

# A b s t r a c t s

## The Czech Hub Politics and Society in the Middle of Europe

Martin Schulze Wessel  
Czechoslovakia  
Structural Problems of a State (1918–1992)

The founding of Czechoslovakia in 1918 was based on two objectives: the creation of a nation with a Slavic majority in ethnically mixed Central Europe and the establishment of a state armed against revisionism on the part of those who lost the First World War. The expulsion of the Germans in 1945–1946 and the fundamental transformation of the international system after the Second World War, in particular changes in Germany's understanding of itself, deprived the common state of Czechs and Slovaks of its basis to exist. After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, a swift velvet separation followed under democratic conditions. Although Czechoslovakia's balance sheet in matters of security, welfare, and the rule of law is by no means unambiguously negative, this state had lost its central function.

Miroslav Kunštát  
“God is Gone, but His Smell's Still There”  
Church, Religion, and State in the Czech Republic

Czech society is considered the most secular in Europe. However, a look at the thousand-year history of religion in Bohemia and its interpretation in the 200-year history of the modern Czech nation reveals that the religious orientation towards West and East, struggles between confessions, and the conflict-ridden intertwining of political and religious power have shaped politics and society in the Czech Republic to this day. The dispute over the restitution of church property provided an example of Czech society's distrust of the Catholic Church, which is still the country's largest confession. At the same time, leading politicians of all stripes, with the support of church dignitaries, are today invoking alleged “Christian values” that must be defended against the corrupting influences of the globalized world.

Alfrun Kliems  
City, Country, Forest  
Spatial Imagery in Czech Film at the Turn of the Century

The village film or the village comedy are defining genres of Czech film. It presents rural seclusion and the idyllic village community as a counter-model to the town. The contrast of town and country picks up a theme that was already popular in 19th-century literature. Since the early 2000s in particular, a “return of the rural” has been observed in Czech film and in Czech prose. However, traditional contrasting motifs

such as pub and café, town and country, village and forest are being displaced. Village and city are blending into a civilizational context. The counter-image is the undomesticated forest, on the one hand, and a quasi-colonially interpreted alien nature in the form of the Slovak mountains, on the other. This shift is at the same time an expression of growing tensions in society.

## **Elements and Origins of Prague Politics**

**Kai-Olaf Lang, Volker Weichsel**

**Conflict instead of Struggle**

A Conversation about Politics and Society in the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic is considered a stable country in East Central Europe. Attacks on the separation of powers and the rule of law, as they are known in Hungary and Poland, do not exist in the Czech Republic. This has to do with the country's political culture, a high degree of pragmatism, and less-pronounced social antagonisms. But the Czech Republic is also no bulwark of democracy, pluralism, and the rule of law. The EU authorities have Prime Minister Andrej Babiš in their sights for conflict of interest and suspected corruption. And a considerable potential of diffuse dissatisfaction, aversion to elites, and distrust of state institutions has built up in society and could be unleashed in 2021 elections.

**Vlastimil Havlík, Martin Mejstřík**

**Parties on the Brink?**

The Crisis of Representative Democracy in the Czech Republic

Until the early 2010s, the Czech Republic had the most stable party system among all of the countries in East Central and Eastern Europe. It resembled West European systems and provided the foundation for a representative democracy. This model has fallen into a deep crisis. Voter turnout has declined, parties are losing members, and voter turnover is high. The programmatic parties became cartel parties without social mooring, but with a tremendous interest in campaign reimbursement from the state and posts in the government. This development is also known from Western Europe. In the meantime, however, there is a man at the head of the Czech government who has come to power by using proceeds from his corporate conglomerate to found his own business party and to counter the idea of a pluralistic competition of ideas by offering the technocratic model of better management.

**Ondřej Čísař, Michal Kubát**

**Populism in the Czech Republic**

An East Central European Regional Comparison

Populism is a key word for characterizing political conditions in East Central Europe. Indeed, leading politicians in all four states operate by using the juxtaposition of a corrupt elite and an honest people, while presenting themselves as the righteous representatives of the latter. Nevertheless, the situation in the Czech Republic differs significantly from that of Poland and Hungary. In the latter two countries, a cultural war between national conservatives and liberals has divided society beyond

reconciliation and brought authoritarian populists to power. In the Czech Republic, the socio-economic lines of conflict continue to structure the party system and the dominant type of populism is that of the technocratic manager.

