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# CZECH POLITICS OF HISTORY

## **Abstract**

The following paper reviews the schemes of memory behind the shaping of the contemporary vision of the Czech's own history and the forms they take while materialising in the contemporary Czech Republic. Among the "great narratives" to have built up the picture of Czech history, a leading role was assumed by a traditional model, that sees the Czechs as a nation on the border of Slavic and Germanic superethnoses. Simultaneously, attention was drawn to its reformation and modernisation potential and Slavic character, the latter of which intensified after having confronted the Germanic world. The Czech post-1989 settlement with its communist past has only slightly impaired this idiom of memory; Soviet domination, especially the Warsaw Pact intervention in 1968, has to a great extent depreciated the value of "Slavicness" as an element of identification of the Czechs. Also, a Czech sense of nationality has faded to the benefit of a sense of "citizenship"—with the latter understood in a broad sense. Czech state institutions have only to a limited extent been committed to researching some details of the politics of history. Among these organisations have been, for example, the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (*Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů*, ÚSTR), the Military History Institute (*Vojenský historický ústav*, VHÚ) and some other bodies, including the Czech National Museum (*Národní muzeum*). When analysing the responsibilities shouldered by the above institutions, one may observe an influential yet financially inadequate role of some NGOs, such as *Paměť národa* (The Memory of Nation) whereas a typical narrative pattern of Czechness has found its place in the educational system. As for the legal perspective, the Czech Republic managed to settle accounts with its communist past by passing both the Lustration Act and the Act on the Period of Lack of Freedom.

**Keywords:** Czech Republic, Czechoslovakia, politics of history, Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, ÚSTR, Military History Institute, VHÚ, *Paměť národa*, 1968, Hussites, House of Habsburg, communism, anti-communist opposition, lustration, Act on the period of lack of freedom

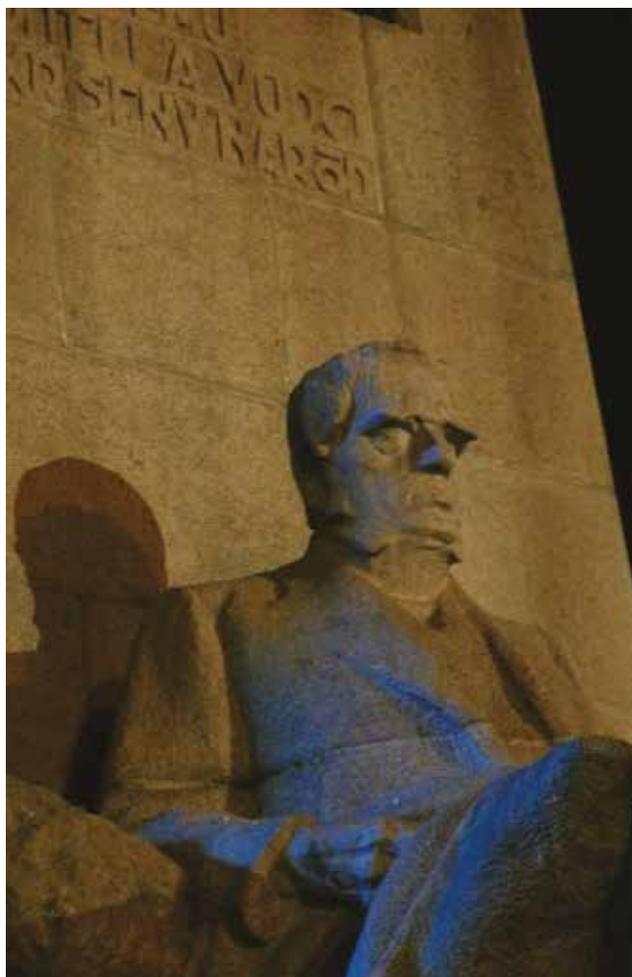
While considering the Czech politics of history, one should start with an assumption that the Czech language lacks such a term: this has so far brought no adequate reflection on the topic. Over the past few years, the term has been occasionally used, mainly in the context of Czech remarks on Poland's public debate, as an unsuccessful calque from the Polish *polityka historyczna* (Czech *historická politika*, although it would be more correct to refer to the phenomenon as *politika dějin* or *politika paměti*). The Czechs do not perceive themselves as “plunged into history”, which is a motif that tends to occur in the context of Czech comparisons with their Polish neighbours.

