

# The Process of Politicization

# CGS Studies

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Volume 5

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# The Process of Politicization:

*How Much Politics Does  
a Society Need?*

Edited by

Wiesław Waławczyk and Adam Jarosz

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



The Process of Politicization: How Much Politics Does a Society Need?  
Edited by Wiesław Waławczyk and Adam Jarosz  
Series: Copernicus Graduate School Studies (CGS Studies)

Reviewed by:  
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This book first published 2017

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-9628-4  
ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-9628-3

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# INTRODUCTION

WIESŁAW WACŁAWCZYK AND ADAM JAROSZ

The question of the fatigue with politics concerning not only the masses but also the elites is as real as never before. The well-known model of liberal democracy seems to be expiring as it is less and less capable of identifying and addressing the serious social issues and real problems (not created by politicians) of different social groups. The political forces that have governed in the Western world seem to lack ideas for finding solutions for these problems and the growing expectations of the people. De-politicisation is actually the de-ideologisation of politics—following the concept of the catch-all party, parties have lost their clear worldviews (e.g. social-democratic forces are in deep crisis) and orientations towards social problems, alongside experiencing new cleavages. As a result, there are no clear concepts and visions, understandable for the masses, which can give prospects about the direction of future developments. Politics has become highly reactive, not bringing ideas and long-term perspectives but giving only limited, *ad hoc* solutions to issues as they appear. This results in a rise in insecurity among the broader parts of society, which is confirmed by the growing inability of state structures to bring the situation under control and provide the needed sense of security. This refers to the migration crisis and the wave of terrorism, but also to providing social and economic security (e.g. unemployment among young people, or disproportions in economic conditions and career perspectives between big cities and provincial areas).

Society's answer is the growing support for radical political forces in European countries and the United States, which is unexpected or even surprising as many of these groups would previously have been seen as unreasonable. Clear messages, simplicity, and the understandability of radical rhetoric make it largely attractive, but most of all these forces offer to solve the real problems of the people (e.g. creating jobs, bringing security). Their approach is highly proactive and provides a clear perspective for the future, both in the short and long terms. Many of these ideas are highly controversial and are labelled as populist, and the

possibility of their realisation is broadly questioned. Despite this, many voters support such parties and politicians.

This proves that the old model of liberal democracy, the political spectrum, and how to address social needs have to be at least refreshed, if not redefined. The appearance of new forces, significant support for them, and the controversies they cause contribute to the political reactivation of the masses, new divisions among the elites, and open access for new people to the elite circles. In addition, dynamic modernisation and digitalisation bring new challenges very rapidly and often unexpectedly. The traditional politics and state structures are perhaps able to respond to these in the short term, but are not able to develop concepts on how to deal with them once and for all. This provokes questions about how modernisation and politics correspond with each other and what traditional and innovative forms of power have proved to be effective and implementable in this process.

Another point is the renationalisation of politics, as nationalist rhetoric has returned in a more or less radical way. Dynamic modernisation and globalisation have brought about neither the dissolution of the state nor an end to concepts of the nation—on the contrary, it seems to strengthen them, especially when (economic and military) crisis situations occur. Although many new actors appear in the international relations and fulfil public tasks nationwide, the state and its institutions are the basis for keeping the order and bringing security, and only the state has tools for this (e.g. setting the rules by legal norms, or using violence legally). Therefore, the question of how the society and politics deal with the limitation of power through globalisation processes and in what way politicisation results from that is one of the most important issues of the present time.

As a result, not only the confrontation with authoritarian structures of power but also relations between the state and society in democracies cause the need to ask permanent questions about the necessity of politicising society. The issue of the maturity of the masses and elites is as important as the issue of civil society as a political instrument of the people used to execute political interests. Civil society, thanks to new tools resulting from modernisation, digitalisation and globalisation, can control the politics and react to its activities, but also influence the electoral process in a way that has never been possible before. There is also a growing desire for participation in not only the electoral act but also the decision-making process, as it is broadly understood. This also contributes to the political re-activation and politicisation of society on a massive scale. In this context, questions of communication between not only

politics and society, or the elite and masses, but also social actors arise—how should it be constructed and through what channels, and how can new technologies improve it, or what challenges (e.g. transparency) and possibilities (e.g. of dialog or mobilisation/resistance) can they bring?

The problem signalled in the title of this volume is of utmost importance today. While envisioning a completely depoliticised society requires a big leap of imagination, there can still be doubts as to the degree to which modern societies may or should be politicised in different dimensions. The contributors to this book give different answers to this question—on the selected examples from modern history and the present time, the process of politicising the society will be outlined, together with the tools and means used for that. These research fields contribute to the newly arising issue of the necessity to politicise society.

