

ROMANIAN REACTIONS TO THE PRAGUE SPRING AFTER HALF A CENTURY

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Abstract. The present article aims to analyse the Romanian reactions to the Prague Spring after half a century (this research is part of the same title dissertation paper published in 2021) and represents the summary of relevant research published in the literature on political, economic, social and cultural framework such as the consequences of the Czechoslovak anti-communist phenomenon and, particularly, the Prague Spring. The novelty elements are highlighted by the inventory of the Romanian cultural reactions occurring after 50 years since the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. We are going to confirm the assumption which is stating that the portrayal of the Prague Spring went through various stages of review and settlement by reference to a new international context and implicitly to other cultural dynamics.

Keywords: *Prague Spring; Czechoslovak “Post-Totalitarianism”; the Culture of Commemoration; Romanian Reactions*

Czechoslovak “Post-Totalitarianism”

On the one hand, the introductory part of this article aims to highlight the main features of the Czechoslovak “post-totalitarianism” since the second half of the 1980s, conducting an analysis based on the corpus of concepts developed by theoreticians such as Jan Cívín, Herbert Kitschelt, Soňa Szomolányi, Rob McRae and Václav Havel; and on the other hand, it focuses on capitalizing on the main modes of expression of two antagonistic notions, such as “living in lie” versus “living in truth”, as they are captured by Václav Havel, followed in his footsteps by Rob McRae. The research roadmap will also consider the “anti-politics”, “non-political politics” and “democratic crisis” concepts developed by former Czech dissident Václav Havel during the communist regime and their implementation since the beginning of the post-communist transition process.

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Last but not least, we will insist on the Romanian reactions, using the analysis of Václav Havel's speech during his official visit to Bucharest in 1994, as well as highlighting the main elements that the former President of Romania, Emil Constantinescu, took over and capitalized on in his political strategy.

The communist regime in Czechoslovakia was, as Jan Cívín pointed out, a "melting" post-totalitarianism. From the second half of the 1980s, it could be noticed a disintegration of society internally, which was showing symptoms of a state of "schizophrenia" caused by the transformations that followed the "perestroika" economic reform plan¹. The new face of the socialist communism was based on a set of values made up of collectivism, optimism, egalitarianism, social security, paternalism, reforms and openings that the dissident movement assimilated to the perpetuation of "living in lie"². The apparent "gain" and "openness" was visible on the foundation of the real ideology of Czechoslovak communism, equivalent to an unwritten social document between the leadership and society, which consisted in refraining from using the means of repression on citizens in exchange for formal loyalty from the society as well as ensuring a certain standard of living from the ruling elite³.

The concept of "grey zone" developed by J. Cívín targets the opposition group of the communist regime which is considered as being a space made up of dissidents seen as the main threat in taking power. Although the communist regime had a total but not an absolute monopoly on the media, it tolerated to some point the alternative sources of information and cultural dissemination, without implementing violent repression. Students and artists who have joined the resistance movement are recognized as being the foundation of the "creative intelligence" group appearance⁴.

Initially, the Czechoslovak communist regime between 1970 and 1980 contained certain post-totalitarian signs, showing explicit signs of weakness, due to the contradictions that arose between the governance principles of totalitarianism and the real situation of society. It is necessary to make a certain clarification in this context: "post-totalitarian" is the concept that relates to political systems of government, which, although following the same matrix, aim to adapt political behaviour to the needs of the party, building a formal reality devoid of content, in which relaxation and recreation are nothing but forms of numbness within a cyclical reality devoid of "past" or "future".

Herbert Kitschelt classifies communist regimes by making a sub-distinction between bureaucratic-authoritarian communism, patrimonial communism and national consensus communism. According to the author, communist patrimonial regimes (e.g. Socialist Republic of Romania) are characterized by a hierarchical dependence between communist leaders and their supporters, who need a person

¹ Jan Cívín, *Czechoslovak Communist Regime in the Period 1985 – 1989*, published in "Central European Political Studies Review", Vol. 7, No 2-3, 2005, Available at: <<https://journals.muni.cz/cepsr/article/view/4107/6051>>, Accessed 10 March 2021.

² Václav Havel, *Viața în adevăr*, Univers Publishing House, Bucharest, 1997, p. 60.

³ Jan Cívín, *op. cit.*

⁴ *Ibidem*.

to decide for them and manage the society. Communist bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes (e.g. German Democratic Republic) do not allow the establishment of any other opposition group within the political elite, trying to apply totalitarian methods in order to manage national order and security. Last but not least, national consensus communist regimes (e.g. Socialist Republic of Poland) are defined by authorizing the rise of competition within the ruling elite, while manifesting an increased degree of emphasis on social interests⁵. In this context, the type of leadership in Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in the period 1970-1980 falls into the category of bureaucratic-authoritarian communist regimes.

Since the second half of the 1980s started to be perceived a significant change in the management of the power within the communist leadership in Czechoslovakia, caused by the increase of social plurality, the blurring of the barrier between public and private life, as well as between the real needs of society and those of individuals. In addition, there is a sharp increase in the number of opponents of the communist regime, without the visible intervention of the political elite in counteracting these actions. Thus, the second half of the 1980s is marked by a post-totalitarian period, determined by conscious liberalization of the Czechoslovak communist regime following the reforms launched in Moscow.

Although externally, the Czechoslovak reality was presented as a homogeneous one, in fact, internally, there was an open conflict between pragmatic and orthodox party members, which developed into a dispute that distracted the party from promoting communist ideology, which eventually caused the loss of legitimacy over its citizens. The roles end up being reversed: if initially, society was acting and manifesting as “schizophrenic”, later the regime becomes the one that loses contact with reality, by intensifying even more the discrepancies between public and private life.

The concept of “negotiated collapse” developed by Soňa Szomolányi relates to the Czechoslovak process of transition from totalitarianism to democracy as a result of negotiation acts between members of the ruling elite and opponents of the regime. The negotiations between members of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and the opposition group were the only sure ways to manage a possible total “decline” of society in the context of the emergence of economic and social crisis. For this reason, the concept of “Velvet Revolution” promoted by Václav Havel defines both the peaceful nature of the transition and the actions of political diplomacy, such as the position between the leaders of the resistance movement and the leaders of the Communist Party⁶.

