

## Final report

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The research stay at OSA archives in Budapest was part of my broader defined PhD thesis- „Remembering communism in the Czech republic“. I am interested in discourses about communism or Czech history between 1948- 1989, what is the national or public memory of this period and how it is shaped. As a sociologist I am mostly working with contemporary data so my aim at OSA was to focus on development of the discourse right after the fall of communism. Can we observe any continuity or discontinuity until late 2000s?

### Data

In the OSA I was working mostly with data from years 1989- 1993 produced by Czechoslovakian and later Czech and Slovak media. These could be obtained in Czech Republic as well but since I was working with media monitoring maintained at OSA Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty Research Institute ( HU OSA 300- 30- 22- 28) I saved a lot of time which I would have to otherwise spend on going through all of the newspapers and magazines myself or I would have to go through broadcasting of radio while here I could work more efficiently with transcriptions of relevant shows. Methodological problem could be the fact that workers of Radio Free Europe did the sampling. But since there are still a big amount of articles covering the whole media scene as well as a broad opinion range and basically the fact that my subject of interest are covered I believed that Radio Free Europe press monitoring is a representative and relevant sample for researching these topics.

Other funds I have researched through my stay wouldn't be reachable so easily anywhere else than in OSA. These are especially funds covering international press covering situation in Czechoslovakia (HU OSA 300-30-24, HU OSA 300-30-15) which gave me a view into questions about differences between Czech and international anti-communist discourse and if there are some possible relationships between them.

### Between transition and revolution

Remembering communism both in private and public space is a strong phenomena in Czech Republic- movies being shot, novels published, law about the third resistance movement has been passed in 2011. Since I was interested in very first years after so called „velvet revolution“ I wanted to see the beginnings of discursive patterns of remembering

communism at the time when it wasn't such a distant past. I found out that terms as „velvet revolution“ should be written in quotation marks because the term itself is part of remembering communism and has its own history. Until February 1990 the term is not used- even the protesters were promoting „transition“ and not a „revolution“. Independent political platform Civic Forum had only limited space in the media (few hours a day in the state radio) otherwise the media were still written by journalists loyal to the regime and also in the communist discourse- from December 1989 protest has been re-interpreted as relevant and rightful critic of the regime in the traditional communistic rhetoric of self-criticism and correction of the wrong way taken by few individuals. General strike was criticised because work was crucial quality in the life of socialist society and all the changes should have been done through the active work not through negativism of strike.

It seems that the rhetoric of radical break up with the past appeared through the year 1990 together with development of diversified political and media scene. Line up of anti-communist discourse was dynamic and rather fast. Rhetoric about communism quickly reached the position which it still has in Czech Republic- references to the pre-1989 could be used in many contexts, it is strong discursive practice but it also became journalistic manners without meaningful content. When politician is not satisfied with the form of first census or against the strike of labourers in agriculture it is easy to call it „totalitarian practices“ or „last uprising of old cadres“.

Following all mentions of past in the media would be very demanding and at the end not really rewarding because phrases referring to past are so common that their power to bring some meaning was slowly blurring.

Through my research I rather concentrate directly on the topic of „coming to terms with past“- on the tools for legitimizing the new regime. As I said opinion that there should be some direct action and formal end of the previous era developed quite fast but still it was not present in the public discourse from the beginning. Important role was played by former dissidents who became politicians and embodied the notion that injustice done to them (and the whole society) should be somehow rewarded and on the other hand those who participated at the unjust political system should be punished or that the whole period needs some justicial evaluation. In the first months of 1990 former samizdat newspaper were the first who activated the discourse of rather radical compensation of past injustice. Lidové noviny who changed from irregular home-typed samizdat into regular daily newspaper in 1990 and soon after the first independent weekly magazine Respekt- whose teams were

made from former dissidents or at least of people who clearly saw media as a space where questions about past should be open. In these and other newly established media the discourse of break up with the past developed. Together with diversifying media scene went the development of new political parties- especially the right wing took promoting of anti communism as a part of their program.

It is questionable how was politics of early 1990s and discourse of revolution (rather than transition) influenced by media from abroad. Events of november 1989 were covered in details by US, german or french press but the picture is rather different. International media are using the term „velvet revolution“ earlier and more often and seemed to be enchanted by peaceful changes in Czechoslovakia lead by intellectuals- figure of playwright Václav Havel as a key player is emphasised. Foreign journalist pictured the events in Czechoslovakia as revolution rather than transition before the czech media did. The question of possible communication channel between Czechoslovakia and foreign countries could be solved on the basis of another research. But it is worth of notion that the new media was often supported financially from abroad.

