

Daniel Povolný

Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, Prague, Czech Republic
ORCID: 0009-0004-4285-4984



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THE DISINTEGRATION
OF THE COMMUNIST REGIMES
IN CENTRAL-EUROPEAN AREA –
BASIC OUTLINE. REVIEW:

**DOMINOVÝ EFEKT: OPOZIČNÍ Hnutí
V ZEMÍCH STŘEDNÍ EVROPY A PÁD
KOMUNISTICKÝCH REŽIMŮ
V ROCE 1989**

eds. Petr Blažek and Jaroslav Pažout. Prague:
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Abstract

This review paper concerns the collection of studies prepared by Czech historians in cooperation with other researchers from the countries of the former Eastern Bloc. The particular articles concern the essential landmarks and development points of the transformation in selected countries (Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the German Democratic Republic, Poland and the Soviet Union) from the turn of the 1970s and 1980s of the twentieth century up to 1989, and the main personalities of the events. The book is supplemented with interesting text and illustration material.

Keywords: Czechoslovakia, German Democratic Republic, Poland, Hungary, Soviet Union, collapse of the East-European Communist regimes, KSČ, Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, SPD, Solidarity, *Charta 77*, Výbor na ochranu nespravedlivě stíhaných, VONS, Church, environmental movement

Czech historians Petr Blažek and Jaroslav Pažout along with other authors prepared the collection of studies entitled *Dominový efekt: opoziční hnutí v zemích střední Evropy a pád komunistických režimů v roce 1989* (*The Domino Effect: the Opposition Movement in Central-European Countries and the Fall of Communist Regimes in 1989*). After more than ten years this publication is still useful and has its value. For the uninformed or less proficient reader, who would like to study Central-European Communist regimes (including Soviet Union) in their closing phase of existence, this book provides the introductory and synthetic “tale” of this period. From this basis and introduction to the developmental trends of opposition movements in particular one, may proceed to the detailed descriptions of specific events, which in effect caused the collapse of the entire Eastern Bloc in 1989.

The publication is divided in four main parts – *Středoevropské souvislosti* (Central-European Contexts), *Opoziční hnutí a pád komunistického režimu v Československu* (Opposition Movement and the Fall of the Communist Regime in Czechoslovakia), *Panelové diskuze* (Panel Discussions), and *Dokumenty* (Documents). The book is supplemented with a number of contemporary photographs.

The book is an effect of the synergy between two grant projects led by both historians and of the 2009 Prague conference “Lidská práva, opoziční hnutí a pád komunistických režimů ve Střední Evropě” (“Human Rights, the Opposition Movement and the Fall of Communist Regimes in the Central Europe”). This occurrence also limited the scope and the concept of the book. It would be undoubtedly desirable if the book was not limited to the Central-European part of the (Soviet) Eastern Bloc, but also included the chapters on Bulgaria and Romania. Inclusion of the introductory synthetic study, which would compare the developments in all of those countries in terms of the essential common features, as well as differences and mutual inspirations between dissident movements in distinct countries of the Bloc would be also useful. In practically all of the chapters there are the references to the mutual contacts between specific dissident groups, which deserve more attention, possibly enclosed in a separate

study. Additionally, and to a significant extent, any view on the ties with the West and its multidimensional support for the development of democracy in the Eastern Bloc, not limited to the broadcasts of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, is largely absent.

Taking in consideration today's technical opportunities, it would be useful to attach a CD/DVD or print a QR-Code linking an online repository, to present broader and more representative choice of appendixes, especially photographs and documents with commentary. Such approach would also provide a space for oral history use, such as in the shape of audio or audiovisual recordings of panel discussions (if those were recorded), but also for the additional (structured or partially structured) recordings of interviews with eyewitnesses, for various reasons absent during panel discussions. It would be also an opportunity for the conference participants to supplement and adjust their statements. Today it is, unfortunately, apparently impossible to achieve, because many of those involved have died in the meantime, and in many cases did not leave memoirs or accounts. Perhaps such accounts could be found in the oral history archives. In the Czech Republic this is in the first place the *Paměť národa* (*Memory of Nations*) project of the non-profit organisation Post Bellum. In Poland there are, for example, *Archiwum Historii Mówionej* (Oral History Archives) containing audio or audiovisual recordings of the witnesses of history accounts (among other things in the Warsaw Rising Museum, Karta Centre, Institute of National Remembrance, and so on), which are accessible online. The Institute of National Remembrance also runs its own YouTube channel, where some conference recordings are published. Other gaps could be possibly filled with memories of the next of kin, friends and close ones of the persons involved. One of the few recent possibilities of broadening our knowledge of this matter is providing access to the previously unordered archival records, as well as acquiring personal legacies and objects. A great challenge for the future is also the development of software enabling optical recognition of the handwriting and printed texts (OCR; some repositories and online libraries provide standard access to the scanned books with an OCR layer), and its combination with AI tools. In this way, naturally with the use of critical rules of historical research, hopefully in future there will be a better possibility to manage the exponentially increasing volume of information, and it would be easier to uncover the discreet connections hidden under its layer.