The concept of “post-totalitarianism” is the main subject of the *Powerless* essay, through which the former Czech dissident Václav Havel discusses critically and consciously about the old model of dictatorship which turned into a basis of the ruling regime. The new form of leadership determined the emergence of certain habits within society, thus promoting the development of consumerism. This new type of leadership promoted the values of a “living in

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

lie.” The concept of “democratic crisis” developed by the philosopher Martin Heidegger is used by Václav Havel in his writings as the main reason why traditional parliamentary democracies cannot provide a solid basis in supporting an industrial consumer society. From the Czech dissident’s point of view, parliamentary democracies are only a temporary, useful and pragmatic solution to the transition process but not the goal itself⁷.

According to V. Havel, “anti-politics” can become the framework aiming to restate an existential ethic, establishing a certain social order between morality and politics. At the same time, “anti-politics” relates to the opposition between building a society based on human and moral reciprocity in relation to the real image promoted by the party leadership, based on domination and coercion. The “anti-politics” developed by V. Havel does not deny totalitarian ideology, but aims to restore the moral dimension of politics, which translates into “individual responsibility”. According to the former Czech dissident, “anti-politics” is not only equivalent to an actual image representation of society, but also serves as a metaphor for the “moral asylum”, which is seen as a final solution of liberation for dissidents who end up adopting a resigned attitude by taking refuge in the mental universe⁸. The “anti-politics” policy relates to civil freedom, but only that freedom based on the rediscovery and promotion of individual responsibility. The origin of human freedom lies in the responsibility of each individual, who assumes his own identity and becomes responsible toward society as a whole⁹.

Although V. Havel debated the concept of “anti-politics” in his writings and criticized the ruling elite, the former Czech dissident decided to get involved in political life, along with the development of the Velvet Revolution, by becoming the leader of the resistance movement, which meant crossing the pre-established line of “anti-politics” defined by himself. The idea of “anti-politics” developed and promoted by V. Havel during the communist regime was adapted and evolved to the concept of “ethical populism” during the events of 1989. The former political dissident was invested with a high degree of credibility and support from the nation due to his active involvement during the Velvet Revolution. Furthermore, the public political space and political parties acted as a unifying element on the will of the citizens to elect him as the new leader of civil society¹⁰.

In 1978 V. Havel published *The Power of the Powerless* essay arguing about the apparent openness and relaxation measures, that he evaluated as a

⁷ Milan Znoj, *Havlova antipolitika na různý způsob. K Sukovi knize o Václavu Havlovi*, published in “Soudobé dějiny”, XXI/3, 2014, p. 418, Available at: <<https://www.ceeol.com/search/viewpdf?id=76532>>, Accessed 12 March 2021.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 415.

⁹ Alexandru Manoli, *Repensar a política: acerca da dissidência e da antipolítica no pensamento político de Václav Havel/Rethinking politics: on dissidence and antipolitics in Václav Havel political thought* (dissertation), Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2012, p. 92, Available at: <https://run.unl.pt/bitstream/10362/8633/1/Disserta%20a7ao_Repensar%20a%20Pol%20c3%a0adica-%20Acerca%20da%20Dissid%20c3%a0ancia%20e%20da%20Antipol%20c3%a0adica%20no%20Pensamento%20Pol%20c3%a0adico%20de%20V%20c3%a1clav%20Havel.pdf>, Accessed 16 March 2021.

¹⁰ Milan Znoj, *op. cit.*, p. 420.

disproportionate caricature of modern life and its lack of authenticity. According to the former Czech dissident, “living in truth”, represents a necessary foundation in mobilising civil society to develop individual responsibility, thus contributing to breaking the vicious circle of “objective guilt”¹¹.

In the *Letters to Olga* novel, which contains most of the letters sent by V. Havel between 1979 and 1982 to his first wife during his period of political detention, the former Czech dissident relates to the new portrayal of modern man, who has become rather a machine than a human being, being used strictly for its functions and not for its essence. V. Havel refers to society’s “identity crisis” that developed in the absence of a sense of “individual responsibility”: “The crisis of today’s world is obviously a crisis of human responsibility (both responsibility to oneself and responsibility “to” someone else)”. Thus, the crisis of human responsibility is the crisis of human identity¹².

Therefore, V. Havel became the main promoter of “non-political politics”, aiming to mobilize the existential revolution of society, based on which people can begin to strengthen the relationship between their own being and social significance, thus rediscovering moral feeling. Based on the concepts of “individual responsibility” and “non-political politics”, the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka considers the idea of “living in truth” as an attempt to materialize a genuinely responsible existence and not a guarantee in itself¹³. Moreover, V. Havel noted that the lack of guarantees is the main cause of the inability, both of the communist regime and of the Western political systems, to represent the real interests of their citizens. The contradiction in this space takes place “between the post-totalitarian system intentions and life’s intentions”¹⁴. The “life’s intentions” are related to society’s wishes to strengthen moral integrity, human dignity and the independent existence. These values end up being dissolved in the anonymity of mass existence in the so-called “pseudo-life”¹⁵.

The ideology of the communist regime itself was based on the perpetuation of “living in lie”, which was equivalent to losing the sense of human responsibility and constantly distorting the real image of society and the true nature of the government system. However, citizens reach a certain level of awareness about the fake image promoted by the ruling elite, thus succeeding in finally making the distinction between the appearance of public lie and the essence of social reality. Nevertheless, citizens choose to agree with the illusion of “living in lie” promoted by the ruling elite. Such decision is a part of the individual responsibility of the citizens, who participate collectively in promoting the ideology of the communist regime¹⁶. The manipulation of truth, both short and long term by the

¹¹ Slavoj Žižek, *Tentative de evadare din logica sistemului capitalist*, in “CriticAtac”, 23 December 2011, Available at: <<https://www.criticatac.ro/tentative-de-evadare-din-logica-sistemului-capitalist/>>, Accessed 16 March 2021.

¹² Václav Havel, *Scrisori către Olga*, Art Publishing House, Bucharest, 2009, p. 400.

¹³ Ivana Vokounová, *Havlova “Nepolitická politika”* (PhD Thesis), Pardubice, 2018, p. 61, Available at: <https://dk.upce.cz/bitstream/handle/10195/71554/VokounovaI_HavlovaNepoliticka_TH_2018.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>, Accessed 16 March 2021.

¹⁴ Václav Havel, *Viața în adevăr*, Univers Publishing House, Bucharest, 1997, p. 59.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 68.