#### Agents and lustration

First years of remembering communism have some typical characteristic. While searching for clear victims (which were obviously dissidents) the category of perpetrators was also made clear. Since the secret state police (STB) and its power was demonised in the notion of ordinary people even before 1989 through rumours and urban legends agents became the most prosecuted group. Until year 1992 articles are common that some governmental office, ministry or political party is still run by people who used to be agents and maybe they are even active. It seems that the power of party and its mechanism (as was the secret police) was seen so strong that no one could believe that it would disappear so quickly. Public opinion (at least in the sense of media) was convinced that the secret agents are still active- they operate in their old nets and are even collaborating with USSR. Only nowadays czech society reflects that the prominents of communist regime were able to use their enormous social capital to grasp the best economic opportunities in the new system, but these social groups were not planning any counterrevolution or coup they were able and eager to building capitalism.

This agentmania is based on two characteristics. Firstly it is development of media but not experienced media consumers. Many new magazines and dailies were established and among them tabloid press but all of them were taken as trustful at the beginning- readers

probably were not able to recognize relevant articles so as other journalists. For example articles from november 1990 claiming that revolution in 1989 (at the time it was already a revolution) was secretly prepared by secret state police and all of the „heroes“ were just puppets, these theories are combined with theory of freemasons and world jewish conspiracy. Texts of similar content are still circulating in czech social media but are not discussed any more in official media.

The most visible and accurate tool for naming and kind of punishing the agents was so called lustration process which was very important and broadly discussed topic during the year 1991 (it has passed in october). Lustration law as it was passed is determining that given positions in state offices, courts of law or state owned companies can not be held by a person which was agent of various type in the state secret police (STB). So the people who worked in these positions or were aspiring to them were lustrated- the lustration office confronted their name with the materials from the former STB called then basically „Lists“ (*Seznamy*). Kind of wild lustration were going on sooner than october 1991- in the atmosphere of agentomania the accuse of being agent could discredit ones career and this accuse was political tool in the elections in 1990 and also afterwards. Parties candidating in the election in may 1990 were lustrating their members and the new parliament was lustrated by the so called Commission of 17th November which was firstly meant to investigate the events of november 1989 especially find the perpetrators of violent interference among police members.

The aim of lustration is very clear – to find perpetrators and to remove them from governing the public affairs (since they as former agents could prepare the coup). Lustration was constructed of rather practical tool for policy of new state and it was covering only small percentage of population. But the rhetoric around the lustrations was rather ethical- it was interpreted as cleaning from the old regime and its practices and it was based on opinion that the former agents do not possess the legitimacy to govern the democratic state. Symbolic comparisons of former regime to rotting grave or ardent wound are used while talking about lustration. We can not see the lustration alone but as a part of other legal processes going on which purpose was also coming to terms with communism. These are restitution or law about the third resistance movement so as the discussed trials with the „perpetrators of 1968“. All of this legal actions were promoted because they redeem the unjust of former regime (law about resistance movement and restitutions) and punish those who could be blame for the unjust. Some level of carrying out the justice was seen as necessary and „making the thick line behind the past“ vision (promoted by Václav Havel) did

not prevail. But through 1991 it was visible that the lustration process is not that unambiguous tool for naming the agents. The whole year is full of smaller or bigger affairs based on questions of someones collaboration with STB. The first was accuse of at the time minister of environment Bedřich Moldán other affairs occured later- emigree and dissident Jan Kavan, head of the slovakian ministry of the interior Jan Čarnogurský were the main visible. What was so striking about them was that these man were falling in to other category- the dissidents, they should have been rewarded in the process of coming to terms with the past. It was obvious after few months that the line between agents and dissidents is hard to find, that those who were in the specific relationship with the regime and were confronted with the secret police were more possible to have record in „Lists“ - but the basic fact of ones name appeared on the lists did not tell anything about the nature of collaboration. So the accuse of beeing an agent quickly became tool for political fight. „Lists“ itself and its publishing were part of this fight- the records dissapeared, appeared in the newspaper or in the hand of political rivals, the whole lists of names were published in the newspaper without any further investaigation under what condition the person was contacted by STB and what was the nature of his or her cooperation.

