The Uneasy Birth of Czech Civil Society

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Abstract

This paper analyzes both the political discourse and reality of Czech civil society. It describes how the concept of civil society has emerged in a difficult ideological context, and sets out how policy towards it has developed, also highlighting its economic role. Recent empirical evidence on the existing range of citizens' activities and their attitudes toward aspects of civic society and organizations within it is marshalled in order to estimate the potential for citizenship in the Czech Republic.

Motto

One feature of the Czech national character is a strong dislike of bureaucracy; its concurrent distinctive feature is the mystical belief that bureaucracy should care for everything and that it has full access to any and all available means to do so.... Any duty we take away from government is political progress. The rise of democracy is feasible only in the form of civic autonomy.

Karel Čapek (1993, p. 20)

KEYWORDS:

TEN YEARS AFTER...

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In November 1989, something extraordinary happened which may well be understood as the quintessence of civil activism: the 'Velvet Revolution' [3] in Czechoslovakia. At that time, the *Civic Forum* and the *Public against Violence* emerged from scratch, in what were in 1992 to emerge as the separate nation states of the Czech Republic and of Slovakia, as political movements offering people hope for a better future. By peaceful negotiations, the representatives of civil society – led by dissident Václav Havel – deprived the leaders of the incumbent communist regime of their ultimate power. Havel's idea about the political role of civic activism has been nurtured during the painful period of the oppression of Charter 77 by communist authorities since it was created in 1977 to defend human and civil rights. (Skilling 1990)

Ten years after, Václav Havel was still in power as the Czech president. The Czech Republic was a consolidated country, with functioning democratic political institutions. Nevertheless, civil society and its organizational vehicles in the third or 'nonprofit' sector were not flourishing. There were apparently still an array of barriers in place preventing it from satisfactory functioning.

The primary purpose of this paper is to survey the political and social conditions and behaviors which have made for this state of affairs. We begin by outlining how civil society and the 'nonprofit sector' can be conceptualized in what follows, and sketch out shared parameters that form an East Central European backdrop against which developments in the Czech Republic an be understood. The paper then gives considerable weight to the influence of ideology, exploring the positions of both Havel

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[3] The term *Velvet revolution* originated at the end of 1989 to characterize the peaceful switch of power from the Communist party to the representatives of popular democratic movement in Czechoslovakia. Václav Havel refuses the hypothesis that it was he who invented the term; Timothy Garton Ash is one of Western journalists who are supposed to use this expression for the first time.

and Václav Klaus, the Czech Prime Minister 1992-1997, economist and neo-liberal. The extent to which these ideologies have fed through into actual policies in the context of a centralized administration is reviewed. Next, after a review of the civic sector's actual scope and economic contributions, behavioral factors – especially the preparedness of the population to be involved in public affairs – are reviewed. It emerges that the high hopes of prophets of civil society – as Havel certainly is – have been confronted with a much more modest reality. It is argued that the behavioral patterns of the population are still deeply imprinted by the totalitarian power structure of the communist past. This factor, alongside economic difficulties and political failures are important ingredients in explaining the dashing of the aspirations of Havel and others who share his vision. Yet more optimistically, the evidence reviewed also suggests significant unrealized potential in Czech civil society, which could yet be released through bold political action.

TOWARDS THE GENERAL CONCEPT OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Amitai Etzioni, whose communitarian philosophy has exerted not inconsiderable influence on thinking about civil society in Central and Eastern Europe, characterizes *citizenship* as the moral obligation of individuals to take an interest in the community in which they live (1988, p. 56). This definition distinguishes citizenship from the technical use of the concept, implying allegiance to a particular government. This obligation leads people to take action on behalf of others. "With the concept of citizenship introduced at home, cultivated in schools, fostered by the news media, enhanced by voluntary associations, and extolled from Presidential and other civic leaders' 'pulpits,' citizens of a

nation feel obliged to contribute to the well-being of the community they share" (ibid, p.56).