The author of the first chapter concerning the dissident movement in Soviet Union is Nikolay Ivanov, a former dissident activist in the

Soviet Union, who settled in Poland, and became professor of the chair of the recent history in the Faculty of History of the Opole University (Iwanow 2013). In the beginning he pointed out the great number of the opposition groups were formed on an ethnic basis, as the Soviet Union encompassed more than 150 nations. However, there were also groups united on the basis of faith, or their political and apolitical views. Due to the mass repressions applied by the KGB, it was never a mass movement like Solidarity in Poland. Nevertheless, in 1965 the Moscow Pushkin square rally in support of writers Andrey Sinavsky and Julius Daniel had shown that dozens of demonstrators and hundreds of followers found courage and determination to openly challenge the Soviet regime. The awareness of “not being alone” and support coming from Western broadcasters helped to break the fear barrier. The Western broadcasters were also regularly used to inform the Soviet society, as the official way was blocked, and *samizdat* (that is, independent publishing) could be distributed only among a limited number of people. In 1968–1982 (the last prepared issue of 1983 was not published) the *Khronika tekushchikh sobytiy* (Хроника текущих событий, Chronicle of the Current Events) was published, before the regime managed to stop it. Further impulses originated from protests against the occupation of Czechoslovakia in August of 1968, when the part of Soviet society hoping for changes in their own country observed the democratisation process of the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia, as well as its crushing by Soviet tanks (the Operation “Dunaj”/“Danube” involved also Bulgarian, Hungarian, Polish, and East German troops). In 1978, after the Polish example of *Wolne Związki Zawodowe* (Free Trade Unions), the independent trade unions were founded – the *Svobodnoe mezhproufessional’noe ob’edinenie trudyashchikhsya* (Свободное межпрофессиональное объединение трудящихся, Free Interprofessional Union of Employees, SMOT), which up until 1982 acted illegally. Not long after the eight-person strong SMOT leadership revealed their identities, harsh repressions came. Some were imprisoned, and the remainder was forcibly exiled. The KGB ruthlessly prosecuted and persistently oppressed all identified opponents of Communist system. “People vanished without a trace for many years without due trial, healthy people became cripples in Soviet psychiatric institutions, and dissidents were held in strictly regimented camps” (p. 17). The ascent of Michail Gorbachev to the position of the general secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985 brought a turn for the better. This unfortunately is not covered in the chapter by Ivanov, as it practically ends its argument on 1982, about the same time as the death of the

notorious “gensek” Leonid Ilich Brezhnev. Definitely a most interesting period is absent there, and certainly the chapter would be worthy of “drawing it up to” the moment of the fall of Soviet Union in 1991.

Tomáš Vilímek, historian of the Prague Institute of Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences of Czech Republic (*Ústav pro soudobé dějiny Akademie věd České republiky, ÚSD AV ČR*), presented an overview of the opposition movement in East Germany since 1945, largely stepping out of the scope of the book as it concerns the 1980s up to the fall of the Communist regimes in 1989. Vilímek divided this long period into two timespans (Vilímek 2013). The first begins with the end of World War II in 1945, and ends with the raising of the Berlin Wall in 1961, which was to prevent the East Germans from “voting with their feet” and escaping to the West-Berlin or to the Federal German Republic. This period is characterised as one of fundamental enmity by the opposition, specifically the denial of the German Democratic Republic and the SED (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*) as a legitimate state and its representative. After this period and up to 1989 came the attitude of so-called system immanency. In other words, after the closing of the borders part of society decided to find a *modus vivendi* with the existing Communist regime, and attempted to reform it. Still a substantial percentage of the citizens tried to emigrate – directly or through the Czechoslovak border to the Federal Republic of Germany. Unfortunately, those escapes through the Iron Curtain in many cases ended in failure, some with tragic consequences. Recently, since 2018, the Czech courts have awarded the claimants – former Eastern Germans – compensation for those grievances. The East German regime then tried to alternately “tighten and loosen the screw.” In 1962 the recently introduced draft to the army encountered resistance from the pacifists, the Protestant church and other opponents of armed military service. In reaction, so-called building units were established in 1964, which however had a positive effect not only for the conscientious objectors, but also for the state’s economy (Schickentanz 1997, *passim*). The building units (*Baueinheiten der NVA*) were a cheap, unpaid workforce (Eisenfeld 1996). Working together, but mostly having leisure together, had an unexpected and noteworthy effect. Gradually the movement of the building-soldiers emerged, based on the resistance against army and state, which continued after the conclusion of the eighteen-month long service. This movement already in 1967–1969 made close contacts on the regional level with the Protestant church, and started to participate in its young men’s workshops. The churches became the places for meetings and exchange of views, as the Church

