

4 The Czech Republic

Critical democrats and the persistence of democratic values

*Zdenka Mansfeldová*¹

Introduction

The current democratic regime in the Czech Republic did not develop in the classic "bottom-up" way in which the pre-war democracy of the Czechoslovak Republic emerged. The latter was a product of anti-feudal protest and it institutionalized democratic impulses from within an already existing civil society. Although the current democratic regime resulted from a revolt against communist rule, its institutional "skeleton" was established from above. The institutions were structured and established *a priori* instead of expressing and codifying democratization *a posteriori*.

However, this institutional skeleton has been in place for years, and seems to have contributed to consolidation of Czech democracy (Merkel 1996a, b; Lauth and Merkel 1997). After the consolidation of the institutional setting, delayed by the split of Czechoslovakia in 1993, a party system developed comparatively fast and served as a structure of interest mediation and political representation. Democracy is increasingly accepted as a regime able to produce and channel dynamic change. The years of stability and "crystal changelessness" (Havel 1989) are over.

Democracy as a political regime has no serious contenders today. Still, the skeleton lacks more flesh, i.e. a functioning civil society. The existing civil society of the pre-war Czechoslovak Republic was a complex network of various voluntary associations which was destroyed first during Nazi occupation and then through communist totalitarianism. However, a democratic community cannot be established from above, and the existing associations and interest organizations do not yet constitute a fully functioning civil society (Brokl 1997). This may explain a number of problems encountered in Czech democracy.

Low levels of participation in both parties and voluntary associations may result in policies that lack responsiveness to the interests of people and concentrate on macro-problems instead. Additionally, absent civic participation may promote the development of a "sclerotic" bureaucracy. Since the structure of interests that should be represented via the party system is not yet fully developed, politicians tend to waste their energy in

petty struggles that confuse both the public and commentators in the media. Altogether, democracy in the Czech Republic seems to function on the formal level, while it suffers from a deficient political culture. The big business of politics is hard to handle for a young democratic regime that is not firmly rooted in national and European values and still struggles to find its own identity.

In the following sections we describe support for democracy and autocracy, political involvement, confidence in institutions, as well as attitudes relevant to an assessment of the ethos of political and civil community. In addition, the analysis allows us to inspect two hypotheses. The first is that Czech society maintained democratic values in spite of the communist regime and embraces democracy as an ideal form of government. From this follows the second proposition that efforts of the communist regime to socialize the older generation into an autocratic mind set were not successful in the Czech Republic.

Support of democracy and autocracy

Support of democracy and autocracy is measured by an index that combines the respondents' attitudes toward democratic and autocratic rule. With this index we distinguish strong democrats, weak democrats, autocrats and undecided citizens. Almost 90 percent of Czech respondents belong to the category of democrats. A third of them represent "strong democrats" (31 percent) who hold strong positive views about democracy, while 58 percent of citizens belong to the group of "weak democrats," who accept the democratic political system, with some reservations. An altogether autocratic orientation is expressed by 4.3 percent of the respondents, and 6 percent remain undecided.

Though citizens cherish the idea and values of democracy, they are rather critical of the way the political system currently works. Only a minority of (strong as well as weak) democrats considers the performance of the current regime as very good. The group where an autocratic orientation prevails exhibits the most critical attitude toward the performance of the political system. The group of strong democrats is least critical, while weak democrats, as indicated in Table 4.1, are less satisfied with the current political system.

Citizens aged 40 years and older are more likely to be found among democrats than younger respondents. In the group of strong democrats, 18.9 percent are forty-to-fifty years of age, 21.8 percent are between 50 and 60 years old and 29.5 percent citizens are over sixty years of age. In the group of weak democrats, the situation is very similar (20.1 percent, 20.5 percent and 23.8 percent, respectively).

With regard to party-political orientation, strong democrats are located predominantly in the center and right part of the political landscape. Weak democrats occupy the center-left. The group of autocrats is mar-

Table 4.1 Satisfaction with the performance of the current political system, 1998, %, Czech Republic

	<i>The political system works</i>				
	<i>Very poorly</i>				<i>Very well</i>
Strong democrats	13.2	19.0	42.3	23.8	1.7
Weak democrats	19.3	34.6	32.6	12.3	1.7
Autocrats	36.5	34.6	21.2	5.8	1.9
Undecided	33.3	31.3	22.9	10.4	2.1

ginal (4.1 percent). They are mostly situated in the center and the left part of the political spectrum.

The stable prevalence of democratic orientations among the respondents, a comparatively even distribution in the political spectrum with centrist accents and a small representation in the extreme left and right, as well as the critical and informed attitude of citizens with regard to the performance of the current political system, gives an impression of a civil society in which democratic values are safely rooted.