Relatedly, *civil society* may be understood as, "the independent self-organization of society, the constituent parts of which voluntarily engage in public activity to pursue individual, group, or national interests within the context of a legally defined state-society relationship" (Weigle and Butterfield, 1993; for elaboration and detailed discussion see Keane, 1998).

Civil society propagates itself through constantly emerging, functioning, and dissolving social interactions between citizens. It creates opportunities for citizens to collectively express and act upon their opinions and values, and encompasses two basic components:

- Social actors characterized by their civic attitude towards public concerns as defined above, that is, citizenship; and
- A legal framework defining the relationship between government and self-governing institutions.

The *civic or nonprofit sector* (henceforth, 'civic sector' in line with much regional discourse) can then be understood as the institutionalized expression of the life of civil society. The sector is made up of non-profit organizations, being voluntary associations of citizens who share common values and are willing to work together. Legal and other conditions which govern the functioning of the civic sector may, then, support and cultivate – or stifle and destroy – the potential for social participation and people's willingness to be involved in creating positive social conditions for their lives and the lives of others.

The *political function* of the civic sector has been helpfully portrayed by M. Kjarum. "Non-profit organizations fulfill a dual role in democratic society. They not only create the foundations of civil society, but also support both the constitutionally

defined political process and the existence of formal democratic political institutions.... The key function of non-profit organizations is to interpret citizens' requirements. They do so by facilitating dynamic citizen participation and raising citizens' awareness of these requirements. Through them, citizens' wishes and needs are articulated, transformed into political demands, and in this way become part of the political process" (1992).

Šilhánová *et al*.(1996, p. 7) and Frič *et al*.(1999) propose that the civic sector will only function to the fullest extent if it supports diversity and the development of different opinions: In other words, if it strengthens political plurality. The civic sector gives people an opportunity to gain political experience, with the understanding that this experience could later be applied in "real" politics. It also creates mechanisms that allow for the timely detection of internal or external threats to democratic principles in a given country. As Brown surmises there may be, "enormous benefits for democracy that accrue when this sector is strong and well organized" (1994, p. 6).

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN POST-COMMUNIST COUNTRIES

In analyzing post-communist societies, we should realize that their social structure, political forms and public attitudes are in many ways and forms still dependent on their communist past. So we need to understand that past in order to accurately portray the present. Rose (1996) compares the power structure of functioning socialist societies to an hourglass. A basic level of trust exists among the politically powerful, supported by the common privileges they have attained. Likewise, trust based on daily face-to-face contact exists between the politically powerless. A narrow channel connects these two groups,

which generally explains the widespread distrust and the feeling of *them* and *us*. Society is atomized in a way that fundamentally requires the power structure to be separated from the powerless masses. To this end, a repressive mechanism called "mobilized participation" was provided by organizations which subordinated all forms of citizen associations to political supervision and a strong administrative framework in communist countries. (Weigle and Butterfield, 1993). In the case of Czechoslovakia, the National Front constituted an important example of this.[4]

In contrast, in societies with a developed culture of citizenship, Rose argues that power structures take the form of a pyramid. Trust between the political elite and citizens is based on wide, horizontal connections between people, which link individuals and political representatives by means of numerous civic sector institutions. The horizontal trust that exists on all levels facilitates and strengthens the vertical trust between people who are affected by public affairs and those who are temporarily entrusted to take charge of them (Keane, 1998). This model brings out both the threatening nature of the civic sector under communist regimes, as well as its centrality to liberal democracies. "Civil society – in this context, the articulation of its interests by society independently of the state – was public enemy number one for a system that required social atomization as a necessary condition for its survival and reproduction, and that did virtually everything in its power to prevent the types of social, political, and economic interactions that could promote individual and group autonomy" (Schöpflin, 1991, p. 241).