The whole year proceeding the passing of law was full of rather negative comments about the lustration- lustrating people is on the same ethical level as was the former regime with its cadre policy, it is promoting collective guilt, especially popular was phrase about „witch hunt“ (in czech more exact translation would be wictch trial). So why the law passed (quite easily)? Hand in hand with the critics went the constant pressure on action against former agents – the need to do something was still felt as important. Especially on the important symbolic events- more on the anniversary of soviet occupation than on anniversary of velvet revolution the need to come to terms with past was rhetorically stressed. On that occations the style of speeches and articles was rather strong but also very general- the perpetrators were not named but pictured as some negative powers of the whole regime. But in the moment when he need to categorised these powers it became obvious that the picture is not so dichotomous- collaboration with regime varied, personal decisions and situations were very different. Lustration as the proces was not fulfilling what it was expected to be, the lists were not the right judgment tools. But stil there was the feeling that not the right ones were punished- disillusion spread and articles where both journalist and readers complain that on many positions there are still „old communist“ or even agents were common. There was still strong conviction that there are some „bad communist“ hiding and influencing the situation but there was no way how to find them.

Many processes discussed at the beginning of 1990s are still going on. Although it became obvious very early that lustration or any other legal process can not divide the perpetrator and victims some political parties are still promoting them. Restitution of church properties which started to be discussed right after the lustration law are hotly debated right now and the law about the third resistance movement which was seen as one of the most important steps passed only year ago. All of these causes are pushed forward especially by right wing parties and at the time of right wing government the dynamics of anti-communism got faster.

The fact that it took around twenty years to pass the law on third resistance movement does not tell only that this is still seen as important for some part of society but also that there was not a complete agreement on the topic. Although the anti-communist discourse or at least discourse of coming to terms with past was dominant the whole period the other one preferring the pre-1989 era was always present although minor or hidden. As early as in December 1989 in the broadcasting by Civic Forum the commentators are surprised how small are the changes on the countryside and that people are not involved in the revolution. Obviously one group of Czechoslovakians preferred transition and took the changes positively but perceived them as partial reforms not a revolution (although a velvet one). This position changed during the year into more negative one towards the new regime. Communist Party which was seen as the platform for this part of public was omitted in the public debate- even the former party run newspaper Rudé právo distanced from communism and became leftist but democratic paper. These are not politicians from Communist Party who are the most nostalgic for the previous period- or at least not openly. The part of society unsatisfied with the development is visible on the media only indirectly- through the public opinion research where number of people who prefer the former regime is growing or more personally when they are writing letters to newspapers.

#### Continuities X Discontinuities

The main questions of my research at OSA was the development of remembering of communism from the early 1990s until nowadays. On the first sight the continuities are very remarkable- at the beginning of 1990s all of the important topics were established together with opinion groups which promoted them. These are restitutions- also of church property, third resistance movement law and materials of former state police and which organisation

will be guarding them and how. The basic discourse of talking about communism was also established (together with new democratic media scene)- rather ethical picture about the former bad governing and party oppressing „ the people“ which will now be replaced with democracy and justice which will be fulfilled by rewarding the heroes. It is interesting that the dynamics of coming to terms with communism is far longer ago after the revolution. The peak of anti-communism came after year 2000. In comparison with that the discourse about past in 1990s has its special characteristic- it is more practical and technicist- as the main site for coming to terms with past and finding justice were seen courts of law and new laws itself. Finding culprits was seen as rather mechanical application of laws. Too early it was obvious that it is not that easy- communist politicians and member of the state apparatus were working in law system of socialistic Czechoslovakia so their actions were not criminal acts and it was not possible to name the real initiators of unjust actions in the difficult system of state power. Too similar to coming to terms with nazi past in Germany in 1960s most of the people were just fulfilling the commands from above. Coming to terms with communism was not possible with legal tools and also the definition of victims was not that easy. Later the remembering communism became reflexive of these obstacles and turned more towards more general and philosophical thinking about the guilt of every single person. At the beginning only the elites of former regime were discussed and researched with no attention paid to the „people“ or to the silent majority. They are not pictured as victims at the early 1990s they are just not present it corresponds to the theory of social trauma that even after period of silence the society is able to reflect its past. In the Czechoslovakia the period of silence was replaced by rather lively debate about the guilty side led by those who seek in it legitimacy for the new regime. But opening of the questions of behaviour of every single individual came later after it was obvious that the idea of fast and legal coming to terms with past is not realistic. This more general, psychological and philosophical discourse on communism is visible also at the beginning of the 1990s in the commentaries about lustrations which are criticising the whole process judging the whole people although the guilt has to be investigated individually.

Research at OSA gave me more complex view on the development of discourse on communism in Czech republic and helped me understand the current situation and the specifics of early 1990s. For this I would like to thank to the whole OSA team namely my supervisor Gabriella Ivacs.