¹⁶ Ivana Vokounová, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

political regime, without showing any sign of resistance from the citizens, have resulted in the establishment of a “tacit consent” between government and society, based on cynicism and hypocrisy. The reality of post-totalitarian society bears striking resemblances to Orwell’s novels, which are not limited to the communist period of Central and Eastern European countries, but also crucially influence the transition process to democracy in the 1990s¹⁷.

The *Power of the Powerless* essay represents an exhortation to every citizen, which calls for the people’s courage to claim their human dignity and their right to liberty through acts of responsibility. The essay’s title refers to two distinct social categories: civil society and the group of dissidents, apparently powerless before the communist regime, but who together have the power to prove the moral and responsible behaviour of “living in truth”¹⁸. The image of dissidents in communist society is compared to that of martyrs, who plead and speak the truth despite political sanctions and oppression, thus risking their status and image in society¹⁹.

According to Rob McRae, the concept of “living in truth” relates to members of the opposition group who refused to submit to the communist regime and chose to live in two different worlds, publicly expressing a desire to assume their existence as “whole people”²⁰. “Living in truth” means living through ideals, which “give you a glimmer of light and warmth in a sea of darkness”²¹. The dissident movements, considered as “parallel structures”, represented, by action and thought, the landmarks of “living in truth. Therefore, the manifested opposition represented the essential element of the construction of a new society”²².

The Romanian reactions regarding the figure and thinking pattern of V. Havel are highlighted in the post-totalitarian period by two events, which target the international echoes of the former Czech dissident.

The first event targets the former Czech dissident reactions, as President of the Czech Republic, regarding the Romanian post-revolutionary territory, during his official visit to Bucharest in June 1994, on the occasion of signing the Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation between Romania and Czech Republic. At the same time, V. Havel received the title of Doctor Honoris Causa awarded by the rector of the University of Bucharest, Prof. Emil Constantinescu, in a ceremonial setting.

During the meeting between the President of the Czech Republic and the former President of Romania, Ion Iliescu, V. Havel discussed the role and importance of business meetings between heads of state, resulting in “a special radiation effect that strengthens the good relations and creates a certain climate” in bilateral relations, but which do not generally show immediate and concrete effectiveness²³.

¹⁷ Alexandru Manoli, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 43.

²⁰ Rob McRae, *Resistance and Revolution, Václav Havel’s Czechoslovakia*, Carleton University Press, Canada, 1997, p. 18.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 58.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 305.

²³ In the *Expres* magazine, Issue no. 22, Published on 21-27 June 1994, Available at: <<https://dupa90.ro/timeline-events/21-23-iunie-1994>>, Accessed 1 April 2021.

His statement was marked by the renewal of the Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation between Romania and the Czech Republic, which was signed by both sides on August 16th, 1968, just a few days before the Soviet invasion. The existence of an official document that stated for “aid in the event of an armed attack” did not prevent the Bucharest leadership from acting for purposes other than mutual aid. In the opinion of the former Czech dissident, N. Ceaușescu’s gesture in August 1968 had nothing to do with the Romanian-Czech relations, but rather with the Romanian-Russian ones, thus sending a direct message to the Moscow leadership.

At the same time, V. Havel didn’t hesitate to speak openly about the proportion that a head of state should establish between values and ideals, thus achieving a link of interdependence between politics and morality.

The former Czech dissident’s visit to Bucharest took place following the invitation addressed by President Ion Iliescu. However, the Romanian media did not hesitate to remark: “Undoubtedly, President Iliescu will know how to make use of his success²⁴” In the present case, the event itself was an exact copy on a small scale of what N. Ceausescu achieved in August 1968 through his speech addressed to the crowd, namely, a strategic decision of promoting President Ion Iliescu’s public image in order to increase the chances of winning the upcoming 1996 presidential election.

The speech that V. Havel delivered in the Great Hall of the University of Bucharest had a cyclical form, opening and concluding with the symbolic phrase that became the main leitmotif of his government program: “Truth and love must prevail over lies and hatred!²⁵” That sentence managed to capture the peaceful and human spirit of the Velvet Revolution. However, the statement itself was understood by both Czechoslovak nation and opponents of the former Czech dissident as a political program that triumphed in overthrowing communism but failed to achieve its goal in consolidating a sustainable democracy. For this reason, V. Havel’s speech in Bucharest was based on strong arguments to develop the main topic, that is – to define the difference between ideal and illusion.

The promise made by V. Havel in 1989, on background of an immoral government and a demoralized society, was a pre-established ideal, but the lack of visible results was considered by society as an illusion. For the purpose of combating such claims, the former Czech dissident stated that “while the ideal is a completely open structure, the illusion is, on the contrary, a closed structure²⁶” Thus, the ideal does not represent a concrete objective, which can be achieved, but represents a traceable direction that can be permanently adapted according to the collective needs.

According to V. Havel, “the ideal resembles the horizon: the closer we get to it, the farther it goes²⁷” For this reason, the ideal cannot be achieved at the level

²⁴ *Idem*, 22 – 28 iunie 1994, Available at: <<https://dupa90.ro/timeline-events/21-23-iunie-1994>>, Accessed 1 April 2021.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

of the whole society without civic involvement. The illusion is finding a common denominator in a given framework and organizing it into a unique system of values. Therefore, it occurs as a rational hierarchy of the system of government through which civic society is based on the fact that the ruling elite will carry out all the promised things, thus giving a meaning to life. The real conviction of the society is that the ruling elite already has all the necessary knowledge to solve the deepest mysteries and it has the obligation to reveal to the citizens the secret of existence; an approach which is an illusion itself²⁸.

Essentially, communist ideology was an illusion, which sought to project the entire world from only one perspective and reduce everything to a single common denominator, including life and history. However, these two elements cannot be explained and controlled by establishing general rules because they are independent of human actions. The ideology of the communist regime was based on strengthening the collective illusion of promoting the communist ideal as the ultimate solution to developing a more prosperous society and a better world. The communist political elite tried creating the illusion that the world could be shaped and controlled, and that the goal could only be achieved by following the directives of the government programme.