Post-communist countries have inherited such a highly fragmented and atomized society, with a significant lack of trust among individual citizens, as well as between individuals and government. This heritage, encoded in values and patterns of behavior, is being overcome only slowly and with difficulty. It has wide ranging implications.

[4] Unfortunately, there is not a comprehensive historical or political analysis of its functions and activities

People are not used to associating or working to protect their interests when they are threatened. Government representatives are not used to negotiating with representatives of interest groups or with the public. Successful contact between these groups is sporadic and incidental, rather than systematically or legally established. There is the constant risk of inappropriate actions from both sides, stemming from a lack of information or understanding. In this context, non-profit organizations can play an important role, as institutions capable of shaping the behavior of their members through control, stimuli, and moral conviction. They extend the amount of time within which participants can come to agreement, thereby increasing the stability and reliability of social relationships.

This account also suggests that the attitude of post-communist government towards the civic sector is thus extremely important. Government has the power to contribute to the "resources" of the civic sector, by purposefully and systematically passing suitable legislation and creating a favorable political atmosphere which promote civic sector development, and by providing public money to support this sector – either from the state budget or by introducing favorable tax conditions for sponsors and non-profit organizations. Whether government is willing to use this power is the main issue, as we shall see below.

THE POLITICS OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Ideological positions

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available.

The political function of non-profit organizations in the development of democracy has become one of the hottest topics of recent times in the Czech Republic. Opinions differ, and the competing ideologies can fruitfully be portrayed by sketching the views of some of the most politically powerful actors. Political and economic neo-liberals, epitomized by Václav Klaus, support only the classic form of representing public opinions, through elections. In sharp contrast, social philosophers whose ideology is well embodied by Václav Havel believe that "...in every place where people feel offended or influenced by the effects of a decision, the possibility to inspect and influence the decision should be a part of the decision-making process" (Naisbitt-Aburden, 1992).

Regarding the neo-liberal perspective, the following quote is taken from a speech made on March 2,1995 by Václav Klaus, then Prime Minister of the Czech Republic. It represents the government's view of the civic sector during the decisive transformation period:

> ...there is a constant search for something that is neither a society of 'atomized' individuals nor a bureaucratic state. History has shown innumerable times that no path leads there, but rather, that freedom, political pluralism, and the market are the best tools to create a just, proper, and solidaristic society. This conviction has driven my four-year polemic in favor of the market alone, of a standard system of political parties without national or civic movements, and, based on the same logic, has also directed my actions to create a *society of free citizens*, rather than the misleading idea of a *so-called 'civil society'*...What is 'civil society?' I am afraid that it is something more than a society of free citizens, that collectivism is somehow attached to individualism in this society, based on the perception that this somehow complements and improves the basic principle of citizenship. (…) There is no need for social reforms or 'civil society' for that, nor for innovative theories that promote the idea that the value of association or community should be more highly prized than the value of freedom. (…) A group of citizens will undoubtedly promote its interests more easily than each citizen alone, but this is not and cannot be perceived as a positive in every circumstance. In order for that to be true, we would have to believe the optimistic hypothesis that people do not promote their own interests, but rather work towards higher values which enrich society. The validity of this hypothesis is not supported by any evidence. Therefore, proponents of so-called civil society should not rely upon it (his emphasis) (Klaus, 1996, pp. 288-291).

Klaus thus presents himself as a methodological individualist, denying the need to analyze human forms of association by any means other than examining individuals' intentions and actions. Klaus even disputes the ontological status of human communities and repudiates the idea that people would associate for any reason other than self-interest.