Delving into views on democracy in greater detail, we see that Czech respondents clearly favored democracy (86.4 percent) over other possible regimes. Only 8.8 percent assessed democracy negatively (Table 4.2). Another 4.8 percent were not able to answer the question.

Similarly, a majority (84.8 percent) agreed with the statement, "Democracy may have problems but it's better than any other form of government," while only 8.5 percent disagreed. "A strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections" was disapproved of by 78.4 percent of the respondents; only 14.8 percent supported this idea. Yet these 15 percent will be misunderstood if plainly classified as "autocrats." The survey was conducted shortly after the end of the Klaus government, which was heavily criticized for its ultra-liberal policies that relied on a kind of "invisible hand." In the media, the "rule of a strong hand" was debated as a way out of the crisis and as an alternative to the Klaus style of

Table 4.2 Attitudes toward democracy, 1998, %, Czech Republic

	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Fairly good</i>	<i>Fairly poor</i>	<i>Very poor</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
Having a democratic political system	37.0	48.7	7.1	1.7	4.8
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Democracy may have problems but it's better than any other form of government	32.4	52.4	6.9	1.6	6.7

governance. However, this alternative was never meant to be beyond parliamentary control. It might well be the case that at least some of the respondents who supported a strong leader in the World Values questionnaire did not realize that they expressed a preference for autocratic rule.

The army ruled was rejected by a majority of 91.4 percent of the respondents, while only 4.9 percent consider the armed forces as appropriate rulers (see Table 4.3).

An interpretation of the respondents' assessments of the efficiency of a democratic regime must distinguish the current democratic regime in the Czech Republic with its various forms during the last eight years from the ideal, the theoretical concept of democracy. However, respondents do not necessarily do the same when they evaluate democracy. They judge the regime on the basis of their experience; therefore, skeptical assessments do not automatically indicate autocratic attitudes (see Table 4.4).

A majority of the respondents (54.4 percent) does not agree with the statement, "In democracy the economic system runs badly," while 37.2 percent agreed; 8.5 percent remained indecisive. Those belonging to the thirty-seventh percentile group may have been individuals who have endured economic hardships over the last eight years due to the democratic regime. That said, these hardships derive from an industrial structure which is a product of Austro-Hungarian times. No regime has ever solved this problem, so democracy is no exception here.

Table 4.3 Autocratic attitudes, 1998, %, Czech Republic

	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Fairly good</i>	<i>Fairly poor</i>	<i>Very poor</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
Having a strong leader who would not have to respect parliament and elections	3.8	11.0	29.7	48.7	6.7
Having the armed forces rule	1.0	3.9	16.6	74.8	3.7

Table 4.4 Effectiveness of democratic rule, 1998, %, Czech Republic

	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
In democracy, the economic system runs poorly	10.1	27.1	45.2	9.2	8.5
Democracies are indecisive and there is too much squabbling	10.2	43.4	34.0	5.3	7.1
Democracies are no good at maintaining order	7.7	32.8	43.9	8.3	7.4

Democracy was assessed as an "indecisive system which has too much squabbling" by 53.6 percent of the respondents, while 39.3 percent disagreed with this statement. These respondents refer to the current political situation in the Czech Republic, rather than to a generally negative attitude toward democracy. This is also indicated by the large share of respondents who agree that "Democracy may have problems but it's better than other forms of government" (85 percent), and the disagreement of 52 percent with the statement that "Democracies aren't good at maintaining order."

Political involvement

Democratic politics rest on citizen participation. How involved is the Czech populace in politics? What about political interest, electoral and other types of political participation, as well as membership in voluntary organizations?

Interest in politics

Among such activities as with the family, friends, at leisure time and work, politics is least important for the majority of respondents. However, religion may be even less important than politics. Subjective importance of politics reached its peak in the period after the revolution of 1990. Since then it decreased from 37.4 percent to 25.8 percent. At the time of the first free elections in 1990, almost every citizen was interested in politics (very interested: 72.5 percent; interested: 27.5 percent). In 1998, political interest declined to a level of 55.9 percent (very interested: 14.6 percent; interested: 41.3 percent). There are at least two possible explanations for the downward trend. First, it could be interpreted as a process of normalization. The extraordinary events of the revolution attracted a high level of attention, while mastering the problems of day-to-day life thereafter directed the attention of citizens to other spheres of life. Second, decline of political interest may have been caused by what was perceived "dirty" or "bad" politics. In this case, it is plausible to assume that people turned their back on political matters.

Political participation

Two types of political participation are considered here: electoral participation and non-institutionalized modes of participation such as signing petitions, lawful demonstrations, boycotts and the like.

