**Political culture in Czech Republic**

In this paper I will focus on the political culture of Czech Republic and describe the important factors which are significantly affecting the changes within the nation. Also I will focus more on the details of how transition from the socialist regime affected the current culture.

Political culture is a very broad and spectral term. This broadness is mostly caused by the fact that it is not being used only in one social science. It is also a reason why this term has to be observed from various points of different sciences, mostly why researching political culture we would stumble upon sociology, psychology and history, but also political science. In this case we will mostly focus on political culture from the point of political science and choose the definition accordingly.

For further work as well it is necessary to bring up what even culture is and how it is connected to politics. In connection with political science we work with culture but not the general defined one but more characteristic. Most typically described as a collection or opinions, attitude and values, which we can observe in the society of the current moment (Berg-Schlosser, Stammen 2000: 181). Culture means not just actions of people within the political system but rather contain s even the structure of the society and institutions of the given system. ……………..

The term political culture was first introduced by Gabriel Almont, it was in late 1960s, and later he defined and conceptualized the term with Sidney Verba, together they wrote a book called The Civic Culture. They defined political culture of a nation as a specific combination of orientation of political objects towards to members of the nation (Almond, Verba 1989: 13). Political culture is made of orientation towards the political system and perception of its own position within the system. Among these orientations they included opinions, attitudes, feelings and evaluation of the political system, it is a relation of an individual towards the politics. Orientations typical for the given society influences their actions and their members in a way typical for the society given by the political culture.

Other definition describes political culture as a specific typology of ways, which make the political system work as a whole. Political system is not meant just as political institutions and politicians but it what ways the citizens operate in the politics and how they behave (Pehe 1997). Political culture is not unalterable, it changes from time to time. By different factors which can be long-term and even short-term, the political culture keeps changing and evolving. Although it may seem that political culture can be very unstable, it is not true, its stability is not defined by it changes but the patterns of similar situations and reactions that keep happening again and that’s where its stability comes from (Pecka 2000:119). But because of these factors it is not easy to explain the political culture in the long-term.

One of the most important factors is the geopolitical influence, the behaviour of the nations is based on their geographical location, the size of the state and even on the number of inhabitants and other factors. There is a big difference in behaviour of a small state and a bigger state, or a state which is not reaching the ocean or which has a good position with the ocean.

Another influence factor is religion. Religion contains political questions such as relations of a person towards the political system or the church and secular world. It carries values and morals which are bounding for the religious people and therefore these values can affect their decisions when it comes to voting for example. Nowadays religion keeps losing its presence and importance especially in Czech Republic.

One of the most important factors is the history. The past experiences of the nation are influencing the political culture immensely. Important historical events, namely the radical social or political changes which have completely changed the characteristics of the state. Thy affect the way the politics are formed and how they are being passed from generation to generation. That is also the reason why political culture is seen a product of collective memory of the nation, since the past is affecting the present events and the future is carrying its consequences. Also there are traditions which come from the past and based on how orthodox they are, they can affect the future development of the state.

The final factor is the economic situation of the state. Unfavourable situation can change the mood of the lower classes and can activate their interest in politics and make them change the current political culture. It’s the classes that are mostly affected by the economic situation and has a direct impact on their lives, but these factors tend to change more quickly.

**Political culture of the post-communist states and Czech Republic**

The fall of the communist regimes in central and Eastern Europe has brought a lot of challenges for the research of political culture. Most importantly the discussion of democracy and its functioning after the transition. Before the transition in the 1990s, the Soviet union established in the Soviet bloc a political culture of “socialist people”, but they never truly managed to erase the previous political cultures of nations even though they tried, using violence as well. Czech Republic was no exception, it had a strong basis of the first democratic state of Czechoslovakia after the fall of Austria-Hungary, and the spirit of first republic endured even during all those years of being a socialist republic. (Broderick 2000: 20–21) The values of democracy prevailed also thanks to the Czech emigrants, who lived in the Western Europe and dreamed of coming back, but when the country would be finally free. (Vodička, Cabada 2007: 179)

Czech political culture is typical by its discontinuity in its development of events, including the fall of the communist regime. Couple of years after the Velvet revolution, Czech society was indecisive, one half was against the former regime and the second was still fighting for the survival of the Communist party. Many of the typical features of the current political culture actually come from the former regime, very typical one is distrust in the most of the constitutional and political institutions, the differentiation between group of “us” – the common people, and group of “them” – the elites, and unfortunately the willingness to follow populist political parties or passive attitude towards the political system.