was the only one institution not bound with Communist ideology. The emergence of the phenomenon of *Offene Arbeit* (Open Work) followed. This enabled young people to meet in the church premises, where they had space for free expression, listen to music, but also to solve their problems for example, related to alcohol or drugs. The pacifist movement developed as well, and from the beginning of 1970s so did the alternative cultural scene. Liberalisation however started to be replaced, from 1976 on, by harsh *Staatssicherheit* (Stasi, state security police) repressions and introduction of the compulsory defense education in schools since 1978. This did not stop the further development of the independent peace movement, or formation of the environment care groups and their cooperation in 1980s. The contacts with the opposition in neighbouring states, specifically in Czechoslovakia and Poland, intensified. The evolution of the different platforms continued – *Konkret für den Frieden* in the first place, where the activists of peace, ecological, religious and human rights groups discussed the ways to forge a pluralist and democratic society in the GDR.

The Stasi still acted against those circles. In 1987 the attack on the *Umwelt-Bibliothek* (Environment Library) operated by the Protestant Zionskirche community in Berlin threatened the unofficial 1978 arrangement between regime and Protestant Church on *de facto* tolerance for its activity. The ground for the attack was the printing of *samizdat* journals *Umweltblätter* and *Grenzfall*, however the edition of the latter was postponed at the last moment – thus the Stasi action was in vain (Vaatz 1996). This occurrence, however, did not discourage them from making further arrests, this time among the people from the *Initiative Frieden und Menschenrechte* (Initiative for Peace and Human Rights) movement. The Stasi managed to hide from the arrested the fact that there were various actions organised in their support. Therefore the arrested activists were given the choice to go to Federal Republic of Germany for a “long-term study visit” or be sentenced to 12 years of imprisonment; and so opted for the former. Despite such temporary weakening of the opposition activities, the number of anti-regime groups soared, as did their impact (for general references about opposition in GDR see also Neubert and Fricke 1996).

In May 1989, for example, they gathered evidence of the government forging the election, and in September *Neue Forum* emerged. The attempt to criminalise it by the SED launched a chain reaction. Already on 9 November the Berlin Wall “fell,” and on 7 December the talks

at the Round Table between the regime and the representatives of opposition movements began, which lasted until 12 March 1990. The way to democracy and the reunification of Germany was open.

At the time the book was edited, Łukasz Kamiński was the president of the Polish Institute of the National Remembrance, and now he is the director of the National Ossoliński Institute in Wrocław (*Ossolineum*). He started his chapter on the opposition movement in the Polish People's Republic at the 1945 as well, but unlike Tomáš Vilímek he limited himself to the necessary brief description of the developments up to the turn of 1960s and 1970s, to introduce the reader to the basic situation in the years preceding those being the focus of his text (Kamiński 2013). After the self-immolation of Ryszard Siwiec on 8 September 1968 in protest against the August occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw pact armies (including the Polish Army), the December 1970 mass protests against Władysław Gomułka's regime on the Baltic coast were brutally crushed with 45 victims. Due to this experience paid with blood, further anti-regime protests of 1980 occurred not in form of demonstrations, but as occupation strikes. In the meantime the brutal repressions by *Służba Bezpieczeństwa* (SB, Security Service) continued, as well as those by other armed services. Nevertheless, when in the Autumn of 1975 the ruling *Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza* (PZPR, Polish United Workers' Party) announced its plan to change the country's constitution and include in it the everlasting friendship with Soviet Union, party's "leading role" in state affairs, and make the observance of citizens' rights conditional to the submission to the obligations toward state, meaning specifically loyalty, it encountered fundamental resistance from the opposition as well as from the Catholic Church – then the first two points were altered, and the third one was postponed. Then the Summer 1976 protests against radical groceries price rises, caused by an economic crisis, exacerbated the situation. The government revoked the increases almost immediately, however thousands of protesters all across the country were brutally beaten, dismissed from work, or sentenced to up to ten years of imprisonment. This caused the establishment on 23 September 1976 of the *Komitet Obrony Robotników* (KOR, Committee for Defence of the Workers), which tried to coordinate help for the prosecuted workers and issue samizdat publications. In the course of 1977 further organisations joined, *Ruch Obrony Praw Człowieka i Obywatela* (ROPCiO, Movement for the Defence of Human and Civil Rights), as well as *Studenckie Komitety Solidarności* (SKS, Student Committees of Solidarity). KOR itself