The most widespread type of political participation is voting in general elections. Since the first free elections in 1990, voting levels decreased continuously from 96.8 percent in the elections to the Czech Parliament in 1990 to 74 percent in the 1998 elections. Apparently voting behavior

has also "normalized." The reported preferences of voters surveyed regularly in opinion polls roughly correspond with the current representation of parties in parliament. In future elections, the number of parties in parliament will probably increase with the participation of the Green Party and the so-called Movement of Independents. The Communist Party and the right-wing Republicans are the most extremist political factions and they are rejected by a large majority of citizens.

Apart from voting, there are many other ways to participate in politics and public matters. When it comes to non-institutionalized modes of participation, signing petitions, participating in lawful demonstrations or boycotts, political participation is quite popular. The same is not true for activities such as participating in wild-cat strikes or occupying buildings. In these cases, the Czech population remains rather passive. These findings may explain why there have been comparatively few demonstrations or strikes in the country, despite of the fact that opinion polls indicate public dissatisfaction with the current political and/or economic situation.²

The transformation of the Czech Republic also involved a revival of civic associations within a renewed legislative framework. Citizens' interests demanded new intermediating associations. Apart from organizations that existed before the regime change, many new organizations were established.³ The number of organizations does not indicate the level of active involvement of citizens. However, the associational landscape became more pluralized after 1990, and thus, the chances to participate increased.

Yet membership in voluntary organizations seems to be rather low.⁴ The most popular associations are sport and leisure-time related. Membership in labor unions remains important, although their membership decreased.⁵ A comparatively large share of the active labor force is organized in labor unions (roughly 40 percent). After the initial loss of prestige in 1990, the public image of labor unions gradually improved. This may also be promoted by increased cooperation between labor unions and the government.

Table 4.5 Membership in voluntary organizations, 1998, %, Czech Republic

Organization		Active member	Inactive member	Not a member
Political organizations	Political party	2.5	4.2	92.9
	Labor union	3.2	12.4	81.4
	Professional organization	3.6	5.3	90.5
	Church or religious organizations	4.7	11.9	83.2
	Environmental organizations	1.5	3.4	94.6
Societal organizations	Charitable organizations	1.1	2.6	95.7
	Art, music and education organizations	3.4	5.5	95.7
	Sport and recreation organizations	11.2	12.4	76.1
	Any other voluntary organization	7.8	9.5	82.0

The churches and religious organizations occupy the third rank with regard to level of civic membership. Although the newly achieved religious freedom did not lead to a massive increase in formal church membership, the willingness to work for charities (which have resumed their activities after 40 years of suppression) went up.

Confidence in institutions

To properly function, a democratic government and an open, pluralistic society need institutions that give citizens confidence to play by the rules. In this section we will present data about subjective confidence in government institutions, in the legal system and administration, in societal organizations and the mass media. The interpretation takes into account that low levels of confidence may reflect the attitude of a critical citizen. In addition, it is well known that most respondents have a tendency not to react to a particular institution as an abstract, generalized concept. Rather, they also consider the people who visibly represent these institutions. Whenever data from the 1990 World Values Survey are available in addition to the 1998 survey they will be compared.

Confidence in institutions of government

Institutions of government such as political parties or the parliament are part of an ongoing process of political competition which is often evaluated negatively by the citizen. Harmony and compromise are preferred over struggle and debate.

This attitude shows most clearly with respect to political parties. Barely 14.3 percent of respondents report confidence in political parties (a great deal of confidence: 0.8 percent; quite a lot of confidence: 13.5 percent), 81.8 percent do not trust political parties (not very much confidence: 54.2 percent; no confidence at all: 27.6 percent). Most respondents have an opinion; the proportion of respondents who say "don't know" is rather low (3.8 percent). These results may also be influenced by former President Havel who openly expressed that he favored political and social movements over political parties. Since he enjoyed high esteem by the public, his assessment of the emerging political parties may well have been influential.

If we compare confidence in political parties and confidence in the ecology movement and the women's movement, this expectation seems to be supported. The ecology movement attracted public attention from 1995 when – with the help of foreign allies – it started to organize a number of protest activities. The protest was directed against environmental destruction and pollution by large industrial plants, as well as against the government, in the conflict over the completion of an atomic power plant in Temelín. Roughly half of the respondents (52.6 percent)

trusted Czech ecological movements: 46.9 percent expressed quite a lot of confidence, while 39 percent of the respondents did not trust these movements and 31 percent expressed not very much confidence.

