still, a consolidated or standard democracy can achieve different levels of success. Miroslav Novák (at the same conference) rightly hinted that *the Czech Republic has had a number of consolidated democracies, albeit of a low quality*.⁵⁸ Since 2005 the quality of the Czech democracy has not improved; quite on the contrary.

Probably the most serious problem of Czech politics is a crisis of political partisanship in terms of weakness and instability of political parties and the party system as well as in terms of distrust of political parties as corner stones of democracy. The Czech Republic does not meet any of the dimensions of the party system institutionalization as suggested by Scott Mainwaring and Torcal Marciano:⁵⁹ 1) the Czech party system does not show stable patterns of party competition, especially in terms of volatility, 2) the interconnection between political parties and society is getting weaker. Political parties are not sufficiently rooted in society and 3) they are not perceived as a necessary part of democracy, 4) personalization of partisanship is increasingly more relevant. Many of the parties are in fact one-man parties which seek the leader's interests or interests of a small group within the party.

The crisis of political partisanship together with the defective constitutional framework are the causes of the weakness and ineffectiveness of the parliamentary regime. The ineffectiveness of the parliamentary regime is one of the causes of citizens' dissatisfaction with politics. The Czech Republic finds itself in a vicious cycle. The situation is obviously not completely hopeless. The problems of Czech politics can be mitigated by appropriate constitutional engineering, as some Czech political scientists repeatedly point out and propose concrete solutions to these problems.⁶⁰ A well-functioning parliamentary system could forestall some pathological phenomena (political corruption) and in turn increase people's confidence in democratic politics.

Politicians, however, remain deaf and blind. The Czech experience has shown that the politicians prefer populist solutions that deteriorate the situation. The best example is the completely inappropriate introduction of the direct presidential elections to the Czech parliamentary system in 2012. Instead of improving the regime, the amendment has nearly destroyed it. In contrast, the appropriate proposals to make a Czech parliamentary regime better through for example introducing the constructive vote of non-confidence or to amend the electoral system remain on paper only.

⁵⁸ M. Novák, 'Postkomunistická nebo standardní? Naše demokracie 15 let poté' in L. Mrklas (ed.), *15 let poté...*, p. 33.

⁵⁹ S. Mainwaring, M. Torcal, 'Party System Institutionalization and Party System Theory after the Third Wave of Democratization' in R. Katz, W. Crotty (eds.), *Handbook of Party Politics*, London 2006, pp. 204-227.

⁶⁰ M. Novák, 'Prezident, premiér a snahy o posílení výkonné moci' in V. Šimíček (ed.), *Postavení prezidenta v ústavním systému České republiky*, Praha 2008, pp. 9-15, *Ediční řada Sborníky*, 34; M. Brunclík, 'Konstruktivní vyslovení nedůvěry jako nástroj k posílení pozice vlády vůči parlamentu', *Středoevropské politické studie*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (2012), pp. 501-527; P. Fiala, *Politika, jaká nemá být*, Praha 2010; V. Hloušek, L. Kopeček, *Záchrana státu?...;* M. Kubát, *Současná česká politika...*

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