



Civic and Uncivic Values in the Czech Republic

Value Transformation, Politics,
Education, and Gender Equality

Edited by Sabrina P. Ramet
Vladimir Đorđević · Christine M. Hassenstab



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*Dedicated to the memory
of H. Gordon Skilling (1912–2001),
a trailblazer in research on Czechoslovakia*

PREFACE

This volume is the ninth in a series of volumes devoted to civic and uncivic values, and democratic transition, in East Central Europe. Previous volumes in this series are:

Democratic Transition in Slovenia: Value transformation, education, and media, edited by Sabrina P. Ramet and Danica Fink-Hafner (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2006), 384 pp.

Democratic Transition in Croatia: Value transformation, education, and media, edited by Sabrina P. Ramet and Davorka Matić (College Station, Tex.: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 432 pp.

Civic and Uncivic Values: Serbia in the post-Milošević era, edited by Ola Listhaug, Sabrina P. Ramet, and Dragana Dulić (Budapest & New York: Central European University Press, 2011), 468 pp.

Civic and Uncivic values in Macedonia: Value transformation, education, and media, edited by Sabrina P. Ramet, Ola Listhaug, and Albert Simkus (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), 368 pp.

Bosnia-Herzegovina since Dayton: Civic and uncivic values, edited by Ola Listhaug and Sabrina P. Ramet (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2013), 430 pp.

Civic and Uncivic Values in Kosovo: History, politics, and value transformation, edited by Sabrina P. Ramet, Albert Simkus, and Ola Listhaug (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2015), 448 pp.

Building Democracy in the Yugoslav Successor States: Accomplishments, setbacks, and challenges since 1990, edited by Sabrina P. Ramet, Christine M. Hassenstab, and Ola Listhaug (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 472 pp.

Civic and Uncivic Values in Poland: Value transformation, education, and culture, edited by Sabrina P. Ramet, Kristen Ringdal, and Katarzyna Dośpiał-Borysiak (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2019), 370 pp.

Civic values and civic virtues are crucial to stable democracy; in addition, they may be seen as the foundation of civilized society in the modern/post-modern era. We launched this volume in early 2020, allowing 12 months for the completion of chapters. For a variety of reasons, some contributors needed some additional time to finish, eventually stretching the length of the project to 18 months. Along the way, three contributors dropped out, costing us chapters on literature, the Catholic Church, and modern republicanism. In spite of that, we hope that readers will find this book useful in understanding what are the strengths and where are the vulnerabilities of Czech society.

Trondheim, Norway
Brno, Czechia
Saksvik, Norway

Sabrina P. Ramet
Vladimir Đorđević
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PART I

Values & The System



The Czech Republic: A Flawed Democracy – An Introduction

Sabrina P. Ramet

I

The Czech Republic is a remarkable country. In the 2021 Democracy Index published by *The Economist*, the Czech Republic is ranked in 31st place, as a “flawed democracy,” behind 25th-place USA but ahead of 47th-place Slovakia.¹ Among the 14 post-communist states of Central and Southeastern Europe plus Estonia,² the Czech Republic is the second most urbanized (74.2% in 2021³ vs. 76% in Bulgaria), the third least corrupt in 2020 (after Slovenia and Poland),⁴ and having the smallest proportion of persons below the poverty line, according to the latest Figs. (10.1% in 2018, with Slovakia in second place with 11.9%).⁵ It is also the most secular,⁶ and devoted 3.9% of its GDP to education in 2017 (less than Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, and first-place Estonia, but as much as or more than the other five countries for which the CIA had data). In 2021, Freedom House ranked the Czech Republic as *free*, the

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highest category in its classification scheme, but identified problems with protections for minorities, safeguards against corruption, transparency, and freedom of the press.⁷ The Czech Republic (2006), Slovenia (2006), Hungary (2009), Croatia (2014), and Estonia (2016) share the distinction of being the only post-communist states among this set to offer official recognition of same-sex partnerships. Thus, Czechs have much to be proud of; yet according to Vladimír Hirsch, a Prague-based composer, Czechs are most proud of their history and stable borders, their architectural heritage, their achievements in the arts (music, painting, literary prose, poetry), their films, locally produced beer, and their special kind of humor.⁸

In spite of the Czech Republic's relatively high ranking for democracy with both *The Economist* and *Freedom House*, 42.82% of Czech respondents to the 2017 European Values Study said that they were dissatisfied with the political system (see Table 1.1). Lines 1–4 (totaling 42.82%) represent degrees of dissatisfaction with the Czech political system; lines 7–10 (totaling 36.26%) represent degrees of satisfaction. The remaining 27.21% fell half-way between being satisfied and being dissatisfied.