## Czech Great Narratives

Naturally, this does not mean that the Czech public debate so far has experienced no disputes over historical themes; on the contrary, they emerged as one of the leading issues in shaping the modern national identity. It is noteworthy that a historian, František Palacký, is regarded by the Czechs as the “Father of the Nation”, and his *History of Bohemia* is viewed as a key document in forming the present-day Czech nation (*Geschichte von Böhmen*, a five-volume *oeuvre* published in Prague between 1836 and 1865 whose Czech-language version, *Dějiny národu českého v Čechách a na Moravě*, volumes 1–5, was printed in Prague in 1848–1867; scans of the first Czech edition were published online by the National Library of the Czech Republic, Palacký 1848–1867). Palacký's narrative, based upon an idea of an ever continuing clash between Germanic and Slavic components, supplemented by an inflated role of the Hussite movement as the spiritual heart of Czechness, laid the groundwork for all consequent political and historical considerations, while bringing the Czechs to

the brink of a “divorce” with Vienna and the German culture. This occurred even though Palacký himself was, for multiple pragmatic reasons, a proponent of the Habsburg Monarchy. The latest analysis of Palacký’s historiosophical concept, along with his influence on developing the Czech symbolic imagination, was discussed by Kamil Činátl (Činátl 2011).

Yet another significant debate over “the meaning of Czech history” arose between the historian Josef Pekař and the founding father of Czechoslovakia Tomáš G. Masaryk, both of whom argued over their divergent viewpoints on the role of Catholicism and Protestantism in the history of the nation. Key texts on the said heated discussion



František Palacký Monument  
(Stanislav Sucharda, Alois  
Dryák, 1901–1912).  
Inscription: *Svému buditeli  
a vůdci vzkříšený národ*  
[To its reviver and leader—  
the nation resurrected].  
Prague, Czech Republic. 2019.  
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Czech Kingdom Arms on the Prague Old City Hall (15th c.) Prague, Czech Republic. 2014.  
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over “the meaning of Czech history” were compiled and commented on by Professor Miloš Havelka, see (Havelka 1995). As Czechoslovakia’s president and chief ideologist, Masaryk was both consciously and deliberately committed to setting a national historical narrative, based both on Hussite and Reformation traditions, which he acknowledged as a source of the liberal and rationalistic ethos of Czech society. Interestingly, despite a categorical rejection of the legacy of the “bourgeois republic”, this predominant manner of narrating Czech history was embraced after the World War II by Czech communists who insisted on the pivotal role of the Hussites and the anti-feudal and anti-German character of this tendency. Among historians who developed the thesis submitted by Nejedlý was the Czech medievalist Josef Macek, whose work on the “Hussite revolutionary movement” emerged as a critical expression of this new narrative (Macek 1952). Not incidentally, when the clergy of all churches were ruthlessly imprisoned or sent to labor camps in the darkest period of Stalinism, the Czechoslovak communist regime decided to restore Prague’s Bethlehem

Fragment of the Jan Žižka Monument in the Vítkov Memorial. Prague, Czech Republic. 2019.  
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Chapel, notable for its connection with the Czech preacher Jan Hus, two centuries after the original building had been demolished.

The continuity of this narrative, which encompassed Palacký, Masaryk and the communist regime—though many Czechs would refer to a similar statement as a blasphemy—implies that even in the post-1989 reality we should talk about the shift of emphases rather than a new beginning. Common motifs of the older narratives such as the linguistic (Slavic) definition of the nation, along with resistance to the German element and anti-Catholicism, all form a vision of Czech history, deemed as still valid, reproduced in school textbooks and disseminated by mass culture.