Until recently, the women's movement has not been very well established in the Czech Republic. This may be explained in part by the fact that, in most instances, gender equality was formally achieved early on. In the Czech Republic, female labor-market participation has been at relatively high levels since World War II. Female suffrage was achieved as early as 1920. The communist party featured women's emancipation among their most important ideological topoi and thus won a high share of the female electorate in the last semi-free elections in 1946. Additionally, the communist regime institutionalized equal representation of women in political and societal organizations. Thus, female interests were, and are at least rhetorically, addressed in Czech society, and equality between men and women has been legally guaranteed for decades. Czech women are constantly told that their social surrounding is not gendered at all. This particular feature of post-communist societies makes it difficult to address women's problems for what they are, since the ideological denial of gender inequalities in a (post)socialist society systematically erased the need to think of such inequalities' existence. In 1998, 32.5 percent of the respondents expressed confidence in the women's movement. Of this group, 30.2 percent expressed quite a lot of confidence. Approximately the same share, 35.1 percent expressed not very much confidence, and 14.1 percent reported having no confidence at all. The percentage of respondents who "don't know" how to evaluate "women's movements" (21 percent) is very high. This points to the fact that the attitude object is not very familiar and many respondents may express an attitude that is not firmly crystallized. It is also possible that they rather refer a movement they know to exist in other countries. Nevertheless, confidence levels for these social movements are very much higher than confidence levels for political parties.

The parliament is the core institution of representative democracy. In 1990, 44 percent of respondents said that they had confidence in parliament. This figure dropped to 19.8 percent in 1998. Data provided by the Czech Institute for Public Opinion Polls (IVVM) indicate similar trends. The proportion of respondents having confidence in the parliament remained at the same high level until January 1992, with a slight decrease shortly before the summer elections in 1992 (40 percent). After the elections this percentage started to decrease until it reached the low level of 1998.

Finally, confidence levels are measured for two supra-national institutions of government, the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN). Both institutions are not part of the day-to-day Czech political competition, and it is expected that confidence levels are relatively high.

In 1990, 64.5 percent respondents reported having confidence in the

European Union; 33.9 percent did not. In 1998, this proportion had dropped to 43.7 percent, while 46.1 percent had no confidence. Apparently, in 1990, the vision of a fast and unconditional accession of the Czech Republic was widely shared and the public image of the EU was very positive. In 1998, the situation had changed. Czech citizens had realized that EU interests were not always compatible with their own, and that most of the time it was up to the Czech Republic to adapt. As a consequence, the proportion of indecisive citizens increased. In 1990, 11.4 percent of the respondents reported having a great deal of confidence in the EU, 6.4 percent indicated that they have no confidence at all and only 1 percent answered "I don't know." In 1998, 13.6 percent of respondents reported having no confidence at all, only 5.2 percent indicated a great deal of confidence and 10.1 percent answered "I don't know." The increasing share of "don't know" responses may signify that many citizens simply could not keep up with details of accession negotiations. In addition, some important political actors were Euro-skeptics and commented on EU-Czech relations accordingly.

The level of confidence in the United Nations is still higher than the level of confidence in the EU. In 1998, 56.5 percent of respondents had confidence in the UN and 34 percent did not. A relatively high proportion of respondents expressed a great deal of confidence (9.2 percent) and roughly the same percentage (8.9 percent) indicated that they had no confidence at all. The proportion of those who said they "don't know" (9.6 percent) seems to indicate a lack of information.

To sum up, in 1998 the two most important government institutions – political parties and the parliament – enjoyed the lowest levels of public confidence. The nature of day-to-day political conflict as well as the temptation to sell favors may explain this situation. Less well-known political actors such as the ecology movement or the women's movement, on the other hand, are not much affected. The same is true for the EU and the UN as supra-national institutions. However, as exemplified by the EU, it is important to note that this situation may change if such an institution becomes important for decisions that affect citizens' lives directly.

Confidence in the legal system, the administration and the army

By definition, the legal system, the various branches of the administration and the army should not be partial, nor part of political competition. Thus, it is generally expected that confidence levels in these institutions should be relatively high.

Thus, it is a matter of concern that the level of confidence in the legal system decreased from 1990 to 1998. In 1990, 42.9 percent of the respondents expressed a high level of confidence in the legal system, while 57 percent did not. In 1998, the share of respondents who were confident

that the legal system acted as it should decreased by 14.5 percentage points to 28.4 percent. There are a range of possible reasons why this loss of confidence in the legal system occurred. First of all, the new legal system could not be established without employing personnel who had already served the "old" system and who were not properly retrained. Second, the Czech legal system had to be adapted to the standards of the European Union. This demanding process continues to cause problems. In addition, restitution, privatization and related cases did not go undisputed. Illegal economic practices in particular, unknown under the communist regime, evolved. No legal rules existed for offences of this type at the time. They had to be enacted by the legislature and, in the meantime, the authorities could not deal adequately with this new type of crime.

In contrast, the administration as well as the army gained more confidence in the eyes of Czech citizens. Levels of confidence in the civil service increased between 1990 and 1998, from 32.4 percent to 38.3 percent. Low levels of trust were expressed by 67.4 percent of respondents in 1990. In 1998, their share decreased to 59.5 percent. There is reason to believe that this positive development reflects the improvement of the quality of public services in general, and on the communal level in particular.