evolved into the *Komitet Samoobrony Społecznej „KOR”* (KSS “KOR”, Committee for the Social Self-Defence). In the following years this trend continued despite the persecutions, and new groups “emerged like mushrooms after rain.” The election of the Cardinal Karol Wojtyła as a new Pope John Paul II, and his visit to Poland in 1978, did not improve the government’s position. The protests and strikes against the government and measures taken by local authorities continued.

On 17 September 1980, representatives of strike committees from the entire Poland agreed to establish *Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy „Solidarność”* (NSZZ “Solidarność”, Independent Self-Governing Trade Union “Solidarity”) with a HQ in Gdańsk. Its most important representative was Lech Wałęsa from the Gdańsk Shipyard. The situation worsened so much that at the end of the year the government for the first time considered the introduction of a state of emergency, and the situation was discussed in Moscow in the presence of the Warsaw Pact countries’ representatives. Solidarity was not aware that this time the Soviet Union, unlike in 1956 Hungary and 1968 Czechoslovakia, had ruled out external intervention, and pressed for an internal solution. In 1981 the clashes between the government and opposition, but also talks on the various levels and establishment’s unfulfilled promises, continued up to the night of 12 to 13 December 1981. At this point Wojciech Jaruzelski, who in the meantime concentrated power in his hands, announced the introduction of martial law in Poland (although against the law). The immediate measures taken encompassed the internment of almost ten thousand people, and claimed the lives of nine. The opposition went underground, but continued in further resistance. However, the regime managed to break this resistance at the price of a new wave of repressions, including those killed and arrested up to the end of 1982, when it abolished martial law, and continued to force the opposition into passivity. This, however, did not succeed – to the contrary, it led to emergence of groups more radical than Solidarity (however Solidarity retained the leading position). In October 1983 this state of affairs was underlined by the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Lech Wałęsa. The Polish leadership did not succeed in economic matters (the crisis deepened all along), and the new murders of activists in 1984 did not help to pacify the resistance. With the entrance of *perestroika* the regime tried to don a conciliatory mask, and attempted to win over the moderate part of the opposition, which succeeded only in a few cases. However, the regime achieved an improvement in the international politics, since in January 1987 US President Ronald Reagan lifted

economic sanctions imposed on Poland after introduction of martial law in December 1981. Besides that the secret and informal talks between party and government representatives and part of the opposition began. The assumption that state functionaries had a better negotiation position, and then they would be successful in convincing the opposition to give concessions, proved incorrect. The open talks at the Round Table, starting in February 1989, only confirmed this. Apart from the number of democratisation measures agreed upon in the Round Table sub-committees, both sides agreed to the provision of 35% of the parliamentary seats for Solidarity in the ensuing elections. In the elections of 4 July 1989, the government candidates suffered a crushing defeat, as the voters crossed them out en masse, and unanimously preferred the opposition. The newly appointed prime minister Czesław Kiszczak did not obtain Solidarity support for forming his government, and the task of forming government was entrusted to Catholic dissident Tadeusz Mazowiecki. His government was appointed by parliament on 12 September 1989, and definitely led Poland to democracy.