In part one, the authors preoccupy themselves with the national ideas of such countries as the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, and Ukraine. They examine various aspects of the main problem under discussion, including nationalism, populism, traditionalism, and elitism. The focus of part two is on national politics. Four of the five chapters concern politics at the local level, the mediatization of politics in Russia, political changes in Ukraine in the period 2013–14, and the problem of political elites in the latter country. The fifth chapter is devoted to the question of the monarchical form of government in European countries. The content of part three and part four goes beyond national ideas and politics. The authors deal, first and foremost, with the problem of politicisation in the international and transnational arenas. They discuss such issues as societies in the late-Westphalian environment, international relations in Europe and Asia, the idea of global civil society, as well as various facets of human rights in both international and domestic dimensions.

This book is the fifth volume of the Copernicus Graduate School Studies. It has an interdisciplinary character and provides diverse approaches to the relations between politics and society. Most of the authors are young researchers of different disciplines, representing different scientific cultures. Although far from attempting an exhaustive coverage of the undertaken topic, the contributors hope that it may serve as a reference for persons interested in the discussed issues. The target audience includes, *inter alia*, students of political and social sciences.

Warsaw and Toruń  
December 2016



## **PART ONE**

### **NATIONAL IDEAS**



## CHAPTER ONE

# THE USE OF HISTORY AS AN IDEOLOGICAL PROXY AND ITS IMPACT ON CONTEMPORARY CZECH POLITICS

ADAM SLABÝ

The history of national societies and nation states saw a massive development of the interdependence between the nation and its politics. The aim for congruence between the national community and the state is hereby one major factor and a basic principle of nationalism.<sup>1</sup> A historical perspective unveils the relation between political action and the reproduction of the national sentiment in all of its various forms, including the tragic dimensions of such agency and related, disastrous events that contribute to the often apprehended negative notion of “nationalism.” The question arises of how much politics is indeed needed for the preservation of national sentiment and the related categories, as well as the question of the malign limits of this action. The following chapter addresses a particular dimension of national sentiment—political agency related to the production and reproduction of “national history” and various, complimentary narratives and their subsequent usage in political discourse.

Three subsequent elections in the Czech Republic<sup>2</sup> displayed notable cleavages within Czech politics and society, especially visible in the

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<sup>1</sup> This article hereby refers to the definition of nationalism by Ernest Gellner in his book *Nations and Nationalism: New Perspectives on the Past* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 1, and its overall concept of nationalism as a process of establishing nations and related national realities and categories.

<sup>2</sup> These were the regional elections in Autumn 2012, the presidential elections of January 2013, and the elections to the chamber of deputies of the Czech Parliament in October 2013.

means of electoral campaigning and political mobilisation. Historical argumentation comprised a remarkable portion of this form of political discourse. This chapter aims to take on historical arguments and the instrumental usage of the past for the benefit of political contest and electoral gain. It addresses the distinct fringe between motivation fuelled by genuine national interests and activities urging popular acclaim by means of historical argumentation for the benefit of vote accrual.

The analysis is provided in gradual steps. The chapter first provides a theoretical framework with regards to the nationalistic and political dimension of history and the nature of history in general. This is followed by the portrayal of the current political constellation of the Czech Republic and the most relevant shaping factors, especially those linked to the analysed process. The empirical portion of the chapter comprises the analysis and evaluation of three distinctive *topos* present in the usage of history-related political mobilisation: anticommunism, anticlericalism, and the usage of historical parallels concerning the events in the Ukraine, which lacks a proper denomination by means of an “ism.” The chapter’s main argument is that the usage of historical reference serves as an ideological proxy and an instrument for temporary electoral mobilisation, thus obfuscating the lack of a sustainable party program, highlighting the deplorable state of contemporary Czech politics and political culture.

## **Constituents of National Existence and the Role of History**

A brief and simple description would portray the emergence of nations as a process, in which individual bearers of certain traits turn into a cognitive group of people who recognise each other as members of a nation, mainly distinct by the very traits that were previously present and visible, yet merely individual. Put differently, a nation is not a mere externally delimited set of trait-bearing individuals. It is far more the internal grid between the trait-bearers—the deliberate, conscious communication and cognitive appreciation of the traits that make up a nation. Only such a set-up endows the “nation” with the agency necessary for the reproduction and action on its behalf, also making it capable of the deliberate exclusion and inclusion of those perceived as nationals or not.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In *Nations and Nationalism*, Ernest Gellner highlights the necessity of agency endowment within the national community, which is related to the constitutive foundations of the nation, to which he refers as “high culture” (1983). As for the inclusion and exclusion, the principle of “imagined community” by Benedict



Specific preconditions are necessary for the establishment of a vivid national community. Education, an effective means of broad communication, and an appropriate set of political freedoms are hereby crucial, as they enable the spread and sustainable reproduction of a national community, including the dissemination of nation-referring categories. While historical differences exist between established states and the national communities developing within them, as well as national communities emerging in foreign state units and polities, the principle is somewhat the same.