Confidence in the police increased most, gaining 11.4 percent points in the period between 1990 (32.0 percent) and 1998 (43.4 percent). Levels of confidence are well above average, despite the police's negative image in the media. After 1990, the Czech police was less associated with the old regime. And, apparently, Czech citizens seem to honor the effort of the police to fight crime, and the high price they pay for it.

The army, too, has a negative image in the media. Despite that, levels of confidence increased between 1990 and 1998. In 1990, 38.9 percent of the respondents expressed rather high levels of confidence, and in 1998 this share increased to 42.2 percent. In 1990, 61 percent of the respondents expressed no or low levels of trust, while this proportion decreased to 54 percent in 1998. As in the case of the police, the "communist factor" and the "human factor" may have played a role. First, leadership structures were changed as a consequence of the democratic revolution. This was welcomed by most Czechs. Second, it was recognized that soldiers tried to perform even if they had to cope with outdated military technology. Many incidents caused by this state of affairs were met with public sympathy.

Thus, with the exception of the legal system, Czech institutions regulating everyday life or offering the same conditions for all young Czechs such as the army have slowly but steadily made inroads into public opinion. This gives reason to be optimistic about Czechs' support of representative democracy.

Confidence in security organizations

Confidence evaluations are available for three societal organizations: the churches, labor unions and major companies.

The churches enjoyed a high level of confidence in 1990 (43.1 percent). However, this level of confidence decreased to 31.7 percent in 1998. The size of the group having no confidence in churches, on the other hand, increased from 56.7 percent in 1990 to 63.4 percent in 1998. In the Czech Republic, the term "church" is primarily understood as "Catholic Church" since the size of other denominations has declined drastically. The Protestants are likely to disappear in a secularized society and so are their churches. After the fall of communism, the Catholic Church had won public support because it had openly expressed dissent with the communist regime. These sympathies vanished quickly when the restitution of former church property became a main issue on the church's agenda. Czech Catholicism turned back to its traditional pattern, i.e. liturgy rather than ecumenism. Obviously, this development has not contributed to increasing levels of public confidence.

Between 1990 and 1998, the level of confidence in labor unions increased from 26.7 percent to 37.4 percent. The size of the group with no confidence in labor unions decreased from 72.8 percent in 1990 to 51.6 percent in 1998. Although roughly half of the respondents still mistrust labor unions, the 10 percent-point increase from 1990 to 1998 must be regarded as a success. Labor unions were not popular after 1990 because of their close ties to the old regime. Their task had been to organize labor to conform to the rules of the communist regime. Labor unions had a role in organizing vacations and leisure time; however, they were usually instruments of control and suppression. They definitely did not do what unions are supposed to do, namely, represent the interest of workers against the interest of capital. The increasing level of confidence in labor unions indicates that this picture is changing. However, under the condition of privatization and a difficult economic situation in general, there is not too much space for the labor unions to maneuver and strike deals which bring advantages to their members. And it does not help either when some employers try to intimidate union representatives within their companies.

In 1998, confidence in major companies shows roughly the same level as confidence in churches or labor unions. Thus, about a third of Czech citizens have confidence in these organizations, while more than half of the populace does not. Several privatization scandals and the fear of takeovers by multinational companies have influenced the negative public image of major companies. Examples of successful multinational investments with positive side effects for local communities have not yet served to change this image. Thus, 55.5 percent of the respondents have no confidence in major companies and only 34.1 percent have such confidence.

2.3 percent reported a great deal of confidence, while 13.6 percent had no confidence at all. Respondents who did not know how to answer the question numbered 10 percent.

Confidence in the mass media

Mass media have become more and more important in the process of political communication. They are by far the main source of information about the world of politics. Investigative journalism helps to keep politicians honest by pointing to misbehavior and corruption. Do Czech citizens consider information transmitted by the mass media reliable? The answer to this question is not easy. On the one hand, confidence levels for both the press and television (TV) are above average. On the other hand, there is still a majority of Czechs who are more cautious.

In 1998, 55.5 percent of the respondents have no confidence in the press. Conflicts between top politicians and journalists lead to this negative public image of the press. It could be shown that journalists had distorted what politicians wanted to communicate. The overall picture is that 42.6 percent of citizens do have confidence in the press. Of these, 41.1 percent report having quite a lot of confidence, while 10.6 percent have no confidence at all. This is mainly due to the many true stories about fraud in the privatization processes, machinations on the political stage and other "watchdog" reports. The share of respondents who report being confident in television is slightly higher. In addition to the general TV stations, there are several TV programs that specialize in political information and current political events. The higher confidence levels in TV media as compared to print media confirms the expectation that people tend to believe what they can see. There are still 46.9 percent of respondents who report having no confidence in TV. Of these, however, only 7.6 percent say that they have no confidence at all.