In the sharp contrast, Havel is a strong supporter of civil society and its institutions. There are some characteristic quotations from his famous speech to the Czech deputies in the Parliament on December 9th, 1997, which represented a severe critique of the nature and consequences of the more than five years of Klaus´ governmental policy:

> "Human beings are social animals who feel a need to form associations and to take part, even if it were only within their small worlds, in the management of public affairs and in the pursuit of universal benefit. This, too, was somehow forgotten: under the motto "the citizen and the state", the citizen was thrown into a hopeless solitude. In order that he would not feel too lonely, and because it was appropriate, the word "family" added from time to time. Beyond that, nothing but emptiness. Consequently, all that was left between the citizen and the state was a party with a capital P. (…) What I most blame them for is an apathetic, or almost hostile attitude, toward everything that bears even a distant resemblance to a civil society, or that which could create it. (…) Civil society (…) means a society characterized by a systematic opening of a room for a most diverse self-structuring, and for the broadest possible participation in public life. This kind of civil society bring with it, essentially, a twofold impact: firstly, it allows a human being to develop all of the facets of human personality, including that which makes a person a social animal, desirous of taking part in the life of his or her community; secondly, it constitutes a true guarantee of political stability." (Havel 1997, p.19,20)

More detailed analyses of the ideological positions of both Václav Havel and Václav Klaus, and their impact on the political decision making process in the Czech Republic, are provided in Potůček (1999a, 1999c). My own position is that both perspectives, one emphasizing the institutions of representative democracy, the other participatory democracy, are one-sided and insufficient. A developed civic sector makes democracy more resilient in the sense that, in addition to the essential traditional channels of representation which define democracy, it offers another way for citizens to articulate

their opinions and take action. The civic sector is pivotal in providing citizens with the opportunity to influence public policy more substantially than simply by voting in elections once every few years.

Policy developments under Klaus and after

As Klaus was Prime Minister in the Czech Republic's formative post-communist years, the theoretical concepts described above were not inconsequential beliefs. They had a substantial impact on actual policymaking by the Czech government during that period. A clear manifestation was the government's reluctance to provide leadership to citizens in creating the right climate for civic participation (Jařab, 1996, p. 30), and its never-ending reluctance to adopt new legislation regarding non-profit organizations. This legislative vacuum made the position of non-profit organizations very uncertain in the period of his governments (1992-1997). This significantly impeded the transformation of many important sectors, including education, health care, social security, physical education, and municipal services.

A Czech law on "public benefit" organizations finally came into force, after many delays, on January 1, 1996. Due to the absence of a special law, establishing a foundation was very simple. Indeed, due to insufficient and unclear tax regulations, it was still possible to misuse this institutional form to evade taxes. This was rectified by the adoption of a law designed specifically for foundations which was accepted in late 1997. This legislation of the late 1990s affects the position of churches, which are still fighting to have their former property restituted and for separation from the state, to gain economic independence (Novotný, 1995).

The left to centre Social Democratic government created after the general election in 1998 has behaved with much more friendliness towards the nonprofit sector. This has been true in terms of governmental programs, speeding-up the legislation and positive examples of productive collaboration between civil service and nonprofit associations. A good example is the approach taken to a government fund established in the beginning of the 1990s to support NPOs from a defined part of revenues gained from the privatization of state assets. Between 1992 and 1997, this had been frozen. Set conditions enabling its distribution within the sector were developed only in 1998 (see Potůček, 1999b). There are also examples of productive political dialogue between the government, civic associations and the general public. One would be the preparation of the Czech social doctrine, a long-term orientation document for social policymaking, which recognizes the contribution of the civic sector in this domain; another would be the encouragement to this sector offered in two recent public discussions about educational reform, and research and development policy.

SCOPE AND SCALE OF THE CZECH CIVIC SECTOR IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