The traits that constitute the basic principles of a national community can differ between various nations—national language/mother tongue, ethno- and socio-cultural traits, religion, or heritage are examples of constituents of national identity. These can be combined and have a different emphasis within different groups, as well as a different influence in their particular role of endowing the given national community with nation-related agency. Besides the founding traits of a national community, a spatial *topos* comprises an important role in the existence of a nation and its actions. Here, notable differences exist between nations emerging in established states, gradually transforming the latter to nation states and stateless nations, seeking an independent nationhood. The principle of congruence between the nation and its statehood, as described by Gellner,<sup>4</sup> serves here as an illustration of this functional principle.

The chapter's focus is on history. The historical dimension of the national existence plays a crucial role in the production and reproduction of the nation and nation-related categories. While the nation-building process is objectively a modern occurrence, enabled by specific socioeconomic and political development, a national community will hardly accept its existence as a mere result of such a process and thus acknowledge the lack of a historical dimension and related historical glory. National communication and consciousness will relate to previous forms of statehood, archaic states, kingdoms, and empires as well as to the presence of distinct traits which became the foundation of a national community, hereby ignoring the lack of a mutual recognition of these traits as a national principle and a resulting absence of national consciousness based on them. Using the ideas of Rogers Brubaker, the category of

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Anderson can be used to demonstrate the ability of a nation to exist beyond the direct contact of individuals based on the imagination of the very same individuals and their knowledge of rules, which they apply to recognise the existence of their nation and the affiliation of people to this nation. See *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*.

practice hereby differs from the category of scientific analysis.<sup>5</sup> The vast dimension of the constructed “national history” provides an extensive basis for political agency. The constructed historical dimension of the national community herewith not only enters public and political discourses, but also gets reproduced and corroborated.

## Motives and Forms of Political Usage of History

Various groups and actors take advantage of the related potential and use it in manifold forms and with a broad array of reasons for the usage. The variety of forms can extend from self-aggrandising appraisals to vitriolic diatribes, which can be of an openly chauvinist nature. While concrete examples can vary in their form and contextual reference, John Coakley provides a functional summary of the potential of historical narratives for political mobilisation. The “national history” and the derived narratives are usually divided into distinct eras, featuring a “golden age” with its deeds and notable personalities, and contrary to that a “dark age” with specific reasons for its emergence and an account of persons related to the national downfall and subsequent era of national revival, again highlighting the deeds and actors of these ages. Such a division not only sets up a vivid narrative but provides contemporary political discourses and argumentations with a wide set of what could be described as ideological ammunition. Present-day politicians can use historical references in days of economic or political crisis and point at the “golden ages,” mobilising the will to overcome crucial times, divert the people’s attention from the crisis, or even obfuscate their (in)competence in battling the reasons for the crisis. The reference to a historical overcoming of critical times can similarly serve as a mobilising potential in electoral campaigns or political manifestations in general, posing as a spiritual backbone in hard times.<sup>6</sup> Such an application of history remains not just on the factual level. The argumentation and mobilisation can be and often is personal. By introducing parallels to historical events and related personalities, mainly to the culprits, a present-day likeness to competing politicians and antagonists can be set up and used as a way of assault and demonising. This can include both domestic political opponents and foreign politicians, or in extreme cases whole ethnicities and nations. The latter case can be

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<sup>5</sup> See R. Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> See J. Coakley, “Mobilizing the Past: Nationalist Images of History,” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 10 (4) (2004): 531–60.

derived from stipulated historical feuds between nations and related prejudice and hostility, projected onto the presence and subsequently instrumentalised.

An optional categorisation and distinction of nationalist history telling has been introduced by Ladislav Holy, particularly on the Czech example. In a comparative matrix, he distinguishes between a nationalist and a non-nationalist historical ideology, as derived from the existing Czech historical discourses. The main distinction, which shapes the nationalist version, is the nature of the nation being a subject of history, rather than its object. A further aspect is the discontinuity of national history, respectively the related notions of the past, whereas the non-nationalist approach takes up a continuous perception of national history. Related to the former, the nationalist approach is the highlighting of external impacts and reasons for breaks in national history. This concept bears a notable similarity to the aforementioned categorisations of Coakley. A further notable trait of nationalist, historical storytelling is the emphasis on the national agency in the “undoing of history.”<sup>7</sup> Just as described in Coakley’s findings, the undoing of history offers manifold dimensions of explicit and implicit transformation into contemporary political debates. Historical reference and the accent on past deeds and glory can hereby often be tantamount to political mobilisation in the present and the description of antagonising personalities by means of historical comparison.