Considering all 15 institutions for which information was available in 1998, the average confidence level is 37.6 percent. Above-average confidence levels prevailed with respect to the supra-national organizations (UN, EU) and the mass media (press, TV), but also with regard to such institutions as the civil service, the police and the army. At the low end of the confidence spectrum were political parties, the parliament and the legal system as well as societal institutions such as churches, major companies and labor unions. For a smaller number of institutions, confidence levels can be compared across time. Here we can observe that confidence has declined since 1990 for the parliament, the legal system, the churches and the EU. Confidence levels have increased for labor unions and, most remarkably, for order institutions such as the civil service, the police and the army – institutions which are of high importance for the life of ordinary citizens.

The ethos of political, economic and civil community

Tolerance

Tolerance and respect for fellow citizens are regarded as important characteristics for democratic citizens. In the set of qualities children should be taught in their families, tolerance and respect rank fourth after good conduct, diligence and a sense of responsibility. A large proportion of respondents stress the importance of good interpersonal relations. For a majority, good interpersonal relations are a precondition for understanding the "other" (60.7 percent), not just effective self-assertion.

Czech society, rather homogenous and isolated until 1990, has become more and more differentiated, with regard to income, lifestyle and social status, as well as to the ethnic origin of its residents. Czech citizens were not familiar with migration before 1990, and are only gradually gaining experiences with migrants who entered the country for better job opportunities or safety from conflicts in their home countries. Apart from migration, many Czech citizens have also experienced a new societal openness with regard to formerly taboo topics, such as divorce, abortion or homosexuality. Furthermore, minorities have begun to articulate interests which are increasingly recognized by legislative measures. There has also been a renaissance of traditional values which can, at least in part, be attributed to a reaction to new social developments that are sometimes experienced as frightening.

Compared to 1990, fewer people would mind having a neighbor who belongs to another ethnic group, despite a general tendency toward xenophobia in the Czech society. In addition, respondents express higher levels of tolerance toward homosexuality than they did in 1990. While the elderly and religious believers are less tolerant on this matter, a majority would at least not mind having a homosexual neighbor. Maybe public debates on homosexual partnerships and their legal recognition have contributed to this comparatively liberal attitude toward homosexuality.

The low – and, compared to 1990, declining – levels of tolerance toward abortion and divorce might be a result of the above-mentioned renaissance of traditional values. Divorce was a subject in debates related to the amendment of family law and a partial easing of divorce. Abortion has never been politicized in Czech politics as has been the case, for example, in Poland (Kitschelt *et al.* 1999). Various anti-abortion movements exist, but no political party attempts to mobilize on this issue. Again, the level of tolerance toward abortion decreases with age. The younger generation (18–25 years) either indicate complete refusal or a high level of tolerance.

Table 4.6 Tolerance, 1998, %, Czech Republic

	Homosexuality		Abortion		Divorce	
	1990	1998	1990	1998	1990	1998
Never justifiable	32.6	9.2	7.7	8.3	6.8	3.7
2	4.3	3.7	2.9	4.9	2.2	1.7
3	5.9	3.1	7.1	4.9	6.0	5.2
4	3.8	2.5	3.9	5.1	5.1	4.2
5	4.4	10.8	6.4	16.7	6.1	18.3
6	12.2	7.1	21.2	8.9	29.9	10.9
7	5.4	6.8	6.9	8.5	7.7	9.1
8	6.9	6.9	14.2	15.8	14.5	16.0
9	8.9	8.9	13.5	7.9	9.4	8.9
Always justifiable	15.5	15.5	15.8	15.1	12.1	18.5
D.K., N.A.	0.1	0.1	0.3	4.0	0.1	3.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Ethics of individual achievement

In 1990, 51.7 percent of the respondents agreed that people should take more responsibility for themselves, while 47.6 percent wanted to delegate this task to the state. Probably those who supported self-responsibility in 1990 expected increasing levels of individual welfare under the condition of a free-market economy. They anticipated better rewards for their work, reflecting their performance on the job and fewer taxes meant for redistribution. In 1998, however, only 29.7 percent of Czech citizens preferred self-responsibility to a paternalistic welfare state, while 57 percent called for a stronger involvement of the state.

Before we draw any conclusion from these findings, we have to take into account the political context at the time of the fieldwork. The World Values Survey 1998 was conducted in the Czech Republic in autumn 1998. At the end of 1997, the neo-liberal Klaus government was overthrown and early elections were held in the middle of 1998. However, even after the new elections, the waves of criticism did not die down. They were directed against a type of politics that regarded any kind of regulation of economic and social policy as a "communist" enterprise. Thus, results do not necessarily reflect a desire to return to a command economy. Rather, they indicate a rejection of ultra-liberal laissez-faire politics. This interpretation is also supported by the electoral results, which gave the liberal ODS another chance. Apparently, Czech citizens do not disapprove of liberalism in general, but of the rigid forms implemented by the Klaus government.