Even more striking is the fact that, of seven institutions (parliament, government, and political parties in Table 1.2; judiciary, police, trade unions, and media in Table 1.3), only the police enjoyed more confidence than not. Combining the scores for “not very much” and “none at all,” the institutions enjoying the least confidence among Czechs were

Table 1.1 Satisfaction with the political system (2017)

	%
No answer	1.77
Don't know	1.93
1. Not satisfied at all	13.52
2	7.56
3	11.75
4	9.99
5. (Middle score)	16.72
6. (Middle score)	10.49
7	11.48
8	9.93
9	2.81
10	2.04

Source: European Values Study 2017

Table 1.2 Confidence in parliament, government, & political parties (2017), in %

<i>Parties</i>	<i>Parliament</i>	<i>Government</i>	<i>Political</i>
No answer	1.71	2.32	1.99
Don't know	2.92	2.48	3.26
A great deal	2.21	1.77	1.05
Quite a lot	10.76	15.62	9.22
Not very much	44.48	48.84	45.75
None at all	37.91	28.97	38.74

Source European Values Study 2017

Table 1.3 Confidence in the judiciary, the police, trade unions, & media (2017), in %

	<i>Judiciary</i>	<i>Police</i>	<i>Trade Unions</i>	<i>The media</i>
No answer	1.16	0.83	1.88	1.10
Don't know	4.69	1.60	9.71	2.15
A great deal	5.85	12.36	2.54	2.04
Quite a lot	28.75	42.44	22.35	16.17
Not very much	43.16	35.43	37.42	50.28
None at all	16.39	7.34	26.10	28.26

Source European Values Study 2017

political parties (84.49% little or no confidence), the parliament (82.39%), the government (79.81%), and the media (78.39%). By contrast—and only by contrast—the trade unions and the judiciary did relatively well, with 63.52% and 59.55% disapproval, respectively. The police enjoyed 54.80% approval, however, alongside just 32.77% saying that they had little or no confidence in the police. All in all, this suggests that Czechs do not have much confidence in the workings of their political system. This result seemed to confound the results of the 1999 European Values Study, when 92.7% of respondents either agreed (52.2%) or “definitely agreed” (40.5%) with the statement, “Democracy may have problems but it’s better than any other form of government”⁹ (Tables 1.4 and 1.5)

In a separate survey, conducted in 1995, the most trusted institutions were, in this order, the media, the government, the president, the armed forces, and the court system. They were followed by the police, political parties, the Church, and, in last place, the parliament.¹⁰ Comparing the results from 1999 with those from 2017, we see that the parliament and

Table 1.4 Political behavior—Voting (2017), in %

	<i>Voting in national elections</i>	<i>Voting in local elections</i>
No answer	2.10	1.66
Don't know	1.16	0.66
Always	49.67	53.15
Usually	30.19	29.30
Never	15.18	13.52
Not allowed to vote	1.71	1.71

Source European Values Study 2017

Table 1.5 Other forms of political behavior (2017), in %

	<i>Signing a petition</i>	<i>Joining boycotts</i>	<i>Attending lawful protests</i>
No answer	2.16	3.04	2.37
Don't know	4.30	11.31	8.17
Have done so	39.46	5.79	14.29
Might do so	26.66	22.35	33.83
Would never do so	27.43	57.51	41.34

Source European Values Study 2017

the political parties were ranked low in both surveys. Relative to the other institutions, the police did much better in 2017 than in 1999, the media did much worse, and the justice system did about the same. In the literature on democracy, it is generally contended that trust in the institutions of the system is an important factor for stability as well as a useful measure of government responsiveness to public needs and demands, which is to say democratic behavior. What these scores taken from the latest European Values Study suggest, thus, is that there may be some problems with Czech democracy.