## Fear of the Word “Nation”

In recent decades, this majority perception of the national narrative has, however, been subject to rectification by reflection about the experience of communism and the incorporation of the European integration process within its framework. The events of 1968 undermined the Czech faith in the “Slavic idea” which had previously acted as an essential point of reference for shaping the modern national identity, as opposed to the abovementioned German element. This sentiment had been a driving force behind many Czech political and cultural choices, including a pro-Russian orientation and an interest in the Balkan region. Even today, both public opinion and culture mark a clear contrast between the “liberators” of 1945 and “occupiers” of 1968. Paradoxically enough, the key reaction to communism consisted of weakening the nationalistic dimension of the national discourse. As argued by Jakub Jareš, who represents the new generation of Czech historians, the post-1989 discourse has referred to Masaryk’s national-liberal approach, with the central myth of the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938) as a distinct island of liberal democracy drifting in a sea of authoritarian sentiments (Jareš 2016). The emphasis placed on the nationalist dimension of this myth has, however, been considerably weakened. Under the new post-communist version of Czech identity, the word “nation” was ousted from



Inscription on the Memorial to the Victims of Communism: 248 executed. Prague, Czech Republic. 2019.

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National Monument in Vítkov (Jan Zazvorka, Bohumil Kafka, and others, 1928–1950): the palimpsest of the national memory. Commissioned in 1920s and built in 1930s, this monument was planned to be ceremonially unveiled on the 20th anniversary of Czechoslovak independence on October 28, 1938. During the German annexation it was used as Wehrmacht magazines, and unveiled only in 1950 (under the Communist dictatorship), with a monumental sculpture of Jan Žižka of Trocnov (an outstanding 15th century Hussite commander and a symbolic figure of Czech military virtue) (the sculpture was commissioned in 1930s, finished only in 1941, and unveiled in 1950). The building contains the Grave of the Unknown Soldier, placed there after World War II, while the former Grave of the Unknown Soldier was destroyed by the Germans during the war (the remains of a Czechoslovak Brigade soldier fallen at Dukla in 1944 and—since 2010—the remains of a Czech soldier fallen in 1915 at Zborov are buried there). In 1950s a building was added with a memorial hall for the Soviet soldiers fallen in 1944–1945 on Czechoslovak soil. The building served from 1951 as a mausoleum for prominent Communist personalities. In 1953–1962 the embalmed body of Klement Gottwald, secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and Czechoslovak president from 1948, was displayed in the glass casket there. After 1989 their remains (including the cremated Gottwald's remains) were handed to their families or transferred to the Olšany cemetery in Prague. The interiors of the Monument, except for the Grave of the Unknown Soldier and the Soviet memorial hall, are now the National Museum exhibition rooms, with the permanent exhibition *Křižovatky české a československé státnosti* (Crossings of the Czech and Czechoslovak statehood). Prague, Czech Republic. 2019.  
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public debate. Of all the constitutions of the four countries of the Visegrád group (V4), the preamble to the Czech document is the only one that does not mention “nation” at all, focusing on “citizens” instead. When a public debate was held in 2007 with the goal of establishing an institution to be modelled on Poland’s and Slovakia’s Institute of National Remembrance, the Czech parliament rejected all proposals of the name that referred to the “memory of the nation”; it eventually decided to name the newly appointed body the *Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes*. The decision to reject the name *Institute of National Remembrance* was motivated by a number of reasons, including the need to refer to Czechoslovakia’s multinational heritage, yet most prevailing was the reluctance to “politically usurp the concept of nation’s memory.” More can be read about the discussion over the institute’s name in (Šustrová 2007; Stehlík 2013).

Such an approach flourished in the discourse of the Czech anti-communist opposition’s leading representatives since the creation of Charter 77. As noted by one of the Charter signatories and politician Alexandr Vondra, “in the Czech Republic, an individual rebellion of conscience prevailed among young people who decided to come out against the regime, while in Poland, it was about the Poles themselves. Speaking of our opposition, no one ever brandished a banner, either Czech or Czechoslovak” (Vondra 2017). Czech opposition to the regime did not encompass a “national independence” factor, which seemed so strong in Poland, and instead adopted the language of the defence of civil rights. On the contrary, the extensive use of ethnocentric discourse and the national symbols by Czech communism seemed to compromised them in the eyes of the considerable part of the society (Jareš 2016). Sociologists still ascribe the reluctance of the Czechs to manifest patriotism or use national symbols to negative associations with the period of communism.