The scarce space provided for this chapter does not allow for a complex description of the principles of shaping history. The brief illustrative portrayal of the possible usage of historical narrative shall highlight the necessity of focussing on the intentions of historically based argumentation. The analytical emphasis must hereby lie on the distinction between a short-term, instrumental usage, e.g. for political mobilisation, and the sustainable reproduction of historical narratives and related historical consciousness for the sake of the very same. The analysis of the contemporary political framework, its actors, and discourse patterns hereby provides a vital aid.

## **Contemporary Czech Politics and Sociopolitical Constellations**

As of fall 2014, the most notable trait of the Czech party system in general is the continuous rise of the movement *Ano!* (“Yes!”), led by the Slovak-

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<sup>7</sup> See L. Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 127.

born tycoon Andrej Babiš, the stagnation of the leading left-wing party, the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), and the huge decline of the former right-wing hegemon, the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), and to a smaller extent the successor of ODS' leading post, the TOP09 party. From a long-term perspective, the significant feature of Czech politics is a notable cleavage between various Czech actors, which is however not defined by means of the different founding ideologies of the parties. The distinctive trait is the variety of functional approaches to politics, the one side preferring a formalistic and interest based attitude, whereas the other side focuses on a broader ethical and generic role of politics and its synergy with the society.

The origins of this cleavage reach back to the nascent era of the democratic political system in the Czech Republic and Czechoslovakia following the 1989 Velvet Revolution. The prominent role of the pre-1989 dissidents soon hit the limits of political efficacy and became more ostensible than effective, until fading totally.<sup>8</sup> The idea of a broad-based sociopolitical transformation proved futile and was soon replaced by a system of party politics, representing particular ideologies. The most notable was the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), led by the charismatic and agile Václav Klaus, a staunch proponent of the representative principle and at the same time a staunch opponent of apolitical, civic approaches to politics. From a formalistic point of view, the development in the Czech Republic resulted in the establishment of a set of democratic institutions and a concomitant party array. This process was however marked, and is still influenced, by the lack of an established ideological consensus<sup>9</sup> with regards to the general national development. As Baylis notes, the differences over the institutional framework or the policy substance do not differ from those found in longer-established democracies.<sup>10</sup> While this is indeed right, the Czech case is specific in the sustainable and long-lasting effect of the existing cleavages and divides, which comprise one of the leading characteristics and influencing factors of the post-1989 Czech politics and society.

For the sake of brevity, the most notable and influential incarnation of the aforementioned state shall be used as an illustration. The success of

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<sup>8</sup> For a description of the decline of the role of dissidents in the Czech transformation process, see J. Krapfl, "The Diffusion of 'Dissident' Political Theory in the Czechoslovak Revolution of 1989," *Slovo* 19 (2) (2007).

<sup>9</sup> See S. Hanley, "The New Right in the New Europe? Unraveling the Ideology of 'Czech Thatcherism'," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 4 (2) (1999): 163–189.

<sup>10</sup> See T. A. Baylis, "Elite Consensus and Political Polarization: Cases from Central Europe," *Historical Social Research* 37 (1) (2012): 90–106.

Václav Klaus' ODS and its interim domination in the first half of the 1990s prompted the establishment of a buzzword that became symptomatic and is still a frequent derogatory denomination in political discourse—*pravdoláskař* (“lovetruthor”).<sup>11</sup> Derived from a famous quote of Havel,<sup>12</sup> it maliciously points out the objectives against an alleged elitist, aloof politics that stipulates a general interest of the society, yet—in the eyes of its critics—is self-serving and lacks popular backing, for example in the form of electoral acclaim. Opposed to that is an approach that lacks a generic buzzword label but which deems itself pragmatic, functional, and formalistic. Objections and criticism of this approach aim at its self-serving nature, populism, and related obfuscation of particular, individual, and reckless interests. To make the matter complicated, this divide is not congruent with ideological and party divides but has managed to establish itself within particular parties, although the ODS and ČSSD can be named as the most notable habitats.