There is quite limited data with which to gauge the civic sector's response to this changing ideological and policy environment. Šilhánová *et al*. (1996), Frič (1998), Frič *et al.* (1999) and Ryšlinková (1999) have provided data on the number and field of activities of non-profit organizations in the Czech Republic. According to these studies, in 1989 there were slightly more than 2,000 registered civic associations (including organizational units, chambers, interest associations, and foundations). After 1989, their number rose significantly, so that by the end of 1992 there were more than 20,000

non-profit organizations and by the end of 1998 there were about 40,000. Of these, up to 8,000 were associations directly involved in influencing the policymaking process. These figures are approximate not only because centralized statistics have not been kept, but also because many of these institutions exist only on paper. Among civic associations we will find traditional organizations, including sports clubs (11,700 in 1996), hunting associations (5,000 in the same year), and parents' clubs (about 2,700). The increase in registered organizations after 1989 is, to a significant extent, due to the fact that a majority of sports clubs and hunting associations were active before 1989 but were not registered independently, because only national umbrella organizations were listed. Similarly, parents' clubs (which grew out of the now defunct Association of Parents and Friends of the School) were newly registered as independent subjects.

Even assuming that 40,000 non-profit organizations existed in 1998, the resulting rate of about four non-profit organizations per 1,000 inhabitants is low in comparison with developed democracies. According to Frič, Goulli, Toepler, Salamon (1999), the equivalent of 74,200 full-time workers are employed by the nonprofit sector in 1995. With the addition of volunteer work which represents another 40,900 full-time-equivalent employees, we may conclude that the nonprofit sector offers employment to 2.7 percent of total employment in the country. The paid activities make up approximately 1.6 percent of the Gross Domestic Product, and including unpaid work, this share rises to 1.9 percent of the GDP. This is also low in comparison with Western countries. In the United States, for example, the "nonprofit" sector accounts for 7.8 percent of the GDP, and in the Netherlands, the country with the largest sector of all using a "structural-operational" definition, a figure of 12.6 percent emerges (Salamon and Anheier, 1997; Salamon *et al*., 1999).

Based on these data, it seems that despite some evidence of development of the civic sector in the Czech Republic in recent years in terms of numbers of entities, its economic, and we would suggest also political and social potential, have yet to be realized. This likely stems in part from the general factors relating to former communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe reviewed above, as well as the ideological and policy concerns discussed. However, further light can be cast by examining evidence on disaggregated patterns of political and civic participation, public opinions, and, crucially, the relationship between the latter and the former.

CITIZENS' CIVIC ACTIVITIES AND ATTITUDES[5]

Responses to the key question, "What is the potential for citizen participation in the Czech Republic?," presuppose some baseline of awareness and recognition; and a comparison of three factors:

- The actual participation of citizens in civic sector activities;
- As yet unrealized willingness to contribute to the activities of this sector; and
- Obstacles that have prevented citizen participation in this sector in the past.

In what follows, we analyze and compare these aspects of citizen participation using a range of survey evidence, including a major study undertaken at Charles University (Institute of Sociological Studies, 1995).[6]

[5] In what follows, we limit our focus primarily to forms of participation other than voting for, or joining, political parties. This is undertaken for pragmatic reasons; it should be recognized that the dividing line between party politics and politically oriented civic action is hard to pinpoint, being complex and evolving. See Potůček (199a) for an account of the role of political parties in the Czech Republic; and see Glenn (this issue) for an analysis of how Czech and Slovak political parties have emerged from within the civic sector.

[6] This section is based primarily on the results of research implemented in 1995 in the framework of a study called, "An Analysis of the Process of Formation and Implementation of Public Policy in the Czech

The evidence suggests, first of all, that the Czech public does not attribute great importance to the existence of non-profit organizations. Among seventeen areas of public policy which were rated by citizens in public opinion polls, support for non-profit organizations was viewed as the least important.

---Table I about here---

A quarter of citizens had no opinion about the role of non-profit organizations (Table I). The level of awareness and consciousness regarding the importance of the civic sector is higher among local government representatives, evidently because they often meet people who are active in the sector and are, therefore, exposed to the results of activity within it. The public's view of the civic sector and whether it is perceived as a specific, relatively homogeneous sector of public life remains a question. Frič (in Purkrábek *et al*., 1996) hypothesizes that people are aware of non-profit organizations which were transformed after 1989 and are oriented primarily at traditional leisure activities. However, these organizations are most likely not perceived to be a part of the civic sector. The civic sector is mainly associated with recently created organizations, particularly foundations and citizen's associations, which address "new problems," such as drug abuse, support for people with disabilities, or the needs of homeless people.