Eva Irmanová, historian and Hungarian studies researcher at the Institute of History of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague, penned a chapter on the opposition movement in Hungary, starting her argument at the turn of 1970s and 1980s (thus adhering to the “official” timespan of the volume) (see Irmanová 2013). The starting point of Irmanová’s chapter is the emergence of the *Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége* (Union of Free Democrats) in 1979, and it focuses on Szabad’s ties and inspirations with dissident movements in Czechoslovakia and Poland. It concerned mainly editing various *samizdat* journals and books, but also a transition from ignoring the regime to negotiating with it, aimed at gaining the right to exist. This was achieved already in 1987–1989. The sensitive point for both sides were the events in 1956, and the bloody suppression of the Hungarian Uprising against Soviet domination, which was the foundation of building “goulash socialism” by the Hungarian Communist leader of the MSMP (*Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt*, Hungarian Socialist Labour Party) János Kádár. In September 1987 the *Magyar Demokratikus Fórum* (MDF, Hungarian Democratic Forum) emerged, which aimed to outlive the regime. The Forum focused on current aspects of the developing social and economic crisis, aimed to unite all dissatisfied with this situation, focussing on rural society, Christian tradition, and Hungarian patriotism. Only six months later, in March 1987 the *Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége* (Fidész, Union of the Young Democrats) was

founded. Its idea was to unite the more radical groups of youth and express their positions. Those positions encompassed the establishment of an economic system based on the usual forms of private, co-operative, and state property, however without state control, along with patriotism and solidarity between Central and Eastern European nations, including the demilitarisation and uniting of Europe. National consciousness and care for the Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries (Czechoslovakia, Romania), as well as environmental issues (primarily construction of the Czechoslovak-Hungarian waterworks Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros on the Danube river, which was discontinued by Hungarian government in 1989 on its riverbank, and later in the 1990s finished by the Slovak republic on its side). In addition, the establishment of a pluralist political system of multiple political parties became essential points of the programs of other political parties and citizen movements as well. Alongside that, independent trade unions emerged, competing with the official and monopolist ones. In June 1987 the Social Agreement was published, where, besides the aforementioned points formulated by János Kis, the main personality of Szabad, there was an unambiguous demand for János Kádár to resign his post. At the same time the Agreement intended to take advantage of the *perestroika*-induced favourable situation in the Soviet Union, and refrain from leaving its power bloc, which gained it favour also among the reformist Communists. When in May 1988 Kádár in fact resigned due to health issues (he died in 1989), the course of events was set in motion. In the Autumn of 1988, the Hungarian parliament started discussing and on 11 January 1989 it enacted a law on associations and unions. As a result of this, tens of new political parties were established. This possibility of legalisation was of course used by the then main opposition parties MDF, SDS, and Fidész. In January 1989 Imre Nagy was exonerated along with other persons executed by the Soviets in 1958 for their participation in the Hungarian Revolution two years earlier. At the same time a dialogue started between the MSDS and opposition representatives, which, despite initial disagreements, resulted in the so-called Round Opposition Table on 13 June 1989. After three months of talks, on 18 September 1989 the agreement was formed, which besides changing numerous laws opened the way to the free elections in Spring 1990. Only a month later the state changed its name to the Hungarian Republic (omitting the word “People’s”), and a preamble was added to the text of the constitution, declaring Hungary as a democratic independent state accepting the values of citizens’ democracy and democratic socialism.

The chapter on the opposition in Czech lands at the end of the so-called normalisation period was penned by another historian from the Institute of Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences of Czech Republic, Milan Otáhal (died 2017) (see Otáhal 2013). The chapter begins with an essential turning point of the recent Czechoslovak history – the 1968 Prague Spring and the subsequent August 1968 occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact armies followed by the ‘normalisation’ [namely the period of totalitarian reaction under the rule of Gustáv Husák – editor’s remark]. Conservative (left-wing) and the pragmatic part of the political echelon (or *nomenklatura*) of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) understood ‘normalisation’ as the nullification of the Prague Spring achievements. The resistance of broad parts of society was consecutively crushed by a series of administrative, but also violent means. Among the latter, deployment of all armed services to the liquidation of demonstrations on the first anniversary of Czechoslovakia’s occupation in August 1969 should be particularly noted. As a result of this at least six people died. Dozens more were wounded, and approximately 2,500 people were arrested. The attacks were also directed at opposition activists among the reformist Communists, who were at the latest in 1970, through so-called checks (*prověrky*), expelled from the KSČ, deprived of their social status, and finally, along with their nearest ones, subjected to continuous persecution. Beside this, Otáhal noted other left-wing opposition trends – expelled members of the Czechoslovak Socialist Party in Brno, and radical students of Philosophy Faculty at the Charles University in Prague. According to him, after the consolidation of the power of the pro-Soviet part of KSČ in the 1971 elections, political trials in 1971 hit those three opposition streams with long-term prison sentences. However, Otáhal did not remark on the 14th KSČ congress in May 1971 preceding the 1971 elections, which was one of the ‘normalisation’ stages, and was linked with unfulfilled hopes for withdrawal of the Soviet Army from Czechoslovakia. The “long-term prison sentences” should be also placed in context, as the sentences of five years imprisonment cannot be compared to the death sentences and life imprisonment sentences from 1950s. The then political prisoners would probably have commented that five years could have been easily served standing up.

