

CZECHOSLOVAKIA - APPLICATION OF DEMOCRACY IN 1990

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Abstract

The political change after November 17, 1989, was the beginning of new historical era for Czechoslovakia. A top priority of the new leaders was the re-creation of a democratic political system and the effort to re-create a market economy and to rejoin Europe. Czechoslovakia's newly re-created democratic political system proved unable to survive the continued conflict between Czechs and Slovaks that dominated public life during the first post-communist era. The milestones in the phasing can be seen in the dates on which fundamental changes in the legislative bodies had taken place, i.e. the dates of the reconstruction of the Federal Assembly, the Czech National Council, the Slovak National Council (end of January and beginning of February 1990) and the date of general election to the legislative bodies on June 8, 1990. This article will reflect several important political facts in Czechoslovakia, the institutional changes that occurred after the end of communist era and milestones emphasis on the development of the Slovakia. The methods used in this article were mainly analysis, synthesis, literature search and study of historical sources, which as a basis of research contributed to achieving the set goal.

Keywords: Constitution, Czechoslovakia, democracy, revolution, Slovak republic, state.

1 Introduction

The breakpoint in 1990 is a significant milestone in the history not only for Czechoslovakia, but also for democracy. A wide space was opened for changes in all areas of social and economic life of Czechs and Slovaks, respectively the "Czechoslovak community". Law and word have regained their meaning, political pluralism and democracy have become a daily reality. After 44 years, free elections (parliamentary and municipal) were held again. The dual model of public administration came into force and at the end of the year the competent law came into force. The first year of freedom was rich not only for illusions, but also for bizarreness and disappointments. At the same time, we can call this year as the year of determining the next direction of our company. For this and many other reasons, we will recall the events that took place in 1990 and that were recorded in our historical annals.

2 1990 - a year of changes

From november 1989, the inhabitants of Czechoslovakia did not expect only partial corrections of socialism. They wanted a fundamental change in the social system. They were not afraid to manifest and demand the changes offered by the changing international situation [1].

During this period, in 1990 (the so-called year of changes), there are historical events in our State that change the form of behavior and the application of rules. The period from november 1989 to the first free elections in June 1990 was a brief and unsuccessful attempt to liberalize the regime and the successful transition of the regime culminating in the clear victory of democratic political parties in the elections of 8 and 9 June 1990. In the context of changes, there is change in the view of self-government and in state administration. The most significant socio-political changes of this period are the restoration of territorial self-government of municipalities [2], [3] and a spontaneous effort to correct some insensitive decisions from previous years.

Significant characters of that period were the temporary government and the President. Opponents of the previous regime have taken key-leading positions in the State. The dissident Václav Havel became the President, the former reform-communist Alexander Dubček became the Chairman of the Federal Assembly. Their task was to lead the country to the first free elections and to promote the principles of a democratic system. However, the beginning of the transformation of our society, there was a different view, perception and the need to grasp socio-political issues. The first conflicts and disputes arose soon, which eroded the relations, ties and direction of the policies of "Czech-Slovak coexistence" [4].

The problem of the post-communist build-up of liberal democracy and the market economy was, for example, the issue in Czech and Slovak relations. Czech and Slovak relations began to escalate after unsuccessful attempts by President Václav Havel to rename the State. It resulted in the so-called Hyphen War. While the Hyphen war carried little policy significance, it pointed to the existence of strong mutual resentments among the political elites of the two republics, and set the tone for the negotiations over more substantive issues. [5]. This subsequently led to a process of independence and autonomy of both States (1.1.1993).

As Zajac states [6], "the struggle for the existence of Czechoslovakia began with a struggle for the name of the State."

A partial solution to the conflict between the Czech and Slovak political representations was Constitutional Act no. 81/1990 Coll. on the change of the name of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (ČSSR). However, this initiative has led to even greater divisions. The reason was the double form of the name of the State, with which the countries were to present themselves. The name Czech-Slovak Federal Republic (ČSFR) was valid for Slovakia, and the name without a hyphen was valid for the Czech Republic and abroad. That caused a great resentment in Slovakia. As Zemko states [7], "the point was that the name of the State presents the character of the State. Should it therefore be the unitary nature of the State or a State composed of two equal parts?" This problem was resolved after painful negotiations when the new name Czech and Slovak Federal Republic (CSFR) was adopted. This name was valid until the official division.

Zajac [6] also emphasizes that this period was not just a political duel. "It quickly turned the political struggle for sovereignty into an economic struggle for authority over state property. In the first case, the focus was on whether the owner of state property will be a joint State or republics itself. In the second case, who will control the economy. The Slovak leaders began advocating institutional reforms that would have placed the relations between the two constituent nations on more equal footing. [5] The Slovak government promoted greater competencies for republics. The Czech government preferred more power to the federal authorities. The struggle for the content of the so-called "competence law" thus represented one of the most serious disputes over the form and functioning of the Czech-Slovak federation in the years 1990 to 1992.

It was even worse with the Constitution. The proposal of a new form of the Constitution could not be approved at all. Controversies arose not only in terms of its qualitative but also quantitative values. The question, whether there should be one or three Constitutions (one federal and two for republics) was not answered at all.

The peak point of the events of november 1989 was the elections (8 and 9 June 1990), which had the character of open competition between several political entities. The organization of the first free and pluralist elections after more than forty years meant a lot to Czechoslovakia. The electoral rules followed the tradition of a proportional electoral system from the time of democratic inter-war Czechoslovakia [8]. On the other hand, these choices have been marked by agile societal discussions. In addition, society began to polarize significantly. However, the successful transition of the regime culminated in the clear victory of democratic political parties promoting the rule of law and a market economy.