The very same parties and their mutual relations can serve as a further example of the impact of existing divides and their overall effect on Czech politics and society. With the evermore frequent failures of the ODS, the Social Democrats started to establish themselves as a notable opposition, a development accompanied by numerous political skirmishes. Before the decisive duel—the 1998 parliamentary elections—the clash of the parties culminated. Following the more-or-less stalemate results of the poll, the hitherto alienated parties agreed to a brokered division of power and control, rendering effective opposition impossible. Such a development was only possible because in both parties, despite ideological differences, individuals could be found who shared the very same functional and pragmatic understanding of politics, detesting the ethical dimension of politics and related responsibility.<sup>13</sup> Such a turn of events triggered a growing increase in discontent and disillusion within the society. The practical display of the ability of politicians to overcome ideological grievances to serve their needs and power interests—the local and regional level providing a sheer abundance of examples—has diminished the impact of ideologically based argumentation and political contest. These

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<sup>11</sup> The translation of this word into English has come from R. B. Pynsent, “‘The Heart of Europe’: The Origins and Fate of a Czech nationalist cliché,” *Central Europe* 11 (2) (2013): 1–23.

<sup>12</sup> *Pravda a láska musí zvítězit nad lží a nenávistí* (truth and love shall prevail over lies and hatred).

<sup>13</sup> Václav Klaus and Miloš Zeman, both former prime ministers and presidents of the country (the latter the incumbent), personify this approach on either side of the political array.

went on to be present and used, but with a diminishing impact. In such a situation and political environment, the parties were increasingly forced to rely on various ideological proxies, of which a portion is the subject of this chapter. An increasing number of political scandals, a decline in social welfare as a result of an insufficient economic policy, and the economic crisis have led to a gradual decline of the ODS and partially the ČSSD. The reasons for the rise of Ano! are manifold, but the distrust of established parties and a search for a universal saviour, or simply being keen on a trial-and-error method, knowing that things can actually only be better, are important.

### **Anti-Communist Patterns in Historical Argumentations: a Failure to Come to Terms with the Past**

The most notable ideological proxy related to history that dominated the Czech political discourse of the second half of the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century is anti-Communism. Anti-Communism became a significant and prominent political strategy with the rise of the Social Democrats, which correlated with the dwindling power and influence of the ODS. The first memorable event related to the use of this rhetoric was the mobilisation poster on the eve of the 1998 parliamentary elections. These elections were likely to decide which party would gain governmental influence, thus prompting the possibility of a retreat to opposition for the ODS. The poster and the main *topos* of a “mobilization” drew a deliberate parallel with the 1938 mobilisation of the Czechoslovakian armed forces, thus suggesting imminent danger for the state and society. The menace here was the option of a falling back to the pre-1989 political constellation, implicitly linking this turn of events to a possible victory for the Social Democrats, hereby rendering the opponent as tantamount to a party with pre-1989 ideology and intentions. Given these circumstances, the turn of events following the election result surprised many, as the ODS agreed with the Social Democrats on the so-called “Opposition Treaty,” securing both parties a notable portion of political influence alongside a corresponding division of posts for individuals. This development not only led to a deterioration of the political culture in the Czech Republic<sup>14</sup> but also unveiled the utilitarian nature of anti-Communist argumentation. The Opposition Treaty had however not ended the competition between the

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<sup>14</sup> L. Kopeček, “Opoziční smlouvy ‘za kopečky’ I.: Byl pakt ČSSD a ODS z let 1998–2002 demokratickou deviací,” *Středoevropské politické studie* [Central European Political Studies Review] 15 (2–3) (2013): 175–195.

two parties, and nor did it bring an end to the usage of anti-Communist rhetoric on behalf of the ODS and its followers. The campaign against the Social Democrats and their alleged communistic affiliations became even more sophisticated, developing a vast variety of symbols, the portmanteau KSČSSD—comprised of the acronyms of the Communist and Social Democratic parties—being the most prominent one. However, this discourse never aimed at a general coming to terms with the past—a vital precondition of transformation.

Even political attempts to set up scientific institutions for the purpose of the processing of the Communist past were heavily influenced and tarnished by a dubious agenda. The Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (ÚSTR) was brought into existence following the initiative of the senate—the second chamber of the Czech parliament—which then had a majority of ODS senators. The resulting political influence and orientation of the institute could hardly be overseen and became personified by the institute's director, Pavel Žáček, who did not conceal his points of view, which were close to those of the ODS narratives and opposing those of the ČSSD.<sup>15</sup> The perception of the institution has thus been tarnished, rendering it a political instrument rather than a venerable scientific body. The various changes in the directorate and the related medial uproar, the most recent occurring in 2013, have steadily and sustainably corroborated this notion.