Private ownership, state ownership and management of industry

In 1990, 72 percent of the respondents supported private ownership of companies, while 27.4 percent preferred state-run companies. Eight years later, support of private ownership declined by 19 percent points (to 53 percent). Now, 41.5 percent of citizens preferred state ownership. These figures express the disillusion prevalent in 1998 regarding the success of economic restructuring measures and its opportunity costs for the individual employee.

Again, these findings must be interpreted in the light of a type of "Manchester capitalism" that prevailed in many post-communist countries after 1990. A small group of businessmen made their fortunes under the conditions of a weak state and a judiciary not yet fully in place. They were less successful in accumulating capital, and they often operated at high risk, sometimes illegally. Their gains were often achieved at the expense of the Czech population. In 1998, several spectacular cases of illegal (or quasi-legal) business practices became public and highlighted the inability (or unwillingness) of the Klaus government to regulate the Czech economy in a decent manner. Therefore our findings can be interpreted first and foremost as a call for a government that implements a legislative framework and strict rules for business activities, rather than as a desire to go back to a socialist economy.

Who should be in charge of management decisions in a company? A total of 42.7 percent of the respondents preferred a cooperation of owners and employees in 1990, while 34 percent deemed the single responsibility of the owners adequate. In 1998, this gap narrowed. A decisive role for the owners is supported by 39 percent of the respondents, while cooperation with employees is the first choice of 35.5 percent. Employees' ownership of enterprises and the election of managers by the employees were favored by 15.6 percent in 1990, while this share decreased to 6 percent in 1998. State interventions were favored by 7 percent of the respondents in 1990; their share increased slightly to 11.7 percent in 1998. The proportion of respondents unable to express a preference also increased, from 0.6 percent in 1990 to almost 8 percent in 1998.

Again, these findings do not necessarily reflect communist nostalgia. They may instead signify a reaction to problematic side effects of less successful cases of privatization, e.g. in public transport and healthcare. The declining popularity of employees' ownership from 1990 to 1998 indicates a rejection of the alternative of a "third way," after eight years of experience with a free-market economy.

Solidarity with the poor

Social and political changes during the last ten years led to increasing inequality among Czech citizens, i.e. to unemployment, an increasing

number of homeless people and poverty. Additionally, poverty as a global phenomenon with local consequences came into focus when migration rates increased. Solidarity was a popular element of the agenda of the communist regime and a central ingredient of the "new socialist personality." Respondents' attitudes reflect both this heritage as well as experience with new types of poverty. Causes of poverty in the Czech Republic are mostly ascribed to socio-economic injustice (51.4 percent), rather than to individual failure. Citizens judge the chance to escape from poverty as rather small and express a conviction that governments should take more responsibility: 62.9 percent of the respondents think that the government provides too little help for the poor. Respondents express a similar opinion with regard to helping economically less-developed countries and their governments (57.5 percent). This attitude changes when it comes to immigration. In a situation of increasing unemployment⁶ many Czechs feel threatened by immigrants. Immigration is mainly related to the labor market and perceived as making it harder to find a job. This is reflected in the attitude of 91.1 percent of the respondents that employers should hire fellow citizens rather than immigrants if unemployment is high.

Conclusion

The preceding analysis has produced mixed results. On the one hand, it has shown that an overwhelming majority of Czechs prefer democracy as the ideal form of government. It can also be demonstrated that confidence in a number of important order institutions has grown since 1990. In addition, attitudes which at first glance might signal a return to communist interventionism could also be interpreted as a reaction to extreme neo-liberal policies. Thus, in these respects the democratic skeleton seems to have gained more and more support from the Czech populace. Citizens were also able to distinguish between democracy as a form of government and the way the democratic process unfolded in their country. While supportive of the former, they were rather critical of the latter. Thus, those classified as "weak democrats" often turn out to be "critical democrats" who are aware of the deficits of contemporary Czech democracy. On the other hand, there are reasons to doubt whether representative democracy can persist in the long run with such extremely low levels of confidence in political parties, the parliament and the legal system. Additional analyses of the reasons for this situation are badly needed.

Our expectations regarding the maintenance of a belief in democracy as an ideal even under the conditions of the communist regime, as well as our expectation concerning the socialization hypothesis, are not contradicted. Additional evidence on this is presented in a 1968 study of attitudes of Czech citizens (Brokl *et al.* 1999). We do not find significant differences in the level of support for democracy as an ideal between the young generation on the one hand and the old generation on the other.

During ten years of transformation, citizens may have lost their illusions and, by now, are ready for a realistic assessment of political, social and economic developments. However, even if the pace of societal and political change enforces adaptations that are sometimes difficult to bear, an increasing proportion of Czech citizens consider themselves to be very happy or generally happy (82.7 percent in 1998 compared to 65.7 percent in 1990). In the last decade we also observed an increasing number of Czechs who are satisfied with their own life. The group of people who are convinced that they have influence over their lives and feel free to make their own decisions has also increased. This evaluation of the current life situation may turn out to be a good precondition for the development of civil society and democracy.