Alongside communism, this reluctance towards the national discourse is linked to yet another burning issue of contemporary Czech history, that is the country’s relationship with German culture, whose dramatic culmination was manifested by the events of 1938, the World War II and the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans. Once altered, the Czech “great narrative” is driven by an increasingly stronger nostalgia



Inscription on the Memorial to the Victims of Communism: 4500 died in prisons. Prague, Czech Republic. 2019.

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for the times of the Habsburg monarchy. It has, however, little to do with the past restoration of the Habsburg baroque, as discussed by Josef Pekař who, in his dispute with Masaryk, juxtaposed “Latin” Habsburgs, whom he claimed were deeply rooted in Mediterranean culture, with the “Germanic” ethos of Lutheranism (Pekař 1929). At present, the Habsburgs are depicted in a positive light as being associated with the economic prosperity of the Czech lands at the time of the industrial revolution and, most importantly, also with a successive model of peaceful integration developed between various nations, emerging as a kind of forerunner

The military prison in Kapucinská Street (built 1894–1896), Prague. So called “Domeček” (“Little Cottage”) during the German annexation, it was a Gestapo prison, and in 1948–1955 the building was a military and security service prison, as well as the place where the political prisoners of the Communist regime were tortured. “Domeček”, is a symbol of the most brutal crimes of the Communist security services in Czechoslovakia. Prague, Czech Republic. 2019. © Franciszek Dąbrowski



of the European Union. The new narrative covered within its scope the notion of the so-called “land patriotism” (stressing the civic rather than ethnolinguistic principle) that also included the Czech Germans. Consequently, the 1945 Act on the displacement of the German population, considered to have laid the groundwork for the present-day Czech Republic, has been recently subject to criticism (it is noteworthy that, unlike on Poland’s Recovered Territories, the expelled Germans were Czechoslovak citizens before the war). Acts of violence committed during the deportations had the potential to become the Czech equivalent of Poland’s “Jedwabne case” – the story of a massacre carried out in July 1941 against the Jewish population of a small town mostly by its Polish neighbors, which became known to the wider public only around 2000. Among them was the Postoloprty Massacre, referred to as one of the greatest crimes perpetrated by Czechoslovak soldiers against the German population during the so-called “savage” stage of deportations taking place in the late spring and summer of 1945 (As a result, 763 German men, among whom were prisoners of war, NSDAP members and civilians, were killed without a prior court judgment).

In the context of recent years, a period that both the Czech Republic as well as all Western countries associate with an ever-deepening socio-political polarisation and the return of “identity politics,” the nostalgia for Habsburg times seems to have deepened, serving as a European remedy for a rising wave of nationalist sentiments. For its part, Czechoslovakia is sometimes deemed as a failed experiment, as exemplified by the fact that one of the publications issued to commemorate the 1918 anniversary was titled “Was It Worthwhile?” (implicitly: to fight for an independent state, Kučera 2019). Notwithstanding that, such an anti-nationalist correction of the Czech “great narrative” exerts a limited impact on society as a whole, remaining the domain of confined *milieus*. Most importantly, the “rehabilitation” of the Germans of the Czech Republic is still at a very early stage, as illustrated by the controversy over establishing the Collegium Bohemicum in Ústí nad Labem, or a museum of the history of German inhabitants in the Czech lands (Bican 2016). It is symptomatic that Czech society is scarcely aware of such events as the Postoloprty Massacre or the Brno “death march”. As a result of



Inscription on the Memorial to the Victims of Communism: 170,938 citizens emigrated. Prague, Czech Republic. 2019.

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Memorial plaque on the Military Prison in Kapucinská Street  
*Památce obětí umučených komunistickou policií*  
 (For the memory of the victims martyred by Communist police).  
 Prague, Czech Republic. 2019.  
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the latter, over 1,000 people, mostly children and old people, were killed when the ethnic German minority in Brno was expelled to nearby Austria. Czech state authorities rarely take part in celebrations to commemorate both historical events whereas inscriptions placed on memorials and sites of national memory generally mention “Czech and German war victims”. In Postoloprty, the local authorities did not agree to dedicate a commemorative plaque to “German victims,” as had initially been planned. Once modified, the text read: “In memory of the innocent victims of the events in Postoloprty” (Drda 2009); also see (Staněk 2005; Padevět 2016).