According to V. Havel, “society is facing a nostalgia for illusion”²⁹, which refers to S. Boym’s ideas about the concept of “nostalgia”, aiming to develop a collective revolt against the modernity of time, history and progress. For this reason, the new leaders rely on issued principles and provide various securities of fulfilling the one-dimensional vision and the goals themselves. One-dimensional visions are nothing but nationalist illusions that overlook civil responsibility and end up vanishing in the society. Thus, these illusions ultimately lead to disappointments. In order to combat the illusions that become disillusion, V. Havel urges a balanced relationship between politics and moral.

When asked about the balance that should exist between politics and morals regarding President Ion Iliescu’s actions in 1990 to call the miners in the capital, V. Havel demonstrated, once again, the main qualities of diplomatic approach that prevailed during the negotiations of the Velvet Revolution. Therefore, the former Czech dissident related to his own policy as being “a service to fellow citizens, [...] a service to public opinion, a service to the community³⁰.” Thus, politics is the outcome of debates that must find an agreement and represents, at the same time, the compromise resulting from negotiations between the ruling elite and civil society.

Symbolically, the official visit of the former Czech dissident to Romania represented his support to Romanian intellectual elites, decisively influencing the mode of action of the political elite³¹.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ Laurențiu Ungureanu, Iulian Andrei Crăciun, *Emil Constantinescu, fost președinte al României: “Lech Walesa, Václav Havel și cu mine – Emil”*, in “Adevărul”, 12 November 2011, Available at: <https://adevarul.ro/life-style/stil-de-viata/emil-constantinescu-fost-presedinte-romaniei-lech-walesa-vaclav-havel---emil-1_50ba02067c42d5a663af7b6d/index.html>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

The second event aims to rebuild an intellectual and cultural community by stating its priorities worldwide. Emil Constantinescu addressed the U.S.A Congress on July 15th 1998, thus being the third head of state to achieve this performance in Central and South-Eastern Europe after Lech Wałęsa's speech in 1989 and that of Václav Havel in 1990³².

Thus, the speeches of the two heads of state of the Romanian and Czechoslovak post-totalitarian nations are required to be analysed from an empirical perspective in order to capture both common and distinct elements.

During the speech addressed to the U.S.A Congress, on July 15th 1998, Emil Constantinescu noted the main elements which highlighted the bilateral relations between Romania and the U.S.A., referring to technology, know-how and capital³³. By stating that, "We are connected by the hundreds of thousands of sons and daughters of Romania, who have come to America over the years, and whose descendants live today in all corners of this magnificent country³⁴", the former President of Romania sought not only to emphasize the existing relations between the two countries, but also to notice, in a diplomatic way, the impressive number of Romanian emigrants.

During his speech, Emil Constantinescu did not hesitate to refer to the former President Ion Iliescu's governance system, considered a follower of *Perestroika*'s reforms promoted by the Moscow leadership: "My country escaped communism in 1989, and in 1996 managed to accomplish the first perfectly democratic transfer of power³⁵." The battle for the office of President of Romania in 1996 meant the disproportionate combat between Emil Constantinescu, considered a charismatic and populist leader, who was supported by the "people" and Ion Iliescu, who was supported by the "democratic" forces and was considered responsible for the 1990's mineriads along with the The National Salvation Front party members³⁶.

Emil Constantinescu built his speeches and activated in the political sphere, appealing to the emotional impact he transmitted, just like the former Czech dissident: "I have always noticed that the emotional impact is the most important one. Ideas are taken over only if are followed by an emotional impact. Otherwise, they are passing you by³⁷"

Emil Constantinescu takes over different elements from V. Havel's speech held in Bucharest on the difference between ideal and illusion in building a government program, aiming to fulfil the election promises: "As a geologist I learned that when climbing the hard ridges of a mountain without seeing it from a distance, you cannot perceive its greatness. As President, I have noticed that debates and controversies often prevent us from distinguishing, from lots of events, which are those that will face eternity³⁸"

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ Speech by President of Romania Emil Constantinescu to U.S. Congress on 15 July 1998, Available at: <http://old.presidency.ro/pdf/date_arhiva/6369_ro.pdf>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ Dan Pavel, *Prezidențialismul românesc și alegerile. De la Iliescu la Băsescu*, in "Sfera Politicii", No. 143, Available at: <<http://revistasferapoliticii.ro/sfera/143/art01-pavel.html>>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

³⁷ Laurențiu Ungureanu, Iulian Andrei Crăciun, *op. cit.*

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

It should be noted that both heads of state are coming from civil society, managing to assert themselves in the political arena without preliminarily having studies in the targeted field. The government program promoted by Emil Constantinescu during the U.S.A. Congress introduced a number of elements developed by V. Havel in his essays, aiming to build a sustainable democracy by generating human solidarity as a supreme form of freedom, thus developing human dignity and progress.

In addition, during his address to the U.S.A. Congress, Emil Constantinescu did not omit to point out the main reasons why Romania should be considered a key factor in ensuring the stability of Southeast Europe, thus publicly manifesting its real interest in joining the North Atlantic Alliance. Therefore, some of the main advantages in ensuring the security of the European region were represented by the territorial extent, the strategic location of Romania in South-Eastern Europe and its Eurasian trade links. We must not forget that Romania has demonstrated its diplomatic skills in avoiding the emergence of possible religious conflicts nationally, and has diplomatically handled relations with the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine³⁹. At the end of his speech, the former President of Romania highlighted the main role of morals in managing interethnic conflicts arising “from a major deficit of democracy [...]”⁴⁰ This statement is proven, both in Romania’s case regarding the interethnic conflicts between Hungarians and Romanians in Transylvania, as well as the misunderstandings between the Czech and Slovak nations which led to the disintegration of Czechoslovakia.

Václav Havel addressed the U.S.A. Congress on February 21st 1990⁴¹. His speech aimed to combine elements from the historical and political sphere with the philosophical one. The main problems of the modern post-totalitarian society are represented by the sharp rhythm of changes regarding the transition from a totalitarian to a democratic regime, and the changes within the spheres of influence. The power of a state lies in its ability to influence the policy of another state, creating interdependent relationships. The real battle took place between the main global powers, represented by the United States of America and the Soviet Union, which tried to influence the political governance of the smaller states that became satellites. Václav Havel debates the concept of “bipolarity” in the global political sphere, referring to the two main forces acting in opposition: one force which defends freedom and other force that threatens it. Thus, with the end of the Second World War, Europe became the main field of dispute in the spheres of influence. The collapse of the communist regime and the transition to democratic regimes allowed nations to free themselves from the shadow of the bipolar vision, offering them at the same time the chance to search for their own identity and allowing their entry into a new era of multipolarity. Although the

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ Speech by President of Czech Republic to U.S. Congress on 21 February 1990, Available at: <<https://cz.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2015/12/Projev-prezidenta-Havla-v-Kongresu-1990.pdf>>, Accessed 2 April 2021.

former Czech dissident's statement aimed to promote the concept of "multipolarity", one should not overlook the fact that the global political sphere of the modern era continues to be governed by bipolarity, when we consider that some states are part of the European Union and NATO but there are also other states which are not part of these organisations.