Notes

- 1 I would like to thank my colleague Lubomír Brokl, who was involved in the first version of this chapter, for his further help and valuable comments.
- 2 Until the end of 1996, strikes occurred very sporadically – indeed, their number was almost negligible. During the first half of 1997, strike activities increased (a general strike at the Railway Company, the strike of the employees of nurseries, basic and secondary schools). However, the amount of time spent on strike activities remains insignificant.
- 3 According to official statistics the largest increase in the number of civic associations and organizations occurred between 1991–3 (Kroupa and Mansfeldová 1997).
- 4 According to the Czech surveys, 24.6 percent of citizens in 1993, 37.3 percent in 1995 and 42.9 percent in 1996 reported to be members in voluntary organizations (Kroupa and Mansfeldová 1997).
- 5 In 1998, labor unions had about 1.4 million members.
- 6 In the Czech Republic, unemployment rates were 3.5 percent in 1996, 7.5 percent in 1998 and reached over 10 percent in the end of 2002.

References

- Brokl, L. (1997) "Pluralitní demokracie nebo neokorporativismus," in Brokl, L. (ed.) *Reprezentace zájmů v politickém systému České republiky*, Prague: SLON.
- Brokl, L., Seidlová, A., Bečvář, J. and Rakušanová, P. (1999) *Postoje Československých občanů k demokracii v roce 1968*, Working Papers 99: 8, Prague: Institute of Sociology, CAS.
- Havel, V. (1989) *Dálkový výslech*, Prague: Melantrich.
- Kitschelt, H., Mansfeldová, Z., Markowski, R. and Tóka, G. (1999) *Post-Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation, and Inter-Party Cooperation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kroupa, A. and Mansfeldová, Z. (1997) "Občanská sdružení a profesní komory," in Brokl, L. (ed.) *Reprezentace zájmů v politickém systému České republiky*, Prague: SLON.
- Lauth, H.J. and Merkel, W. (1997) "Zivilgesellschaft und Transformation," in Lauth, H.J. and Merkel, W. (eds) *Zivilgesellschaft im Transformationsprozess*, Universität Mainz, Politikwissenschaftliche Standpunkte, Band 3.

- Merkel, W. (1996a) "Theorien der Transformation: Die demokratische Konsolidierung postautoritärer Gesellschaften," in von Beyme, K. and Offe, C. (eds) *Politische Theorien in der Ära der Transformation*, PVS-Sonderheft, No. 25, Opladen.
- Merkel, W. (1996b) "Institutionalisierung und Konsolidierung der Demokratie in Ostmitteleuropa," in Merkel, W., Sandschneider, E. and Segert, D. (eds) *Systemwechsel 2. Die Institutionalisierung der Demokratie*, Leske + Budrich, Opladen.

5 Slovenia in central Europe

Merely meteorological or a value kinship?

Vlado Miheljak

Introduction

A few years ago, central Europe was rediscovering itself: the collapsing communist states were taking the *Mitteleuropa* concept as a kind of short cut out of autocracy into the realm of democratic states, while central European sentiment was resurging in the consolidated democracies of the region. Then the provocative Austrian writer Peter Handke, whom the Slovenes count as one of "their own" because of his Slovene mother, baldly and cynically joked that, for him, central Europe was merely a meteorological term. This provoked a wave of ire, particularly among intellectuals in the new democracies of the region, Slovenia included. Is central Europe really only connected by geography and meteorology? Or is it also bound together by culture and values? And what is Slovenia's place in it?

Slovenia encompasses several identities and traditions. On the one hand, its political and cultural history roots it in the heartland of central Europe; on the other, it was removed from this orientation during the 70 years it spent in the political space of the former Yugoslavia. When the Yugoslav state union slid into severe political and economic crisis, as well as a crisis of identity, following the death of Tito,¹ the Slovenes once again began to discover their dormant central European identity in the 1980s.

Slovenia was then doubly different in communist times.² First, it was different to the other Yugoslav republics in that it was the most developed, the most pro-Western and the most liberal republic. Second, it was quite different from the other eastern and central European countries. Sociological surveys of the value orientations of the general population and generational studies of youth (see Ule 1986; Hafner-Fink 1995) in the 1980s showed that, notwithstanding the wide economic and cultural differences between the former Yugoslav republics individually, the differences between Slovenia and all the other republics were greater than those among the latter. These differences were manifested as a split between traditional and secular-rational orientations regarding, for example, authority, political authorities, religion, gender roles, national identification. Actually, the first explicit conflicts between Slovenia and