## Settling Accounts with the Communist Past

Poland’s popular belief in the “Czech successful attempt” to settle its accounts with the past has its grounding in solid facts. In the first years that followed political transformation, the Czechs performed a series of activities aimed at excluding from public life former regime officers and *nomenklatura* members. This was the chief purpose of the Lustration Act (Act 451/1991), barring certain categories of people, with particular regard to officers and collaborators of the communist security service or communist officials (including district secretaries and senior officials) from holding a range

of positions in the state administration, armed forces, police, judiciary institutions and public media. Originally adopted for only five years, the act has been extended several times. In 2014, major changes were brought to the Act by the first amendment, passed as a response to a controversy over Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, who served as Minister of Finance at that time; as reported, he allegedly cooperated with the communist-era Czechoslovak security service, as a result of which the Czech ruling coalition repealed the obligation to conduct a lustration process against ministers and their deputies (to read more on the amendment, also dubbed “Lex Babiš”: Lex Babiš 2014). Undoubtedly, this modification can be viewed as symptomatic of a new period in the history of the Czech Republic, marked by the problematisation of the popular attitude to the communist era, the wave of “nostalgia” for the past and the relativization of its legacy.

The second pillar of the Czech strategy of settling accounts with its communist past was the Era of Unfreedom Act (Act 480/1991). Enacted on November 13, 1991, it involved only two yet substantial paragraphs, the first of which provided for a sharp dissociation from the country’s communist past, as contained in the statement, saying that “in 1948–1989, the communist regime violated human rights as well as its own laws.” For its part, the second paragraph sought to maintain the legal continuity of Czechoslovakia as a successor of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (ČSSR). A specific combination of criticism of communist times, seen from an unambiguous ethical perspective, and a pragmatic pursuit for maintaining continuity seems to lie at the core of the approach adopted by the Czechs.

In particular, the 1991 Act was broadened by the Act on the Illegality of the Communist Regime and on Resistance Against it (Act 198/1993), adopted back on July 9, 1993. As stated in the preamble, a “democratically elected parliament shall confront and settle accounts with the past,” subsequently accusing the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia of “purposefully destroying traditional principles of European civilisation, violating fundamental rights and freedoms, moral and economic decline” and “destroying natural environment.” In its later part, the document considered the resistance of citizens against this regime “legitimate, just, morally justified



Inscription on the Memorial to the Victims of Communism: 205,486 sentenced. Prague, Czech Republic. 2019.

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The Memorial to the Victims  
of Communism (*Pomník obětem  
komunismu 1948–1989*)  
(Olbram Zoubek, Zdeněk Hölzl,  
Jan Kerel, 2002). Prague,  
Czech Republic. 2019.  
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and worthy of respect.” The 1993 Act exerted a considerable impact on both language—including its colloquial variant—and culture (both high and mass), leading to the nation’s final settlement with its communist past. An unequivocally negative assessment of that period was and still is referred to as an obvious matter, all that despite mounting waves of nostalgia and changes in the political climate over recent years. No one attempted to wipe out the past purposefully or preach some kind of “don’t bother with the past, choose the future” discourse popular for example in Poland. The communist period served after 1989 as a point of reference for both politicians and artists. The people’s mass consciousness of the communist period was to a great extent shaped by dozens of films depicting the events of the second half of the twentieth century, which can be seen as one of the leitmotifs of post-1989 Czech cinema. Although focused essentially on presenting life stories of ordinary citizens, these movies used great historical events as a background. The most influential modern Czech film directors, among whom were Jan Hřebejk or Jan Svěrák, shaped Czech mass consciousness after the democratic transition, unequivocally portraying all the evil of communism, the traumatic experience of the 1968 occupation or the stifling ambiance of a period after the Prague Spring of what the authorities referred to as “normalisation.” It is difficult to count all the Czech films that conveyed explicit opinions regarding the Communist era; they include both productions popular with mass audiences such as the Oscar-winning *Kolja* (*Kolya*, 1996), *Pelišky* (*Cosy Dens*, 1999) or the widely popular TV show *Zdivočelá země* (*The Land Gone Wild*, 1997) that was written by a former political prisoner Jiří Stránský, as well as thematically dense films, intended as a study of memory in the *milieu* of secret collaborators of the Czech Security Service, including *Kawasakiho růže* (*Kawasaki’s Rose*, 2009) or *Pouta* (*Walking Too Fast*, 2010).