At the same time, it appears that the perception of the role of civic organizations, primarily various movements, is becoming polarized. The public has a positive view of ecological initiatives (such as Friends of the Earth, Rainbow, and Greenpeace) and

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Republic After 1989." This was undertaken at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Charles University and supported by the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic. The study examined a representative sample composed of 1,007 citizens and 222 representatives of local governments. We also draw upon other empirical research of citizens' opinions conducted by several Czech public opinion research firms, including STEM, IVVM (Institute for Public Opinion Research), SOFRES/Factum and GfK.

human rights movements (Committee for the Protection of the Unjustly Accused and the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly). On the other hand, citizens are strongly opposed to skinhead and anarchist movements. According to Institute of public opinion research, the percentage of respondents who considered the activities of skinheads to be decidedly harmful was 86 percent, while the percentage was 75 percent for anarchists. The activities of human rights movements were judged to be decidedly or probably beneficial by 71 percent, while ecological movements received this rating from 73 percent of respondents in June 1996. (Institute for public opinion research 1993-1999)

Evidence on the opinions on trade unions and a special "tri-partite institution" established to mediate between trade unions, the government, and employers, which are respectively regarded as part of, and linked to, the civic sector, is also available. A majority of Czechs are evidently in favor of the existence and activity of both trade unions and the tri-partite institution.

The character of citizens' consciousness is, to a certain extent, linked with their attitudes towards institutions of the government and political democracy. This attitude is, in fact, a real expression of citizenship, as it defines the degree of identification of individuals with political conditions and their willingness to personally play a role in implementing policy. To put the views about certain types of civic sector organizations in perspective, it is therefore useful to consider alongside them attitudes towards the government.

What emerges in the case of public institutions, as much as the civic sector, is a mixed picture: certainly with regard to confidence, there is marked variation. For example, confidence, rather than lack of confidence, characterized the relationship of citizens to the President (in whom 15 percent lacked confidence), local and city representatives (19 percent), the supreme accounting office (21 percent), and the Prime

Minister (32 percent). People had less confidence in all of the Ministries, while particularly low confidence and high lack of confidence is attributed to the Ministries of the Interior (45 percent lacking confidence), Health (50 percent), Labor and Social Affairs (43 percent), and Education (39 percent). Parliament also receives a low degree of public confidence – more than three times as many people do not have confidence in it than have confidence in it – as do the Courts of Law. Other independently obtained research results confirm these findings.[7] This is alarming, considering that a properly functioning parliament and court system are the institutionalized embodiments of democratic ideals.

Regular surveys of the public regarding their opportunities to achieve justice and gain access to their citizens' rights underline the enormity of the problem. (Institute 1993-1999) Those questioned with regard to public administration do not have much hope: they estimate their chances after several years as very slight or slight (between 1993 and 1996, 55-75 percent of respondents gave one of these two answers). Optimists who estimate their chances as very significant or significant are in the minority: their number varies between 17 percent and 36 percent. Problematic contact with public administration or power is the most frequently named obstacle.

Second, Table II compares the *actual* and *potential* and participation of citizens in activities of various civic sector organizations.

---Table II about here---

This illuminates many aspects of both present participation and the potential willingness to be active in public life. Traditionally, most people are engaged in activities

[7] Resources: results of public opinion research done by research firms STEM and SOFRES/Factum.

of voluntary sport and cultural organizations, trade unions, and professional associations. Within these organizations, the potential for further and wider participation emerges as limited. Relatively lower participation and less participatory potential is also visible in churches and religious organizations. In contrast, the research discovered low current participation but a high interest in potential future participation in public-serving voluntary organizations, human rights groups, and environmental movements (cf. Frič in Purkrábek *et al*., 1996).