The importance of all those groups declined in the course of the following years, and even the 1975 Helsinki CSCE Conference (specifically the third basket of the Conference Final Act, concerning human rights) did not help. Former Communists tried in vain to start

the dialogue with government, towards the observance of citizens' and human rights. In the end, they were unable to connect with other opposition movements. For the latter the common platform became *Charta 77*, founded in 1977, devised by playwright and future Czechoslovak and Czech president Václav Havel. *Charta 77* was represented by three speakers: one of them represented reformist Communists, second the independent cultural circles, and the third – the religious democratic stream. *Charta 77* was consistently warning the ruling establishment about the necessity of observance of the international agreements made in Helsinki, then implemented in the Czechoslovak legal system in 1976. Initially the group pursued an apolitical dialogue, however, its demands were of political character. *The Státní bezpečnost* (StB, State Security) tried to destroy the group from the very beginning, which resulted in the death of the philosopher Jana Patočka, who died after a gruelling interrogation on 13 March 1977. The StB tried to publicly discredit *Charta 77* (through so-called *Anticharta* – a statement publicly signed by employees of cultural institutions), and when this did not succeed, it surrounded *Charta 77* with silence, to make it forgotten. However, other groups emerged, such as the *Výbor na ochranu nespravedlivě stíhaných* (VONS, Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted) in 1978. Despite the international renown, which to a certain extent protected the leaders of *Charta 77*, up to 1989 it did not gain any mass support among citizens, or other opposition movements, which accused it primarily of collaboration with former Communists. In the meantime the StB continued with its disintegration efforts. Regarding the efforts to sentence the *Charta 77* and other opposition movements' members for criminal offences, Otáhal did not mention the *ASANACE* action. Through psychological and physical pressure applied to selected *Charta 77* members, independent circles representatives, and other activists, the StB succeeded in forcing about three hundred of them to 'agree' to emigrate to the West. The situation changed for the better with the beginning of *perestroika* in the Soviet Union. However, even then such groups as *Demokratická iniciativa* (Democratic initiative), or *Hnutí za občanskou svobodu* (Movement for Civic Freedom) or *Klub za socialistickou přestavbu – Obroda* (Club for Socialist Reconstruction – Revival) did not gain significant recognition and impact in society. This applied also to the independent youth, which established in 1988 a group *Společnost za veselejší současnost* (The Society for a More Cheerful Present), inspired by the Polish *Pomarańczowa Alternatywa* (Orange Alternative), and also the

České děti (Czech Children) group, which were active in organising demonstrations. Some temporary accomplishments in dialogue with the authorities aimed at changes were achieved by the *Nezávislé mírové sdružení – iniciativa za demilitarizaci společnosti* (Independent Peace Association – Initiative for Demilitarisation of Society). The organisation of demonstrations was seen by the KSČ leadership in 1988–1989 as most threatening. After the clashes in Prague on 21 August 1988 [that was on the 20th anniversary of Warsaw Pact invasion – editor’s note], and on 28 October 1988 [that was on the Czechoslovak national day, 70th anniversary of the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the formation of Czechoslovakia – editor’s note], the Communist leadership unexpectedly allowed a demonstration on 10 December (the Day of Human Rights) in Prague at Škroupovo náměstí square. The result, however, did not meet their expectations, and therefore further bans and repressive measures followed. The demonstrations during so-called Palach Week from 15 to 21 January 1989, intended to commemorate the 20th anniversary of self-immolation of Jan Palach and Jan Zajíc in protest at “normalisation” and the presence of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia, were met with such violent measures. For participation in this action Václav Havel was sentenced to nine months imprisonment, however under domestic and foreign opinion pressure he was released after serving less than four months. Then, the opposition started to differ in opinions: to continue the pressure on the Communist regime, or start communication with it? Practically, the pressure applied, as in the form of demonstrations of 21 August and 28 October 1989, and of the petition *Několik vět* (“Several years,” which came from Václav Havel’s circle, demanding the release of political prisoners and allowing independent initiatives, signed by 40 thousand people), but also the so-called *Navrátilova petice* for religious freedom (“Navrátil’s petition,” signed by six hundred thousand people; Augustin Navrátil was a Catholic activist, unlawfully sectioned and detained in a psychiatric hospital for his resistance activities), led the regime to the edge of a crisis. The last straw for the Czechoslovak citizens’ patience towards the KSČ was a brutal assault of the security services launched against a peaceful demonstration on the International Day of Students on 17 November 1989.