Also, Czech cinematography was the first to shoot contemporary films to commemorate Czechoslovak involvement in the battles of Britain and Tobruk (*Dark Blue World*, 2001, and *Tobruk*, 2008) while recent years were marked by *oeuvres* commemorating the Lidice massacre (the worst massacre of Czech civilians during the World War II was portrayed in a 2011 film *Lidice*, also known as



Inscription on the Memorial to the Victims of Communism: 327 perished on the borders. Prague, Czech Republic. 2019.

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*Fall of the Innocent*) or the assassination of the Nazi official Reinhard Heydrich, considered the most famous operation carried out by Czech resistance forces (*Protector*, 2009, and *Anthropoid*, a 2016 international film based on Operation Anthropoid). Given all of the examples above, it is paradoxical to acknowledge what was quoted back in the introductory paragraph, or that issues relative to politics of history are practically absent from the Czech public discussion.



## Politics of History: no Politics, no Institutions

One of the main reasons behind such a statement is the fact that the post-1989 authorities withdrew from the cultural sphere, including the sphere of institutions dealing with history and memory. A decision was made to liberalise and decentralise educational systems while declining to interfere in the content of cultural activities. This should be partly viewed as an antidote after the communist period, which represented greater ideological enslavement than that experienced by the Poles. A significant role was played by the mentality of the Czech anti-communist opposition whose members to a great extent shaped the new post-1989 reality, characterised by a tilt towards underground and counterculture. The programs of the first democratic governments of Petr Pithart and Václav Klaus explicitly stated “an absolute autonomy of culture” and “abandoning the role of the state and culture as a cultural sovereign since this obligation can be assumed solely and exclusively by an individual” (PM Pithart Declaration of July 2, 1990; Czech Government Declaration of July 13, 1992).

Jareš argued that the first signs of the return of the state’s educational and community-based role as well as that of state-run institutions had not emerged until the 2000s, yet emphasised that changes in this respect were introduced at a languid pace. Suffice it to admit that “since 1989, no museum has been established in the Czech Republic to be even vaguely compared to the Warsaw Rising Museum, the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews and the Bundeswehr Military History Museum in Dresden”. The Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, whose tasks were comparable

to those of Poland's Institute of National Remembrance, was founded only in 2007 as a incomparably smaller institution with limited powers. Its predecessor was the Office of the Documentation and the Investigation of the Crimes of Communism; established in 1995, it now forms a part of the Czech police structures. Initially headed by Václav Benda, a legendary oppositionist, the Office gained outstanding merit in documenting the communist era and examining archive collection, with many publications (including the yearbook *Securitas Imperii*) issued under its auspices. Nevertheless,



Braník Square in Prague: the palimpsest of the national memory. The 1905 monument for Jan Hus (14–15th c. Czech reformist theologian and symbolic figure of Czech identity) added with the plaque of the May 1945 Prague Uprising fighters. Behind the monument is the building, housing *Archiv Bezpečnostních Složek*, the archive containing the records of former Communist security services. Prague, Czech Republic. 2019. © Franciszek Dąbrowski

Pankrác Prison entrance building (built 1885–1889). During the German annexation and World War II period the Gestapo prison was placed there—and in 1943–1945, 1075 prisoners were guillotined there. Since 1949 Pankrác was a prison of the Communist security police, and a place where 150 political prisoners were executed, among them Milada Horáková and Rudolf Slánský. Prague, Czech Republic. 2019. © Franciszek Dąbrowski