3 Description of results

The elections in 1990 meant for the citizens of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, that they had the opportunity to vote in the real manner. Nevertheless the elections were held before, the difference was that citizens could vote freely and choose from several political parties. Therefore, the institute of free elections is one of the basic pillars of a democratic society.

The size and nature of the election was huge. Elections to the House of Peoples (SĽ) and the House of Nations (SN) of the Federal Assembly (FZ), the Czech National Council (ČNR) and the Slovak National Council (SNR) were held. Although the federal and republican parliaments began to take shape in part before the election, the result of the election could not be estimated in advance. The problem was that no one knew what public support they could expect and how the new politicians are perceived. At the same time, the key question which has not been answered, was, how are the communists, who have ruled so sovereignty so far, perceived by the public? If they get majority and won, it could be not only the first, but also the last free elections. Despite these unanswered questions and issues, the favorites won. The Public Against Violence (VPN) party won in Slovakia and the Civic Forum (OF) won in the Czech Republic. Zeman [6] aptly comments on the election result: "We have survived; it is time to think about what will happen next."

At the same time, these elections can be referred to as elections of trust. Therefore, they were to some extent considered a "mini-referendum". The citizens had the opportunity to decide about the regime of the newly created State and their representatives.

According to Gális [9], the biggest shortcoming of the elections was "the absence of a relevant federal party. Although the Communists formally formed one party, the Slovaks were mentally elsewhere. Although VPN and OF cooperated, they did not merge organizationally. The Slovak Democrats and the Czech People's Party have made an agreement that they will not act on the other bank of Moravia river."

Slovakia shuffled even more cards. This was aroused by nationalist passion and the question of a clear determination of the position in the joint State. Although there was no open talk of independence, everything was geared towards that.

Social and political pressure caused a record number of voters. Almost everyone went to the polls. The reason was the desire and determination to express what was absent in the previous governmental establishment.

At the same time, the elections started a two-year operation of democratically and freely elected institutions, i.e. the Federal Assembly (FZ) and national parliaments. FZ was composed of two equal chambers. The House of Peoples (SĽ) had 150 deputies elected throughout Czechoslovakia. The House of nations (UN) consisted of 150 members elected on a parity basis. Half of them were elected in the Czech Republic and half in the Slovak Republic. The Czech National Council (CNR) consisted of 200 deputies, the Slovak National Council (SNR) 150 deputies (Table 1).

Table 1 Winning political parties in the 1990 elections [10]

| Federal Assembly | | | | | | | |
|--|-----------|-------|------------------|--|-----------|-------|------------------|
| Czech republic | | | | Slovak republic | | | |
| Political party | Votes | | Number of chairs | Political party | Votes | | Number of chairs |
| | number | % | | | number | % | |
| House of people | | | | | | | |
| Občanské fórum | 3 851 172 | 53,15 | 68 | Verejnost' proti násiliu (VPN) | 1 104 125 | 32,54 | 19 |
| Komunist. strana Československa | 976 996 | 13,48 | 15 | Kresťanskodem. hnutie (KDH) | 644 008 | 18,98 | 11 |
| Křesťanská a demokr. unie | 629 359 | 8,69 | 9 | Komunist. strana Slovenska (KSS) | 468 411 | 13,81 | 8 |
| Hnutí za samospr. dem. - Společnost pro Moravu a Slezsko | 572 015 | 7,89 | 9 | Slovenská národná strana (SNS) | 372 025 | 10,96 | 6 |
| - | - | - | - | Koalícia Spolužitie - Maďarské kresťanskodem. hnutie (ESWMK) | 291 287 | 8,58 | 5 |
| Overall | | | 101 | Overall | | | 49 |
| House of nations | | | | | | | |
| Občanské fórum | 3 613 513 | 49,96 | 50 | Verejnost' proti násiliu (VPN) | 1 262 278 | 37,28 | 33 |
| Komunist.strana Československa | 997 919 | 13,80 | 12 | Kresťanskodem. hnutie (KDH) | 564 172 | 16,66 | 14 |
| Hnutí za sam.dem.- Sp.Mor.a Sl. | 658 477 | 9,10 | 7 | Komunistická strana Slovenska (KSS) | 454 740 | 13,43 | 12 |
| Křesťanská a demokratická unie | 633 053 | 8,75 | 6 | Slovenská národná strana (SNS) | 387 387 | 11,44 | 9 |
| - | - | - | - | Koalícia Spolužitie - Maďarské kresťanskodem.hnutie (ESWMK) | 287 426 | 8,49 | 7 |
| Overall | | | 75 | Overall | | | 75 |

Source:

As Szomolányi presents [11], "the elections in 1990 created the legitimacy of a new government elite. It was tasked with creating the institutional framework for the new regime and its economic system."

Among the important and decisive acts of this period, we also include the renewal of self-government (Act on Municipal Establishment). This can be described as a basic pillar of the later introduction of the dual model of public administration, which is still valid in a modified form.

4 Conclusion

The year 1990 was marked by euphoria. Emotions evoked negotiations about the new name of Czechoslovakia, arguments about the hyphen as well as the result of the elections. Expectations and disappointments alternated rapidly. The pressure and the need to assert themselves were therefore enormous on both sides. Society welcomed change and the influx of freedom. It believed in unity and brotherhood. The society did not know, that this period would last so short. Ideals began to fade. The harsh reality began to show more and more intensely. The era of joint Czechoslovakia began to fall slowly. However, it managed to build a solid foundation for the transition from autocracy to democracy, on which both republics stand to this day.

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