Independent activities in Slovakia in 1987–1989 were described by Norbert Kmeť of the Institute of Political Science of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava (Kmeť 2013). Opposition activists in Slovakia were aware that in neighbouring countries – Poland, Soviet Union and Hungary – the regimes are disintegrating, and in cooperation

with the opposition in Czech lands they also tried to strengthen the position of citizens in Czechoslovakia. In this mindset the *Charta 77* open letter of March 1987 was also penned, criticising the KSČ for the fact that, when in Poland and Soviet Union political prisoners were released, in Czechoslovakia they still were thrown behind bars. Another initiative in that year originated from the deterioration of the Hungarian-Slovak relationship. *Charta 77, Výbor na ochranu práv maďarské menšiny* (Committee for the Defense of the Rights of Hungarian Minority) and other representatives of the Hungarian and Slovak opposition spoke out about the anti-Hungarian StB action, and about other serious incidents harming a common coexistence. Miklós Duray (a Hungarian human rights activist and member of *Charta 77* living in Slovakia) also criticised nationality politics in Czechoslovakia and the construction of the Danube waterwork Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros. The StB acted also against Catholic dissenters, who opposed the state's supervision of churches. They had no so-called "state approval" for performing church rites and celebrations, and because of this the courts sentenced them to suspended or unconditional prison terms. Additionally the StB, for example, intentionally seized the technical documentation of buses, which were to transport the faithful to various religious events in Slovakia and abroad (such as for John Paul's II papal pilgrimage in Poland in June 1987). Despite this, some of those events were attended by up to 150 thousand people. Other churches in Slovakia also suffered persecution, as did the secret churches, peace and environmental activists. Despite all of the so-called destructive measures applied by the StB, party and state functionaries, as well as campaigns in the mass media, *inter alia* in the beginning of 1988, resistance in Slovakia continuously grew. This was proven on 25 March 1988, when in Bratislava a peaceful (although not permitted) demonstration of the faithful took place, known as *Svičková manifestace* (Candlelight demonstration). The security forces assaulted several thousand demonstrators without hesitation with water cannons, batons, physical abuse, dogs, and also ramming people with vehicles. Later in the Autumn the trials followed, when the arrested were accused of incitement, rioting, and public order disturbances.

The opposition in Slovakia truly did not intend to be silenced, and in 1989 it continued in solidarity actions in support of the Czech opposition, as well as in printing *samizdat* and organising church pilgrimages, assemblies, and demonstrations. For commemoration of the August 1968 victims, five opposition activists, with Ján Čarnogurský in the forefront (as a lawyer he defended dissidents

and for it he was expelled from the bar), were sentenced to prison for incitement. The execution of their sentences was thwarted by the Silk Revolution of November 1989.

Petr Blažek, a historian employed at the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (*Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů*, ÚSTR), and from end of 2023 head of the Remembrance of the 20th Century Museum in Prague (*Muzeum paměti 20. století*), prepared the chapter *Vedení KSČ a protirežimní opozice v druhé polovině osmdesátých let* (the KSČ leadership and anti-regime opposition in the second half of the 1980s) (see Blažek 2013). Blažek also begun his argument with start of 'normalisation' at the turn of 1960s and 1970s, and the document called *Poučení z krizového vývoje* (Lessons learned from crisis development), which was the KSČ official account of the Prague Spring. Blažek described the 1980s in the KSČ leadership as a period of personal crisis in the party gerontocracy, mostly visible in the Soviet Union due to the quick succession of the deaths of three general secretaries of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1982–1985. Such a course of events did not occur in Czechoslovakia, and all of the KSČ leaders lived to the party's bitter end. They were divided into three factions. The pragmatic trend was embodied by the prime minister Lubomír Štrougal, the conservative by Gustáv Husák, the state president and general secretary of the Central Committee of KSČ, and the third was connected with Vasil Biľak and Miloš Jakeš, neo-conservative members of the presidium of the Central Committee. The visit of Michail Gorbachev, general secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, in the Spring 1987 proved that changes must be applied to unblock *perestroika*. Thus in November 1987, Husák was forced from the position of the party's general secretary, and replaced by Jakeš. The dismissal of Biľak was also expected, however he managed to stay in his position up until December 1988, and in the meantime in September the main supporter of changes, Štrougal, resigned. The reforms were not launched, and the other protagonists appeared to be incompetent also in other fields.