During his speech, Václav Havel debated the strategic position of Czechoslovakia as a satellite state during the communist regime and its role of promoting only a specific type of policy and following only a certain direction accepted by the Moscow leadership. The transition to a democratic regime meant for Czechoslovakia disconnecting from the past and managing political governance independently. Elements such as civic responsibility and the need for developing a global revolution are key issues that the former Czech dissident emphasized in order to fulfil self-awareness and human existence⁴². The transition from a totalitarian to a democratic regime has not spared society of its individual responsibility, because once acquired, the democratic regime must be strengthened in a sustainable way. According to the former Czech dissident, the inability to place morality above politics, science and economics is still considered a current issue in the contemporary era, representing also one of the customs of the communist past. Society is not able to understand and accept that the only real solid basis of all human actions, in order to be moral, is individual responsibility. The main reasons identified in explaining those behaviours are the personal and selfish interests at group, state, and even corporate level, which seriously prevail over truly general and global interests⁴³.

In concluding his speech, V. Havel emphasized the persistent problem that continues to influence human behaviour and patterns in the political sphere, determined by the acceleration of history and the need to emphasize the qualities of the human spirit, by transforming words into action⁴⁴.

Romanian Reactions to the Prague Spring

The Romanian reactions to the Prague Spring are still linked to Nicolae Ceausescu's speech delivered to the public from the balcony of the former Central Committee of the Communist Party on August 21st. 1968. The speech reflected Nicolae Ceausescu's view both over the invasion, by Soviet troops, of the territory of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic⁴⁵, as well as showing caution by fearing the possibility of a Soviet invasion of Romania, due to taking an attitude of relative freedom towards Moscow's policy, manifested by the militarization of the Romanian border with the Hungarian Socialist Republic⁴⁶. The Romanian reaction to Soviet invasion needs to be integrated into the West's

⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵ Kevin McDermott, Matthew Stibbe, *Eastern Europe in 1968 Responses to the Prague Spring and Warsaw Pact Invasion*, UK, Ed. Sheffield Hallam University, 2018, p. 194.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 197.

tough stance on the action taken by the Moscow leadership, especially from the Federal Republic of Germany, which sent official threatening messages to the Kremlin leadership in the event of possible military intervention on NATO territory⁴⁷, Romania, Yugoslavia or Albania. The West considered the military intervention of the Soviet Union as part of a new policy of removal from Czechoslovakia and integration of the People's Republic of China position, which has publicly expressed its objection to the violation of the sovereignty of the nation-state⁴⁸.

In order to evaluate and quantify the Romanian reactions to the political, economic and social situation in Czechoslovakia, we are going to use the information (e.g. news, articles, reports and interviews) as published in the official Romanian Communist newspaper "Scinteia" between January and August 1968. January 1968 doesn't excel toward proving the claimed interest: only 5 articles were published on the situation in Czechoslovakia. In the newspaper published on January 7th systematically biographical data on Alexander Dubček is mentioned, regarding his investment as First Secretary of Czechoslovakia⁴⁹. The briefing between the journalist E. Ionescu and Eng. Jan Neumann, Chairman of the Czechoslovak Committee on Nuclear Energy, dated January 14th, 1968, is included among the most important events held in Czechoslovakia that were mentioned by the Romanian Communist press. During the briefing the attendees discussed research activity on the development of nuclear energy in Czechoslovakia⁵⁰, such as expanding the mutual economic cooperation between Romania and Czechoslovakia in the field of metallurgy, machine-building, chemical and oil industry, agriculture and food industry between 1971 and 1975. The briefing that took place in Bucharest was a direct result of Maxim Berghianu's (Chairman of the State Committee of the Socialist Republic of Romania) latest visit to Prague⁵¹. During the negotiations, "the discussions took place in an atmosphere of friendship and mutual understanding⁵²", which confirms the fruitful relations of collaboration between the two Socialist states.

During the analysis of N. Ceausescu's speech from August 22nd, 1968, we notice both an attitude of uprising against the Soviet invasion in Czechoslovakia, as well as the desire in mobilising the Romanian nation in order to offer unconditional support: "Our whole nation is showing its tight unity around the party and state leadership, fully endorsing the Romanian Communist Party and the government regarding the situation in Czechoslovakia." / "The events in Czechoslovakia represents for Romanians an opportunity for even closer mobilization around the Romanian Communist Party [...]"⁵³ On the one hand,

⁴⁷ Andrei Tinu, *Poziția actorilor politici internaționali față de primăvara de la Praga*, in "Sfera Politicii", No. 2 (184), 2015, p. 21, Available at: <<http://revistasferapoliticii.ro/sfera/184/pdf/184.02.Tinu.pdf>>, Accessed 13 February 2021.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

⁴⁹ *Scinteia*, Year XXXVII, No. 7575, Sunday, 7 January 1968, p. 6.

⁵⁰ *Scinteia*, Year XXXVII, No. 7582, Sunday, 14 January 1968, p. 5.

⁵¹ *Scinteia*, Year XXXVII, No. 7583, Monday, 15 January 1968, p. 3.

⁵² *Scinteia*, Year XXXVII, No. 7589, Sunday, 21 January 1968, p. 6.

⁵³ *Scinteia*, Year XXXVII, No. 7802, Thursday 22 August 1968, pp. 1-6.