The passive attitude usually means that an individual citizen would not believe that he can change anything by any behaviour and therefore does not participate in the political matters and events. Overall the political system in Czech Republic is seen in a very negative light, most of the institutions do not have a very high level of trust from the citizen polls. From the communist regime, citizens still expect that the state will take care of them, mostly in the times of crisis. Another typical feature is ineffective communication between the political actors and public or even in-between political actors and institutions. (Vodička, Cabada 2007: 182–183)

Most of the Czechs can also find the politics to be very complicated to comprehend. After the Velvet revolution, citizens’ trust in political institution was declining and so was the satisfaction with democracy and political system. (Frič 1996: 196) This was connected to the after revolution mood, everybody had very high expectations for the future and had goals stated during the revolution, but also they were not truly fulfilled. In this connection, one of the typical Czech traits is distrust and negation and no big expectations for a change. If the situation is not evolving in a certain way, Czechs tend to be very sceptical.

Political culture is also created by the attitudes of certain actors which compete for the political power. Based on their style of attitude and their behaviour also opinions of their supporters and non-supporters change. The difference is whether the actors act within the law or they are trying to avoid it and commit illegal acts. (Frič 1996: 196-197) It is important for Czechs to see that politicians are behaving ethically and in the case of obvious violation of law they tend to moralize (Švanda 2003).

In the light of seemingly successful economic transformation, the Czechs started to feel more special and optimistic. This idea was based on the economic success of the first after-revolution period, but with the upcoming worse economic situation the society has went into the state of complete disillusion (Pehe 1997).

Years of optimism were exchanged by pessimism about the lack of positive changes and opinion of the citizens, that the economic situation has become bad once again. (Frič 1996: 192) This state was a consequence of exaggerated expectations and goals, which promised a transition from centrally planned economy to market driven economy based on competition. Democratic governments are in many aspects considered to be the administrators of public finances. The public needs were described as citizens wanting to be able to create, sell, buy and enjoy the profits (Švanda 2003).

First years after the Velvet revolution, trust in the institutions was quite high until the year of 1996. The initial decrease of trust was probably caused by the political fights, drama and conflicts, namely within the Občanské Forum (in English “The Civic platform”), later the trust was decreasing because of the tension between Czech and Slovak part of the federation, namely their political representatives. (Červenka 2009: 5) Until the mid-1990s the trust in constitutional institutions was quite high. In the case of political dissatisfaction in Czech Republic there are the most dynamic changes, according to Lukáš Linek. In the half of the 1990s, most of the public was quite satisfied with the politics but by the end of 1997 it was around ten percent of the citizens and ever since then the value of satisfaction has never really increased that it would be more than the third of the society. (Linek 2010: 115)

In the concept of political dissatisfaction the governmental elections and basically all the local elections as well, in the times of election the dissatisfaction tends to decrease. It happens because of strong mobilization of voters, and individual political parties of candidates offer different solutions of the current issues which are troubling their possible voters and society. (Linek 2010, 118) Citizens also became during the inspection of the trust in institutions become more optimistic when it comes to the outlook for the future development. Also another thing that decreases slowly but constantly, is the overall trust in the political institutions such as the government and the parliament. (Linek 2010: 118-119) This trend also shows the decrease of the Czech political culture, as a reflection of dissatisfaction of citizens with political system and its actors. This dissatisfaction also negatively reflects on the political behaviour of the individuals, who for example refuse to go to vote and are not identifying with any political elites.

Based on the inspection of trust of citizens in chosen political institutions and evaluating their satisfaction, since the beginning of the independent Czech Republic in 1993 until nowadays, we could come to a conclusion that the current political culture is quite low compared to the Western democracies. In the context of post-communist Central and Eastern Europe, the Czech political culture may represent a some sort of a type compared to the rest of this region and in this context we could even say that Czech Republic is doing fine and political culture is quite high. To summarize the most important factors which affected the culture were economic situation and its influence on the citizens, quite a number of political crisis and affairs, or negative attitudes of the public towards the politics coming from the political culture of the communist era.

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