the Office was originally founded as an investigative body, whose area of competence did not include educational or popularisation activities. Generally, the core area of both institutions was to research and share archive records of the Communist Secret Police, a task they performed very well as the Institute has succeeded in almost completely digitizing most of the existing materials. Nonetheless, both exerted a limited impact on wider public opinion. In this situation, “actions undertaken by the NGO sector” can be considered as crucial for shaping historical consciousness among members of Czech society. Suffice it to say that most of the “blank spots” in the 20th-century history of the Czech Republic have been most efficiently addressed by numerous civic associations, among which are *Post Bellum/Paměť národa* (The Memory of Nation), known as the authors of the gigantic database containing oral history archives and thousands of radio and TV programs (see: [www.pametnaroda.cz](http://www.pametnaroda.cz), [www.postbellum.cz](http://www.postbellum.cz)). Also, the key role in this respect is played by individuals, such as Miloš Doležal, a poet who saved from oblivion Father Josef Toufar, a Czech priest killed by the communist police, and initiated a discussion on the Ďáblice cemetery. Compared to the “Meadow” (*Łączka*) at the Powązki Military Cemetery in Warsaw (a place where victims of the Polish communist regime were inhumed), it was where Czech people killed by Nazi Germans and then the communist authorities were buried in mass graves. In 2016, the cemetery became a national memorial site yet since then no exhumation has been carried out in the area. Also the most important commemorative gathering the Czech capital, the celebration of each anniversary of the Velvet Revolution on 17th November with tens of thousands of participants, happens in downtown Prague almost without any participation by the state authorities. Some of those private initiatives manage eventually to turn into permanent institutions such as the aforementioned celebrations of the Velvet Revolution now operating under the name of the Freedom Festival or Post Bellum’s initiative to establish Czech museum of totalitarianism just recently being adopted by the new leadership of Prague municipality.

According to Jareš, since the democratic transition in the Czech Republic the notion of culture as a means of



“strengthening the national community” was first mentioned in Czech state cultural policy documents as late as in period 2015 to 2018. Under the same document, “national values” were juxtaposed to “globalisation pressure” (State cultural policy 2015). The document listed anniversaries, including those of Jan Hus’s death, the birth of Charles IV, Holy Roman Emperor and the centenary of the formation of the Czechoslovak state, as the events to be promoted to a particular rank, and whose creation would involve the direct participation of state institutions. This decision suggests a considerable qualitative change that was, moreover, warmly welcomed by Czech society, especially in the context of the first two anniversaries. Also, celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of the Warsaw Pact 1968 invasion, which had already been over while I was writing this article, were characterised by their unprecedented scale, whereas the involvement of the state apparatus could not be compared to any other memory-related event observed in the Czech Republic after the collapse of the communist regime. All the three cases as mentioned earlier were defined by a striking interaction between state activities and initiatives launched by civil society; which sometimes led to conflicts, yet in the end provided the celebrations with considerable energy.

To sum up, the post-1989 politics of history in the Czech Republic was built on very sound foundations, this was first and foremost possible thanks to the rejection of the communist regime, both by the introduction of legal norms and the adoption of a set of tools to shape the personnel policy of a new democratic state. Secondly, the Czech politics of history is additionally amplified by the existence of a continuous, deeply-rooted “great narrative” of Czech history; based on the belief in the innately liberal ethos of the Czech nation, pursued despite historical adversities and sacrifices. Owing to the abovementioned foundations both at the intra-state and international levels, the vision of the history of the Czech Republic can be deemed capable of exerting considerable impact, regardless of the lack of official state involvement in shaping this vision for most of the post-1989 period. The Czech politics of history is to a great extent delineated by its civic aspect which goes hand in hand with enthusiasm and commitment that has in many cases contributed to discovering

“blank spots” in the country’s history. These attitudes were also exemplified by the high quality of *oeuvres* inspired by Czech history, which also fulfil a valuable educational function. On the other hand, such an approach leads to institutional weakness while offering reduced possibilities for transmitting historical accounts to society as a whole. In recent years, we have, however, witnessed a trend toward an increasingly visible presence of the state in this domain; yet time will soon tell whether this tendency is likely to transform into a permanent phenomenon and what fruits it will eventually bear. Thus far, buildings of such renowned institutions as the National Museum, the Military History Museum or the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes are all covered with scaffolding symbolising the transition stage of the Czech politics of history.