N. Ceausescu's attitude towards the Soviet invasion overloads the usage of a strategic arsenal of empathy, and on the other hand, his speech serves as a propaganda tool in order to support the Romanian nation's turning towards the Romanian Communist Party and the image of its leader. The Czechoslovak crisis and Romania's reaction on the reform measures in Prague, especially to the Soviet military intervention, were key elements, which gave to the Romanian leader the opportunity to adjust quickly, according personal and state interests, enjoying at the same time international fame and increasing Romania's chances of economic influence⁵⁴. The position and consolidation of influence within the Party are the elements that determined certain political members to take one side – for example, Ion Iliescu, who was at the time first secretary of the Communist Youth Union, denounced the “aggression” by the Soviet Union towards Czechoslovakia⁵⁵. Marin Preda shares the same attitude by stating that “We are all moved by the words of Comrade Nicolae Ceausescu, words full of wisdom, determination and concern for the fate of our people⁵⁶” (August 24th, 1968). This instrument was used as a tactical strategy on behalf of the Romanian Communist Party, of strategic use of certain leading personalities in order to increase the people's confidence in N. Ceausescu's speech and in the image of the Romanian Communist Party.

The first articles referring to the internal situation in Czechoslovakia after the negotiations in Moscow were published on August 30th, 1968. The articles emphasise the “continuation of the revival process on social and political life, in order to reach consolidation and normalization as soon as possible”. By claiming this fact, the leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party anticipated the “compromise” measures taken by the Soviet Union in order to maintain communism of a conservative type⁵⁷.

N. Ceausescu's speech represented a manifest public display of anti-Sovietism, in which Romania was assuring Czechoslovakia of “esteem and consideration”, of support given in order to develop a policy of independence from Moscow⁵⁸. At the same time, Alexander Dubček and Nicolae Ceausescu considered that economic and social reforms were the only solution in speeding up the economic recovery of the state. However, the two communist leaders developed different modes of action. Unlike Nicolae Ceausescu, who adopted a “top-down” policy of action, keeping a close eye on the implementation of reforms, Alexander Dubček relied more on the wishes of “civil society” in order to develop the necessary reforms in achieving economic goals⁵⁹. Despite differences in decision-making and reform implementation, both political leaders publicly expressed their beliefs about the restructuring of socialism. Although N. Ceausescu harshly criticized the invasion of Soviet troops on the territory of Czechoslovakia, he

⁵⁴ Andrei Tinu, *art. cit.*, p. 27.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

⁵⁶ *Scînteia*, Year XXXVII, No. 7804, Saturday 24 August 1968, p. 5.

⁵⁷ *Scînteia*, Year XXXVII, No. 7810, Friday 30 August 1968, p. 6.

⁵⁸ Andrei Tinu, *art. cit.*, p. 26.

⁵⁹ Mihai Retegan, 1968. *Din primăvară până în toamnă. Schiță de politică externă și politică militară românească*. Second Edition Revised, RAO Publishing House, Bucharest, 2014, p. 143.

did not publicly display a reaction of revolt, nor did he firmly state his intention to withdraw from the structures of the Warsaw Pact⁶⁰.

For this reason, we are going to review the Romanian reaction and its act of support offered to Czechoslovakia as a strategic move of developing the propaganda associated with the cult of personality of the former communist leader. Therefore, we are going to debate on Nicolae Ceausescu's image, internally considered as being the one and only "saviour of the Romanian nation"⁶¹ against the Soviet threat, while externally his actions were seen as being firm and independent.

*Culture of Commemoration – Romanian Reactions
to the 50th Anniversary of the Prague Spring (2018–2020)*

The present research aims to analyse and quantify the Romanian cultural-commemorative reactions to the political, economic and social situation in Czechoslovakia in 1968, focusing on synthesising the information published in newspapers, articles and interviews in the field of online press, regarding the Prague Spring during 2018 – 2020. In this regard, we are going to relay on to an extended framework, using all media that include the print media, radio, television and the Internet. The research results are going to be systematized in relevant graphs for determining a specific Romanian cultural attitude. Thus, we are going to consider as a starting point sociologist Geert Hofstede's statement according to which the national culture represents "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another"⁶². In other words, the cultural attitude is the one that establishes that the specific value of the members of a group is found in the contrast of information and knowledge in relation to other people of the group. However, the essence of culture results from the collective effort of individuals to materialize knowledge at group level into shared symbols, rituals and values⁶³.

We are going to practically highlight the theoretical aspect mentioned above through a series of articles, studies and reports that point explicitly, both through their title and through the information transmitted, to the landmarks of the commemorative culture. Thus, the Romanian reactions to the Prague Spring after 50 years during 2018-2020 can be categorized following two general coordinates: the first coordinate concerns the informative character, and the second coordinate concerns the historical and cultural recovery.

The Romanian reactions to the 50th anniversary of the Prague Spring are consistent with European dynamics. Thus, the commemorative reactions at the level of the European institutions were highlighted by the speech of Jean-Claude

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 145.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 146.

⁶² Geert Hofstede, in Angela Pîrlog, *Abordări teoretice ale conceptului de cultură națională*, published in *IBN* (Instrumentul Bibliometric Național), 3 March 2018, p. 267, Available at: <https://ibn.idsi.md/sites/default/files/imag_file/265-269.pdf>, Accessed 27 April 2021.

⁶³ *Ibidem*.

Juncker, President of the European Commission's, delivered on August, 21st 2018, which emphasized not only the importance of regaining freedom and respect for human rights, but also the collective need to defend these values in a democratic society⁶⁴. At the same time, the speech was mainly based on solidarity and civic responsibility – basic values promoted by the former Czech dissident Václav Havel – component elements in the cultural and social heritage passed on to the next generation⁶⁵.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel made a speech at European level referring to the events from August 1968 as being a “sad culmination of the policy of oppression initiated by the Soviet Union and its allies”, severely criticizing the participation of the German Democratic Republic troops in this action⁶⁶. In her opinion, the beginnings of the attempts to democratize the Czechoslovak state launched in 1968 did not materialize until 1989, when “the will of the people has prevailed”, thus referring to the motto of the Czech state – Truth prevails! (“Pravda vítězí!”)⁶⁷.

At the same time, the event was commemorated in Bratislava, Slovakia, by organizing a photo exhibition with information panels and audio-visual recordings from August 1968⁶⁸.

In the opposite situation we analysed the Russian cultural-commemorative reactions to the Prague Spring, which included brief and restrained articles on assessing the involvement of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact troops in the invasion of Czechoslovakia⁶⁹. The Russian cultural reactions have shown that the Prague Spring event does not represent one of the public interest priorities of the Russian Federation. Thus, the current Russian leadership continues to maintain a conservative attitude towards manifestations at European level.