Stanislav Balík

## Regions in the Czech Republic

Regional Policies in East Central Europe: a comparative approach

Regions are an important administrative structure between the municipality and the nation-state. They share responsibility for providing general public services on a daily basis and for maintaining infrastructure. EU regional policy presupposes that member states consist of large regions that can function and absorb financial resources from Brussels. Sometimes, regions contribute significantly to the formation of people's identity. The Czech districts have nothing in common with the historical regions of the Czech lands. Their power to form identity is weak. The distribution of tasks between the regions and the central government is confusing. There is a lack of financial autonomy that exposes just how little importance officials in Prague attach to the political work of the regions. The goal of national and European regional policy to eliminate regional differences in living standards has so far failed. This also applies to regional policy in Slovakia and Poland.

Zuzana Lizcová

## Under Pressure

On the State of the Press in the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic's quality press finds itself in a difficult situation. The market is small, production costs are high, and revenues modest. Newspapers and news magazines often fail to live up to their claims of providing serious reporting. Responsibility for the tabloidization of the Czech press was long attributed to the foreign, predominantly German media houses that invested in the country in the 1990s and dominated the press market. Since the 2008 global economic crisis, these investors have pulled out. The new owners are mostly large Czech companies. But the quality of reporting has not necessarily improved. Rather, the issue of freedom of the press has become even more urgent. This applies especially to products from the publishing house MAFRA, a subsidiary of the Agrofert Group, which was founded by Prime Minister Andrej Babiš.

Christiane Brenner

## Women, Men, Dada?

Czech Gender Relations: On the State of Affairs

In the Czech Republic, gender equality is an official policy goal, but the country is far from achieving it. The topic hardly resonates within society. Many reject the term "feminism." This attitude can be traced back to "emancipation from above" under socialism and to the policies of the 1990s. Women place a great deal of value on their education and careers, but the state does too little to improve conditions for their participation in business and politics.

## Limits to Globalisation

Vladimír Handl  
Familiar Strangers

Czech-German Relations, 1989-2021

The Czech Republic and Germany have managed to overcome the confrontational relationship that marked their relationship throughout the 20th century. Contentious historical issues have been settled. Conflicts that arise from the asymmetrical distribution of power and competing interests are resolved pragmatically. Relations are institutionalized and stable. That applies to the regional, intergovernmental, and international levels within the EU and NATO. Nonetheless, German-Czech social integration remains weak. And political questions involving strategic preferences and values, such as attitudes towards migration, nation, and sovereignty, are strongly influenced by domestic political constellations and can easily cloud bilateral relations.

Zdeněk Sychra  
Dream, Nightmare, Reality

The Czech Republic's European Policy

Czech society's relationship to European integration has changed considerably over the past three decades. After accession to the EU in 2004, a decade of enthusiasm was followed by ten years, during which Czech politics looked to Brussels, partly sobered, partly disillusioned, and domestic critics of the EU gained a greater hearing. The euro crisis and especially the issue of migration have led to a further cooling. Today, Czech politics is cultivating a pragmatic relationship with the European Union and seeks to derive advantages from its membership. But, in reality, many Czechs see European institutions as a foreign and threatening power that is undermining state sovereignty and social values.

Ondřej Ditrych  
Great Powers, Small World

The United States, Russia, and China in Czech Foreign Policy

The Czech Republic's relationship with the European outside world oscillates between rapprochement and isolation, a desire for recognition and a fear of losing its identity. With the "return to Europe," the sense of facing constant threats seemed to have been overcome. Yet, fear returned – and with it the search for powerful allies. For some, this was to be the United States. But their slow withdrawal from Europe is fuelling a sense of forsakenness. Others seek protection in Russia or even in China. The argument between the supporters of these concepts is preventing Czechs from overcoming their fears and gaining a clear view of real dangers that can only be countered in a united Europe.