Czechoslovak Arms  
on the Vitkov Monument.  
Prague, Czech Republic. 2019.  
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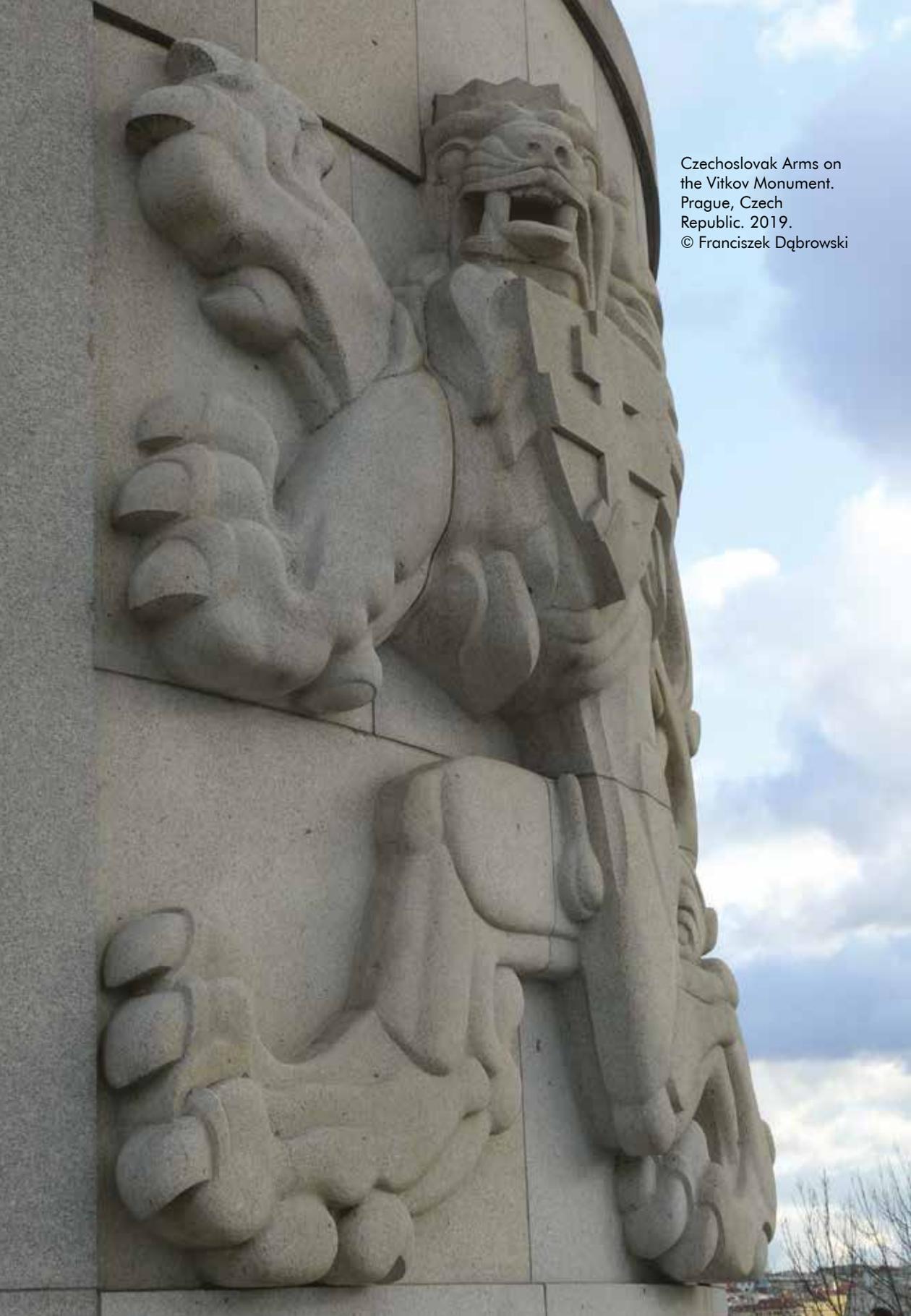
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A large, detailed stone relief sculpture of a lion rampant, a symbol of the Czechoslovak Republic. The lion is shown in profile, facing left, with its right front paw raised and its mouth open, revealing its tongue and teeth. The sculpture is mounted on a light-colored stone wall. The background shows a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

Czechoslovak Arms on  
the Vitkov Monument.  
Prague, Czech  
Republic. 2019.  
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