II

In fact, as Andrew Roberts reports, there has been a consensus among Czech political scientists that the system has not been working well. They have therefore been grappling with the question, what went wrong

with the democratic project in the Czech Republic?¹¹ Among the problems identified by the six political scientists whose works Roberts reviews are governmental ineffectiveness, corruption, and cronyism. Vladimíra Dvořáková highlights “a party system that functions as a cartel, a civil service that lacks professionalism, an absence of long-term policy visions and a media under the thumb of politicians and unable to carry out its investigative mission.”¹² Noting the pervasiveness of corruption in the country’s politics—hinted by Freedom House’s score of 3.50 for corruption in the years 2014–2018¹³—Dvořáková writes that Czech democracy is seriously marred by a “lack of respect for rules and procedures” on the part of both politicians and ordinary citizens, as well as by a widespread notion that compromise is immoral.¹⁴

Michal Klima¹⁵ and Petr Fiala¹⁶ concur with Dvořáková that corruption is a significant problem. In Klima’s view (as paraphrased by Roberts), “political parties...no longer represent societal interests but rather private and personal interests.” Businessmen and large corporations place themselves and their supporters in “key party positions...[and] have used their resources to influence national party leaders...The consequences are worsening corruption, abuse of the intelligence services, unstable and ineffective governments, and the declining significance of elections.”¹⁷ Fiala accuses politicians of lacking any political vision for the country or, at the local level, for the locality, and, in an interesting gloss on Dvořáková’s analysis, tasks politicians with being too ready to compromise.¹⁸

Of the remaining three writers whose works are discussed by Roberts, only Jiří Pehe is interesting for our present purposes. In assessing what has gone wrong in Czech democracy, Pehe underlines what he sees as an undemocratic culture, manifested among other ways in intolerance of others’ views and “lack of respect for minorities.”¹⁹ All in all, the consensus among the Czech political scientists analyzed by Roberts, is that the Czech democratic system is dysfunctional, marred among other things by ineffectiveness and corruption.

One source of the debasement of the Czech political system, as Seán Hanley and Milada Vachudová note, has been the rise of the ANO (YES) Party, established in 2011 by billionaire Andrej Babiš. In the run-up to the October 2013 parliamentary elections, ANO accused other political parties of being corrupt and incompetent, with Babiš asserting that the state should be operated like a business. ANO won 18.65% of the vote, making it the second-largest party in the parliament.²⁰ Four years later, ANO won 29.6% of the vote that year, by far the largest take

of any party and well ahead of the center-right Civic Democratic Party (ODS), which finished in second place with just 11.3% of the vote. In the meantime, the former prime minister (during 1998–2002) Miloš Zeman had transmogrified from a social democrat to an illiberal populist who looked to Hungary’s Viktor Orbán, Poland’s Jarosław Kaczyński, and Russia’s Vladimir Putin as kindred spirits. In May 2013, Zeman violated the constitution by “appoint[ing] a ‘technocratic’ caretaker government of political cronies over the heads of the country’s party leaders.”²¹ In response, the parties voted to dissolve parliament, forcing early elections in which Zeman’s Citizens’ Rights Party did badly.

Babiš, installed as prime minister in December 2017, took the wind out of challenges to his personal dominance through his purchase of the influential daily newspapers *Mladá fronta dnes* (commonly known as *MF Dnes*) and *Lidové noviny*.²² He has used his media to discredit political rivals and propounds a vision of an illiberal techno-democracy. Babiš has vilified both Roma and other “outsiders” and has embraced the Trumpian slogans “Czechia First” and “Make Czechia Great Again.”²³ In a speech delivered in April 2019, directed in part at least at the European Union’s effort to impose quotas for the acceptance of migrants from the Middle East and Africa, he assailed “the excessive regulation that comes from Brussels.” He added, “We do not like the exaggerated political correctness that comes from the EU. This leads to the use of unnatural language and the fear of describing things as they really are.”²⁴

On 8–9 October 2021, parliamentary elections were held in the Czech Republic. The final results gave the anti-Babiš Together Coalition 27.74% of the vote, edging out Babiš’s ANO, which won 27.17%. A coalition of Pirates, Mayors, and Independents (SCAN) attracted 15.57%, and Tomio Okamura’s far-right Freedom and Democracy movement collected 9.58% of the vote.²⁵ Due to the specific way in which votes are translated into mandates, ANO was awarded 72 seats in the parliament, against 71 seats for the Together Coalition. Prior to the election, President Zeman had promised to assign responsibility to form a new government to whichever party ended up with the largest number of parliamentary mandates—which would be second-place ANO. However, the Together Coalition had formed a pre-election alliance with the coalition of Pirates, Mayors, and Independents and between them, they controlled 108 seats in the 200-seat parliament, giving them confidence that they would form the new post-Babiš government.²⁶