**Markéta Klásková**  
**Limited Mobility**

**The Czech Republic in the International System of Migration**

Czech society has a sceptical view of migration. The number of people who have left the Czech Republic in search of work in other countries is much lower than in other East Central European countries. Conversely, immigration policy is also restrictive. Humanitarian concerns and considerations of global responsibility hardly play a role in Czech migration policy. Until 2015, economic benefit was the main motive. But since the so-called refugee crisis, even the issuance of work permits has been severely restricted for those seeking to enter the Czech Republic via the migratory routes established in the socialist era. Within the EU's system for distributing migrants, the Czech Republic, like all Visegrád countries, has resisted admitting people from the Middle East and South Asia or from Africa. But unlike Poland, the Czech Republic is also letting only a few people from Ukraine or Belarus into the country legally.

**Petr Drulák**

**Human Rights as a Danger in Foreign Policy**

The idea of human rights is undeniably an achievement. After the terrible atrocities that the tyrannical dictatorships of the 20th century inflicted on their citizens, it can hardly be denied that every human being is entitled to the protection of his or her life, dignity, and property, and that every state has to ensure this. And yet, this is an ominous idea that must be rejected as a matter of principle.

**Šimon Pánek**

**“Human Rights as a Danger to Foreign Policy”**

**A Response to Petr Drulák**

The juxtaposition of social and political rights is misleading. Only the adherence to basic freedoms creates the space necessary to advocate for additional human rights. In authoritarian regimes, those who work to alleviate social exclusion and poverty, to advance equal rights for women and sexual minorities, and to fight against corruption learn this very quickly.

**Jakub Eberle**

**Arms Exports and Human Rights**

**Blind Spots of a Debate**

In Czech foreign policy debates, the topic of human rights plays a central role. However, the issue of the connection between arms exports and human rights violations goes unmentioned. The Czech Republic can achieve much more in this area than heap criticism – rightly deserved – on Russia or China. Arms exports are a blind spot in the human rights debate. This undermines the credibility of those who declare they have made human rights a guiding principle of their political actions and hinders those who are seeking to provide a clear definition of the public's interest in export controls.

**Rudolf Fürst**  
**China and Human Rights**  
Notes on a Misguided Debate

In the Czech Republic, China policy has been hotly debated for many years. The background to the discussion was initially the violent stifling of the human rights movement in Beijing in 1989 and the peaceful revolution in Czechoslovakia that same year. It is no coincidence that the Czech media dedicates its attention above all to Tibet and Taiwan. The Czech Republic's first president, Václav Havel, who was a personal friend of the Dalai Lama, still represented a credible concept of solidarity with the powerless. Over the past two decades, however, the debate has deteriorated. Now, vociferous criticism of China serves almost only to boost the domestic standing of politicians. Symbolic gestures are supposed to demonstrate fearlessness in the face of a great power. China experts can hardly get a word in. The Czech Republic lacks a foreign policy strategy to improve the actual human rights situation in China.

### **The Wealth of the Nation**

**Petr Zahradník**  
**World Champion Exporter Czech Republic**  
Fundamentals and Problems of an Economic Model

The Czech Republic is by far the most developed country in East Central Europe. Measured in terms of gross domestic product per capita, it is on a par with Italy and Spain and lags only slightly behind France. Exports have contributed to this to a large extent. In order for the past three years' of positive development to continue, something must change. Structural problems in the export sector mean that the Czech Republic is not fully using its economic potential. Companies under Czech ownership have failed or been unable to replace the still significant role of foreign capital, which in many branches maintains a dominant position. Prague politicians have also so far refused to put forward a suitable policy of investment promotion that would contribute to the Czech Republic reaching its full developmental potential. Without overcoming these problems, the country will not succeed in breaking through into the group of above-average developed countries within the European Union.

**Zuzana Lizcová**  
**Silicon Valley instead of Extended Workbench?**  
The Czech Republic in the Global Knowledge-Based Society

The Czech Republic is engaged in coordinated efforts to keep up with other countries in times of accelerated technological change. The Czechs have grand ambitions. They want domestic companies to move up global value chains. In matters of productivity and innovation, the economy as a whole is to catch up with neighbouring Germany and Austria at the very least. However, the Czech Republic's record in funding innovation is mixed. Individual companies are beacons of digital modernization, but they still face a broad base of manufacturers. A fundamental restructuring of education and scientific research through targeted funding, as well as the creation of a favourable environment for start-ups are making only sluggish progress.