The Romanian reactions to the Prague Spring after half a century tend to unanimously consider the event in question as being still a painful and recent episode of history from Czechoslovakia and Europe, insisting mainly on the decision and individualization of the response given by the Romanian elite to the commemorative event. Thus, referring to the way the Romanian elite reported to the commemorative event, we argued on answering to the question: Was it or not a commemoration, if not forgotten as the Romanian writer Matei Vişniec called it, with “slowness and difficulty” of history and cultural recovery or on the contrary, was it a well-individualized commemorative event and generously disseminated by the Romanian cultural and political elites? The event was definitely not forgotten, but discreetly commemorated, as the Romanian publisher Tudor Curtifan described the photo exhibitions, conferences and book launches as well

⁶⁴ *Statement by President Juncker on the 50th anniversary of the end of the Prague Spring*, Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_18_5101>, Accessed 14 May 2021.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁶ Editorial Euroskop, *Jak si Evropa připomíná výročí okupace Československa 1968?*, in “Euroskop”, 21 August 2018, Available at: <<https://www.euroskop.cz/9002/31590/clanek/jak-si-evropa-pripomina-vyroci-okupace-ceskoslovenska-1968/>>, Accessed 14 May 2021.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

as dedicated radio and television programs⁷⁰. The “slowness and difficulty” in the commemoration acts, which Matei Visniec⁷¹ mentioned, should be reported only to the explicit reactions of the current political elite (an impartial attitude in order to avoid overbidding the position of the former Romanian communist leader, Nicolae Ceausescu!). The way Tudor Curtifan described the Romanian reaction as being a “discreet and quiet commemoration” is one of the natural attributes of Romanian cultural-historical reactions (discreet with the sense of highlighting the landmarks and the value of the moment), anchored in the European collective spirit (“quietly” as a pious and reverent act!), of the “Truth that prevailed!” definitely in 1989!

Lessons of the Czechoslovak Past: a Bridge to European Dynamics

The “lessons of the Czechoslovak past” follow the long-term resolutions of the Prague Spring among civil society and the political elite, by pursuing the development of democratic regimes in the former Soviet states and their effects on European dynamics. Thus, the concept of “negotiated revolutions” makes an explicit reference in the transition to democracy of the former communist states. At the same time, we must not overlook the facts that the principle of the “domino” and the “boomerang”, are both defining in the context of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of independent states in Central and South-Eastern Europe. Both principles seek to confirm the spread of the effects of “micropolitics”, represented by the events of August 1968 in the management of democratic political systems after the disintegration of the USSR. Romanian and foreign historians and analysts such as Adrian Pop, Tony Barber, Jiří Pehe and Andrew Foxall seek to highlight through a series of articles, interviews and reports not only the way in which European states underwent radical changes with the end of the Cold War, but are also pointing out the effects of splitting and increasing populism among political elites.

According to Adrian Pop, genuine democracy represents a product and a local result. Thus, the success of the process of transition to democracy depends mainly on the consequences of the “negotiated revolution” between the old and the new political leadership⁷². We should not overlook the fact that the development of a democracy, even an imperfect one, represents the direct effect of the “negotiated revolution”. The failure to establish a lasting relationship between civil society and the political elite has its source in poor democratic systems⁷³. The European revolutions of 1989 showed that the national edification

⁷⁰ Tudor Curtifan, *Primăvara de la Praga, comemorarea unei jumătăți de secol*, in “Defense Romania”, 20 August 2018, Available at: <https://www.defenseromania.ro/primavara-de-la-praga-comemorarea-unei-jumata-i-de-secol_593095.html>, Accessed 14 May 2021.

⁷¹ Matei Vişniec, *Praga, august 1968: o “primăvară” uitată...*, in “Dilema veche”, No. 758, 30 August – 5 September 2018, Available at: <<https://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/pe-ce-lume-traim/articol/praga-august-1968-o-primavara-uitata>>, Accessed 3 May 2021.

⁷² Adrian Pop, “*Lecțiile*” globale ale revoluțiilor Est-Europene, in “Sfera Politicii”, No. 6 (182), 2014, p. 97. Available at: <<http://revistasferapoliticii.ro/sfera/182/pdf/182.12.Pop.pdf>>, Accessed 23 May 2021.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 98.

of the former Soviet and Yugoslav states was correlated with the assertion of the feeling of national reaffirmation. In A. Pop's view, the positive dimension of the collective desire for national emancipation that prevailed in the case of the bourgeois-democratic revolutions of 1848 represents a context of comparative analysis, through which it can be stated that 1989 is identified with "primordial nationalism"⁷⁴.

Nationalism was the main factor which contributed both to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and to the emergence of new independent states in Central and South-Eastern Europe. The tireless efforts of anti-Soviet leaders, such as Iosip Broz Tito in Yugoslavia and Nicolae Ceausescu in Romania, to develop national communist ideology at any cost and efforts, ultimately contributed to the revolts and revolutions among civil society⁷⁵. Thus, the use of the national element in promoting the communist ideology has operated as a "boomerang principle", by acting against its promoters. At the same time, the actions of emancipation of the satellite states under Soviet domination launched in June 1989 through the partially free elections in Poland caused chain reactions, which acted as the "domino principle" and resulted in the collapse of the entire Eastern bloc⁷⁶.

According to A. Pop, the outcome of the 1989 events is seen as a "self-limiting revolution", which highlights both the post-communist reality resulting from the change of political regime, such as also the overview and demands of the globalization process, which show a tendency to deprive civil society of its tools of self-organization and self-defence in exchange for extensive political and economic benefits⁷⁷. The post-1989 transition process failed to completely eliminate the imposed measures and the behaviours inherited from the communist regime in terms of how to reconcile the democratic system⁷⁸.

Sociologist Jeffrey C. Goldfarb used the theory of "micropolitics" in defining and explaining the concept of "self-limiting revolution", emphasising that historical events which are considered as being completed and having no possibility to influence in any way the dynamics of the current government by the political elites, such as the Prague Spring or the Eastern European revolutions of 1989, have actually wide-ranging consequences in civil society⁷⁹.

According to Tony Barber, editor of the *Financial Times*, the events of August 1968 remain decisive in the context of the development process of modern democracy. The argumentation is extensive and it concerns the following elements: no political ideology or system of leadership managed to pass the test of endurance over time without undergoing considerable changes. As a result, the unsuccessful adaptation has resulted in the total eradication of the system. At the same time, the totalitarian political regimes have proved that they do not

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 102.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 101.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 103.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 103-104.

have a solid basis to meet the dynamic challenges of modern society. Thus, both the old and the new management systems contain elements of their own decay, as they fail to notice the real problems of the modern world and end up providing inadequate solutions that will contribute to chain reactions, such as economic inefficiency, social tension and political dissatisfaction⁸⁰.