The constant attacks of the ODS, based on anti-Communism and the related political mobilisation, saw their peak in the so-called “egg throwing” campaign during the 2009 election campaign. Jiří Paroubek, then prime minister and ČSSD chairman, became an epitome of evil for the particular anti-Communist discourses, alongside a notable portion of viral campaigns, images, videos, and blogs. But all this campaigning could not detract from the fact that its purpose was political and self-serving, rather than aiming to serve as a corrective for political culture and a coming to terms with the Communist past. Moreover, the egg-throwing—an outright physical assault—provided space for the establishment of a competing, antagonising discourse: anti-anti-Communism. Its main discursive strategy was to brand anti-Communism as primitive and

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<sup>15</sup> His views can be demonstrated by his article about the role of the ODS in the coming to terms with the Communist past, in which he unmistakably advocates the approach of the ODS and attacks the ČSSD and their related policies. See P. Žáček, “Role ODS při překonávání komunistické minulosti,” in S. Balík et al. (eds.), *Občanská demokratická strana a česká politika. ODS v českém politickém systému v letech 1991–2006* (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2006), 195–213.

totalitarian, or even in certain cases fascist. While an opposition to the abuse of anti-Communism in political competition, with a self-serving aim, inhibits a sincere coming to terms with the past that can hardly be contested, the emergence of anti-anti-Communism made matters somewhat worse. The clash of these discourses further derived its focus from a genuine historical debate on its political abuse. As of today, the coming to terms with the Communist past can be described as having failed in the Czech Republic, as sincere efforts are inhibited by the abusive use of anti-anti-Communism and anti-Communism. The constant and long-lasting usage of the latter discourse in political contest, particularly in its estranged form, has further led to a demise of anti-Communism, as any attempts to develop an impacting socio-political agency by its means are ineffective.<sup>16</sup> The more-or-less perceivable negligence of the society surrounding the alleged collaboration of Andrej Babiš with the Czechoslovakian Secret Service (StB) can serve here as one of the notable examples.

### **Anti-clericalism and Anti-Catholicism and their Endurance in Czech Politics**

Also related to the coming to terms with the past was the issue of the restitution of Church property seized by the Communist regime after 1948. The legislative proposal of this step was also a transition from the state-based financing of the churches to a self-sustained financial backing enabled by the return of the property. The passing of the law coincided with a long-lasting governmental crisis and an exacerbated form of coalition-opposition dispute, set in a long sequence of politics-related scandals. The opposition to the property transfer went on to dominate the campaign of the 2013 regional elections, mainly in the campaigning strategy of the Social Democrats, despite the fact that the regional administrative bodies have no competence regarding the matter. This, as well as the lack of a significant, regionally defined set of goals, aims, and programs, unveils the proxy nature of the theme. The stringent use of the topic in the later parliamentary elections does not debunk this assertion, as the topic remained a prominent theme in the related agency setting.

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<sup>16</sup> For a detailed description of the demise of anti-Communism in the Czech Republic see A. Slabý, "The Demise of Anti-communism and its Effects on Coming to Terms with the Communist Past in the Czech Republic," *Darbai ir Dienos* 60 (2014): 251–263.



Admittedly, however, the parliamentary elections campaign displayed a more manifold set of topics and issues within the presented programs.

Although the law included all eligible churches and religious societies, the focus of the campaign on the Catholic Church was as difficult to oversee as it was intentional. Campaign visuals and billboards served as evidence of this circumstance, the most notable introduced by the Social Democrats. Their visual of a politician's hand passing a bag of money to a Catholic clergyman's hand was set alongside an alleged amount of related costs to stir uproar in the society.<sup>17</sup> The ČSSD hereby effectively exploited anti-Catholic sentiments by establishing a link to an alleged protestant and anti-Catholic tradition of the Czech national movement, hereby highlighting the ideas and deeds of the Hussites and Jan Hus. Such a step was not new to politics. In the 1890s—a heated era of Czech nationalist struggle within the Austrian Empire—anti-Catholic sentiments and the instrumental introduction of the Hussite era into political argumentation played an immense role, whereas the Catholic Church was presented as tantamount to a genuine national antagonist and outright enemy, siding with the Austrian Empire.<sup>18</sup> Like in the 1890s, the contemporary efforts aimed to portray an era of national glory during the Hussites and refer to the culprits of its downfall—the Catholics and the Habsburgs, later the Austrian Empire—which corresponds with Coakley's description of historical mobilisation. The contemporary campaign established parallels with the past, depicting the alleged culprits of the present as akin to their historical predecessors. The culprits here were notable clergymen, politicians in favour of the restitution laws and to a lesser extent notable personalities siding with the law proposal. The concomitant campaign in social media, a notable platform of present-day Czech political discourse, developed ludicrous dimensions as it relied on distorted images of the Hussite era. These images were often founded in the Communist era, portraying the Hussites as akin to a socialist movement of the medieval era, hereby altering or outright forging historical reality and obfuscating the theological principles of the reformist movement. While modern-day, post-1989 historiography has clearly debunked these perceptions, the impact of Communist images, such as of the Hussite film trilogy by Otakar Vávra, remains present; numerous quotes introduced in the