Many problems (such as opposition activity) were only repeatedly discussed, however no effective solution for the improvement of the situation was decided. Step by step, the KSČ leadership was losing contact with reality, despite receiving current reports on the developments in society, and the StB did not come out from the shadow of its coercive methods and intimidation. The leaked record of Miloš Jakeš's speech held at Červený Hrádeček by Plzeň in July

1989 revealed that he was like the emperor from Andersen's tale: Jakeš admitted then that the KSČ leadership had lost popular support, and acted on its own. The only exception was the new prime minister Josef Adamec, who replaced Štrougal, however he decided to start the unofficial dialogue with the opposition in the Autumn of 1989. This was, however, too late.

When the book was printed, Jaroslav Pažout was a lecturer at the Technical University in Liberec – now he is an employee of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (ÚSTR). In his chapter Pažout dealt with the prosecutions for anti-regime activity in Czechoslovakia in the 1980s (Pažout 2013). In the introduction he briefly describes the problems of the Czechoslovak economy, and the visible scientific and technological fallback behind the West. However, for the common citizens the lack of, for example, some hygiene products or the increasing prices of basic food was far more important. Pažout's subject matter overlaps with the chapters by Milan Otáhal and Norbert Kmeť, the demonstrations and petition actions in 1988 are again described in detail, not to mention the voluminous references. The regime's punitive actions against the participants and organisers of the demonstrations and petitions had grown in 1989 to such an extent that the VONS members were virtually unable to follow all the trials. Pažout also analyses the entire range of punishable acts and penalties administered, including differing practices in their enforcement, with specific examples. The majority of those cases ended with fines, or rather lenient suspended sentences of several months' imprisonment, and some even with acquittal due to a lack of evidence. The politically motivated cases which ended with non-suspended prison sentences were an exception. Some of those "offenses" were punished extrajudicially by committees for the protection of public order at the national councils (that is, units of local government). This practice was ended only by the Silk Revolution and the amnesty act issued by the state president Husák on 8 December 1989. The case of Pavel Wonka, who died on 26 April 1988 in Hradec Králové due to medical negligence and the result of hunger strike is absent in the composed list of judicial sanctions against the opposition (only marginally mentioned by Norbert Kmeť). Although the matter concerns a controversial personality (an StB collaborator), it should not be excluded from the contemporary context.

The last chapter *Od Charty 77 k Občanskému fóru. Pokus o proměnu morální opozice v politickou pozici* (From Charta 77 to Civic Forum. The attempt at transformation of the moral opposition into a political

position) was penned by Jiří Suk, a historian at the Institute of Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences (Suk 2013). In this more philosophically than historically oriented text, the ideological starting points of *Charta 77* in neo-politics are outlined by Suk again, as in Otáhal. The author indicates the common points with new social movements in the West and the impact abroad of Havel's political essay „Moc bezmocných“ (1978, English edition: *The Power of the Powerless. Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*; Havel 1985). Suk described the Forum's development of thought and organisation after its establishment on 19 November 1989, primarily under Havel's guidance, including its transformation into a political party and its split in 1990–1991 into *Občanská demokratická strana* (ODS, Civic Democratic Party) of the future prime minister of the Czech Republic Václav Klaus, and *Občanské hnutí* (Civic Movement) under the guidance of the then foreign minister and deputy prime minister Jiří Dienstbier. ODS won the 1992 elections, and the defeated *Občanské hnutí*, which did not gain any seats in the parliament, disappeared soon after. According to Suk, the link between anti-regime dissent and the cultural underground was forgotten up until the second half of the 1990s, when in turn Václav Klaus suffered defeat.

Beside the points concerning the aforementioned text and photo appendixes and comments attached to them, in conclusion I would add one technical remark. It is undoubtedly commendable that the document attached to the chapters, *Vyhodnocení plnění plánu práce II. správy SNB za rok 1988* (Evaluation of the execution of the work plan for 1988 of the 2nd Directorate of the National Security Corps) (Blažek 2013, p. 2) is annotated with notes disclosing the cryptonyms of the case files concerning the dissidents named there. However, for the next time, I would suggest adjusting the practice to identify all of the cryptonyms or pseudonyms (and persons of interest hiding behind them) for all mentioned case-files, to offer a better insight into the activity of the SNB 2nd Directorate (counterintelligence) to the uninitiated reader.

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