**Tomáš Ehler**  
**Autarky and Self-Determination**  
Czech Energy Policy amid Europe's Competing Interests

Czech energy policy faces major challenges. Domestic lignite still plays a major role in the country's energy supply. In the search for alternatives before the final phase-out of coal in 2038, the Czech Republic is betting above all on nuclear energy. This reflects a broad social consensus. Behind this lies careful deliberations on such principles as security of supply, economic efficiency, and ecological sustainability. Renewable sources of energy have only limited potential in the Czech interior, and these have fallen into disrepute due to an expensive model of subsidies. Imported natural gas will gain in importance as a bridging technology, but its use should not grow unduly for reasons of security policy.

**Marcela Efmertová, Jan Mikeš, Jaroslav Knápek**  
**Electrification and Europeanization**  
A Brief History of Power Grids in the Czech Republic

Power grids are the arteries of national and transnational integration. They increase the security of supply and ensure economic synergy effects. Whenever the masterminds of European unification presented plans for pan-European power grids in the 1920s, Czechoslovakia was always involved. However, the division of Europe after the Second World War led to Czechoslovakia's integration into grid of the Comecon countries, which was largely decoupled from Western Europe. Since 1995, the Czech network of transmission lines has been an integral part of the European power generation and distribution grid, and the Czech Republic plays an important role in the power supply in Central Europe.

**Tomáš Nigrin, Pavel Szobi**  
**The Czech Republic's Transport Sector**  
National and European Paths

In the Czech Republic, the use of individual transportation has increased massively over the past 30 years. This has been accompanied by a greater flexibility in cargo transport. As a result of structural changes in industry, cargo also moved from rail to road. Both of these shifts led to congestion on the roads and a deterioration of living standards in cities and along highways. The state reacted by expanding the network of roads, for which it primarily used EU funds. Rail traffic slumped. Only since a rail reform in the early 2000s have passenger numbers begun to grow again. The railway is efficient. Despite the massive increase in truck traffic, rail's share of cargo traffic is up by a good quarter when compared with the rest of Europe. Transportation by water has played almost no role so far. In aviation, the strong growth that arose due to cheap flights to tourist destinations has slumped as a result of the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic. There is no sign of an ecological about-face in this trend.

## The Age of Extremes

Jiří Holý

Leaden Times, Gilded Times

Czech Literature since 1945

The cultural diversity that characterized Czechoslovakia in the era of President Tomáš Masaryk was irretrievably lost after the Second World War. Under the repressive cultural policy of the communist regime, which started in 1948, literature was divided into “forbidden” (samizdat and exile publishers) and “permitted” publications. This division cannot be automatically equated with the presence or absence of literary quality. Nonetheless, the majority of the country’s important authors struggled with censorship between 1948 and 1989. Many important works did not appear until decades after they had been written. The brief liberalization of the 1960s, with its extraordinary flowering culture and literature, was followed by the leaden repression of “normalization.” It was not until the Velvet Revolution of 1989 that state control over literature was finally lifted. But at the same time, the literature’s importance in society went into rapid decline. Contemporary Czech authors work on a high artistic level, but under difficult economic conditions.

Michal Pullmann

Disputed Past

Debating Communist Rule

Coming to terms with the communist dictatorship is one of contemporary history’s central themes. In the Czech Republic, the thesis that the communist regime in Czechoslovakia was based not only on repression and violence, but also on the convictions and consent of various population segments led to a heated debate. At the centre of the controversy was Michal Pullmann with his book “The End of the Experiment”. In retrospect, it can be seen that the controversy advanced contemporary history as an academic discipline: today, it is probing the character of the communist system with new questions and methods. And the general public is no longer so easily agitated. The image of a dictatorship that relied not only on tanks but on the population’s consent is not a trivialization of oppression, but an even grimmer finding.

Pavel Kolář

The Prague Spring as Cause for Thought

Between Disillusion, Grief, and Melancholy

The military suppression of the Prague Spring was a turning point. Protagonists from back then and historians agree that the crackdown was accompanied by enormous disillusionment. In global historical terms, 1968 was a defeat for socialism and a part of the left’s decline. The left showed itself unable to come to terms with the causes in a critical manner. It sought refuge into melancholy or cynicism. Some seek to toss the Prague Spring on the ash heap of history. But working through the grief and the memory of that era’s yearnings and experiments could provide cause for thought with regard to the present.