Table II also illustrates relatively high extent of negativity towards the public sector and political parties. While the relation of citizens to local government and, surprisingly, to public administration, is characterized by a higher rate of latent interest than actual participation, they generally attract less actual and potential support than the civic sector.

In this context, it is illuminating to consider responses to a hypothetical question: What would happen if opportunities for political participation were widened? Would this development opportunity be truly utilized? To explore this issue, respondents were asked whether they have an interest to be personally involved in the solution of public affairs. Table III summarizes the results, distinguishing by gender.

---Table III about here---

Fewer than half of all citizens indicated that they were prepared to directly and personally participate in public affairs. Higher than average interest was found for men – as shown in the table – and for people aged 40 to 60, more educated people, and residents of smaller municipalities. Significant interest was also noted in people who have experienced changes in their social position since 1989, regardless of whether it

has risen or fallen. Intensive interest in politics and public affairs is shown by less than one-tenth of adult citizens (Compare with Purkrábek *et al*., 1996, p. 25, and the research of IVVM and STEM from 1996.)

Individual citizens' responses as to why they would not be interested in participating in public affairs ranged from subjective (time constraints accounted for 34 percent, age for 14 percent, and different political views for 5 percent) to objective obstacles (mistakes of democracy received 17 percent, administration's lack of interest and corruption got 10 percent, and the fact that individuals were former communists and therefore prohibited from public life was the case for two percent) (Institute of Sociological Studies 1995, p. 40).

The paradox here is that, while public activity does not seem to attract many people, citizens are still aware that public and political activity greatly affects their lives. The survey established that while three-quarters of people did believe that involvement in public life substantially affected whether they were personally satisfied or dissatisfied, only a small portion have decided to actually influence the political process themselves by directly participating as citizens in public affairs. There are logical explanations for this. Many people feel the state very much dominates public affairs, and negative attitudes towards it shape their willingness to participate in both the public and the civic sectors. They seem not to believe that they have a realistic chance of influencing what are seen as the impersonal, shortsighted, and difficult public control mechanisms for creating and implementing policy. Others simply hope and rely on the fact that this responsibility will be shouldered by someone else.

CONCLUSION

Through all of the political and economic changes which have occurred in the Czech republic during the last years, development has still not progressed to the extent that the *powerful* and the *powerless* have become more integrated. It is a bit of a paradox, in the sense that the powerless today undoubtedly have more of a chance to control and influence the actions of the powerful than they did in the past. One statistic says it all: almost two-thirds of citizens (62 percent) in 1995 held the opinion that nothing prevented them from influencing the outcome of public affairs (Institute of Sociological Studies 1995, p. 39).

There are numerous causes for the indisputable deficit of citizenship, of active participation in the life of society. Two apply to participation in public life via both the public and civic sectors. First the continuing influence of stereotypes of behavior. After the long decades of communist rule, people have forgotten how to "speak up." Second, the economic stress of transformation has forced people to concentrate first and foremost on earning a livelihood. A third important factor applies particularly to public institutions and political parties: as the traditional channels of social control and mechanisms of representative democracy, these are widely seen as not having reacted quickly, effectively or trustworthily enough to the needs of people and the majority of society. Fourthly, and to emphasize the importance of ideology with regard to the civic sector, the counter-productive role of the Klaus government was damaging over the 1992-97 period, and leaves a major task of making up for lost time in the hands of the current government.

The present situation should be perceived by both politicians and political scientists as a pressing challenge. Many Czech people seem prepared to enter public life. They do not, however, because the institutionalized forms for mediating such participation seem inaccessible. At the same time, they see before their eyes the

numbness of political parties, the ungracious way that public administration treats citizens' concerns, and the difficulties of establishing and running non-profit organizations. The necessary changes for the better will not happen automatically. Without decisive political priority given to the reform of public administration and the development of the civic sector, a marked part of the untapped potential for citizen participation will remain on the sidelines in the future, too.

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