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<sup>17</sup> See ČSSD, *ČSSD odmítá návrh vlády na vyrovnání s církvemi*, <http://www.cssd.cz/aktualne/aktuality/cirkevni-restituce-3/> (accessed October 25, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> For an extensive description of this process see P. Cabanel, "Protestantism in the Czech Historical Narrative and Czech Nationalism of the Nineteenth Century," *National Identities* 11 (1) (2009): 31–43.

political campaign were drawn from the movies, regardless of their ahistorical and made-up nature.

The ČSSD had to a certain extent managed to succeed in raising the tension within Czech politics, but failed to gain the electoral acclaim it had expected to receive. The usage of ideological, history-base proxies has thus proven to be of dubious effect, although again this needs to be set into a long-term scope of political development, mainly of the previous political campaigning and its utilitarian nature.

The aftermath of the parliamentary elections and a relatively weak result reduced the manoeuvring space for the Social Democrats at the negotiating table and resulted in a coalition led by a Social Democratic prime minister alongside the Ano! movement and the Christian Democrats of the KDU-ČSL party. The latter were proponents of the restitution law and had also been the target of the aforementioned campaigning. But within the new setup a coalition without this party was not possible, as the parliamentary mathematics did not allow for another realistic coalition that would include the ČSSD. As the KDU-ČSL made it clear that it deemed any changes to the restitution law anathema,<sup>19</sup> for the sake of a stable government the Social Democrats were forced to abandon a government-based effort to undo the law. While notable individuals within the ČSSD and other parties remained staunch proponents of the undoing of the law and hereby continuously used anti-Catholic rhetoric, the campaign as a whole serves as an example of an ideological proxy acting as a desired catalyst for electoral acclaim, but after failing to meet its goals made the party face expectations it could not cope with. The intraparty coup within the ČSSD, founded on the long-lasting cleavage within the party, one akin to the “lovetruthor”-functionalistic divide, was *inter alia* argumentatively based on this,<sup>20</sup> as it used the election failure of the ČSSD to aim for a reconfiguration of the power structures in the party. It is however noteworthy that rather than having intentions to improve the party’s standing and perception within the public, the coup’s aim was to promote the personal interests of the individuals included. Despite its failure, the

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<sup>19</sup> See *Církevní restituce nechme být hlasí Ano a lidovci. Co ČSSD?*, [http://www.tyden.cz/rubriky/domaci/politika/cirkevni-restituce-nechme-byt-hlasi-ano-a-lidovci-co-cssd\\_288345.html#.VFYyYharz-A](http://www.tyden.cz/rubriky/domaci/politika/cirkevni-restituce-nechme-byt-hlasi-ano-a-lidovci-co-cssd_288345.html#.VFYyYharz-A) (accessed October 30, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> See *Opozice uvnitř ČSSD se podle Bohuslava Sobotky snaží o stranický puč*, [http://www.rozhlas.cz/zpravy/politika/\\_zprava/opozice-uvnitř-cssd-se-podle-bohuslava-sobotky-snazi-o-stranicky-puc--1273655](http://www.rozhlas.cz/zpravy/politika/_zprava/opozice-uvnitř-cssd-se-podle-bohuslava-sobotky-snazi-o-stranicky-puc--1273655) (accessed October 28, 2014); *Sobotka ustál pokus o puč. ČSSD ho chce jako premiéra*, [http://www.tyden.cz/rubriky/domaci/sobotka-ustal-pokus-o-puc-cssd-ho-chce-jako-premiera\\_280604.html#.VFZU6xarz-A](http://www.tyden.cz/rubriky/domaci/sobotka-ustal-pokus-o-puc-cssd-ho-chce-jako-premiera_280604.html#.VFZU6xarz-A) (accessed October 28, 2014).

coup unveiled the persistence of trans-ideological divides within Czech politics, which were further highlighted in the ongoing crisis in Ukraine and its perception within Czech politics.

### **The Ukraine Crisis in Czech Politics: a Specific Usage of History**

When approaching the Ukraine crisis, its introduction into Czech political discourse, and the related use of this topic as an ideological, history-related proxy, it needs to be said that this topic differs from the two described before. It is a borderline matter, as the whole issue is not centred around history only, and it mainly cannot be seen purely as a proxy as it intentionally reflects and proliferates ideological positions.

With relation to contents, the portrayal of the events in the Ukraine has mainly centred on the Majdan-Movement, the Crimea events, and the later outbreak of hostilities in Eastern Ukraine. A distinct trait was hereby the siding with the Russian depiction of events, mainly relying on the quoting of Russian media and politicians. The best example is hereby the portrayal of the Majdan movement and related politicians as “fascist,” using the presence of extremist forces without however acknowledging the complexity of the Ukraine events relying outright on the false propaganda of forged news. It was also this topic that saw a massive usage of history in the Czech interior’s political quarrel. Historical comparisons and frequent reminders of atrocities committed by Bandera gangs entered the Czech political discourse, hereby building on the negative image of these gangs based on their fights in Czechoslovakia in the aftermath of the Second World War. Drastic images of slain victims were deliberately used in social media by politicians to corroborate their stance against the Ukrainian government, hereby accepting the approach of the Russian mainstream and rendering the term “fascist” into a generic label usable against every opponent. While there should be no doubt that crimes and atrocities had been committed by Ukrainian nationalists, the omission of the historical context and an ahistorical usage of these parallels draw a peculiar image of contemporary Czech politics and its actors.

The occupation of Crimea was also widely debated, which might not come as a surprise in a country that has been victim to foreign occupations, including the Soviet one of 1968. But rather than siding with Ukraine and defying the act of aggression, the most vociferous voices were those vindicating the actions of Russia and the separatist, pro-Russian government in Crimea, acknowledging the right of the Russian population to secede from Ukraine and join Russia. The tragic downing of

the Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 has resulted in a myriad of speculations and quotes, ranging from the accusation of the Ukrainian government to the proliferation of conspiracy theories.<sup>21</sup> The official governmental position had condemned the downing, acknowledging the need for an independent, international investigation, but this did little to calm the uproar. Even those voices that had sided with the version stating that the culprits of the downing were the pro-Russian separatists instantly referred to the guilt of Ukraine for causing the crisis or for not locking down the region's airspace.

The motivation behind such voices is indeed a mixture of ideology and ideological proxies, the latter hereby being used as a catalyst. But given the manifold set of actors involved in this discourse, it is hard to define a significant, unifying trait of their behaviour. A notable dimension is the one of self-profiling mainly by means of opposition to the "establishment." The background hereby reaches from an outright anti-Americanism and anti-EU stance to a volatile usage of populist argumentation, which uses *ad hoc* topics to meet what it perceives as a majority sentiment among the population. Although Russia is, economically and politically, far from being what the Soviet Union was, some politicians also refer to the anti-Communist—and thus malign—dimension of the pro-Ukrainian argumentation, hereby often introducing an alleged Russophobe aspect. Like in the case of anti-Communism and anti-Catholicism, a dimension not to be neglected in describing the motivation is the existence of political cleavages where the alleged "lovetruthor"-side is mainly demonised and accused of being warmongering, jingoistic, anti-Russian, or even outright fascist.

As the conflict in the Ukraine is ongoing, it is likely that its impact on the interior politics of the Czech Republic will remain, further highlighting the low quality of political culture in the country.

## Conclusions

This chapter addressed the usage of history as an ideological proxy and the contextual set of this use, hereby aiming to portray the impact on contemporary Czech politics. The usage of ideological proxies corresponds with the state of Czech politics, which can be described as deplorable, whereas the usage of historical argumentation as a proxy

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<sup>21</sup> See J. Uruba, *Czech MP Huml: CIA shot down Malaysia Airlines flight MH17*, <http://www.czechjournal.cz/czech-member-of-parliament-huml-cia-shot-down-malaysia-airlines-flight-mh17/> (accessed October 29, 2014).

constitutes one contributing factor among many. The lack of a sincere and steady proliferation of programmes, attitudes, and stringent opinions leads to the breach of trust between politicians and the population. Such a development deepens the cleavages within the Czech society and leads to a further deterioration of an already bad state. The preference of individual political interest over general interest, no matter how obfuscated by reference to general interest, contributes to the lack of a general consensus, which in turn hinders a steady and sustainable development of the country, including the social wellbeing of the population. A further dimension of this state is the issue of the trustworthiness of the Czech Republic as an EU and NATO member state, mainly in relation to the presented positions on the relations with Russia and the crisis in Ukraine.

This chapter provided a brief analytical look at a particular aspect of the situation. It is unlikely that the qualitative level of argumentation and politics in general is going to improve in the near future. It is more than probable that future elections will again provide many examples of exacerbations of various malign symptoms, including the usage of ideological proxies, providing sufficient material for future, analytical views.

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