Social emancipation attempts under Soviet rule, such as the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the Prague Spring of 1968, and Solidarity of 1980, are real lessons which demonstrate how the common will of civil society comes to rule at the expense of ideologies imposed for regaining power, political rights, justice and national freedom (the strong feeling of patriotism of the Czechs and Slovaks was the one that prevailed in the context of the Soviet invasion of August 1968)⁸¹.

Another “lesson of the Czechoslovak past” is the firm attitude expressed, not based on aggression and arrogance, but rather on iconic reactions reflected in the “political charm” of the Czechoslovak reformist leader Alexander Dubček, who was greeted with cheers on his return to public life in the context of the Velvet Revolution of 1989⁸². Czech political scientist Jiří Pehe claimed that the Czechoslovak nation was aware of the imperfection of the communist regime, but strongly believed that the system could be reformed and could be given a “human face”. After the invasion of Soviet troops in August 1968 and the introduction the period of the so-called “Normalization”, the gap between the real version and the distorted image of the imposed system and ideology deepened⁸³ (we should not overlook the international reaction in response to Soviet invasion – NATO had strongly condemned the suppression of the Prague Spring by Warsaw Pact troops, but without explicitly expressing their intention to intervene in changing the course of action)⁸⁴.

According to Andrew Foxall, the post-Soviet political situation of the West was rebuilt undergoing radical changes, influencing the governing bodies of the states in the former Eastern bloc. Despite the development of its mechanisms for action and influence, the European Union does not have unity and decision-making power, proposing proportionate measures which are adapted to European strategies⁸⁵. The new political leadership in the Czech Republic and Slovakia demonstrates that both states face common problems in the administration of governance systems regarding the deficit of liberalism and democracy. The double significance of 2018 regarding the 100th anniversary of the establishment

⁸⁰ Editorial Democracy Digest, *Why the Prague Spring still matters*, in “Democracy Digest”, 13 August 2021, Available at: <<https://www.demdigest.org/why-the-prague-spring-still-matters-for-europe/>>, Accessed 24 May 2021.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*.

⁸² *Ibidem*.

⁸³ Marc Santora, *50 years after Prague Spring, lessons on freedom*, in “The Seattle Times”, 24 August 2018, Available at: <<https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/50-years-after-prague-spring-lessons-on-freedom/>>, Accessed 25 May 2021.

⁸⁴ Andrew Foxall, *The West must not forget the lessons of the Prague Spring*, in “Cap. X”, 24 August 2018, Available at: <<https://capx.co/the-west-must-not-forget-the-lessons-of-the-prague-spring/>>, Accessed 25 May 2021.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*.

of the Czechoslovak state and the 50th anniversary of the Prague Spring also highlighted the different approaches issued. For example, the President of the Czech Republic, Miloš Zeman, publicly noted his approach to Moscow rather than Brussels. In addition, his decision to refuse giving a speech or to participate in official events commemorating 50 years since the invasion of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia did nothing but amplify tensions between civil society and the ruling elite⁸⁶.

The current Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, Andrej Babiš, became the main subject of an interpellation by the European Commission in April 2021 for conflict of interest, being accused of using European subsidies converted into investments for his own Czech company, Agrofert. His company deals with development of food, chemistry and the media domain⁸⁷. Despite the fact that the Czech Prime Minister is the 5th richest man in the country, and as a political leader and businessman he promotes the principles of populist ideology, and his public statements radically claim that the actions were taken in full compliance with the requirements and associated regulations⁸⁸.

In Slovakia, the resignation of former Prime Minister Robert Fico and Interior Minister Robert Kaliňák in March 2018, following the assassination of journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée, Martina Kušnírová, sparked massive protests among civil society, radically condemning corruption at the level of the political elite⁸⁹.

The Czech Republic and Slovakia have a firm position within the European Union, featuring resources to counter the slippage and destabilization of the European-international liberal order, reaffirming the values of the Prague Spring by reiterating the desire to defend and strengthen democratic values and civil liberties⁹⁰. The turbulent events of 1968, which divided European states between the supporters of the capitalist world and those of the communist world, remain relevant and current through their common stated goal – the struggle for freedom. According to the former European Parliament President Nicole Fontaine, the Prague Spring and the events of May 1968 in France were attempts in purifying the governance system by reforming the social and moral norms considered by young people to be archaic and unbearable⁹¹.

In the former Federal Republic of Germany, the events of 1968 had such a strong impact on civil society that they favoured and triggered the assertion of disadvantaged social groups, confirming the freedoms and rights asserted and

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁷ Adriana Matcovschi, *Premierul ceh Andrej Babiš, vizat de Comisia Europeană pentru conflict de interese*, in "Agerpres", 25 April 2021, Available at: <<https://www.agerpres.ro/politica-externa/2021/04/25/premierul-ceh-andrej-babis-vizat-de-comisia-europeana-pentru-conflict-de-interese-702961>>, Accessed 26 May 2021.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁹ Andrew Foxall, *op. cit.*

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁹¹ European Parliament, *Ce a lăsat anul 1968 Europei?*, in "European Parliament", 16 May 2021, Available at: <<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+IM-PRESS+20080516STO29045+0+DOC+XML+V0/RO>>, Accessed 26 May 2021.

won to this day – such as the active involvement of women in politics, the issue of same gender communities, etc.⁹².

In March 1968, Poland was divided, on the one hand, by massive student street protests, supported by the intellectual elite in the fight against the communist regime and, on the other hand, the demonstrations of workers in the Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza – PZPR), which supported the ruling leadership. The suppression of student protests in Poland and the Prague Spring were, according to the former Polish Foreign Minister Bronisław Geremek, the decisive and relevant influence in founding and consolidating Solidarity's decision-making power in 1980⁹³, which contributed to the subsequent fall of the communist regime.

The importance of 1968 should be reviewed in terms of the contribution that the socio-political events which marked the European political scene had in shaping the subsequent historical course. However, there are perspectives that consider 1968 to be just another chapter in history; for example Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Member of the European Parliament, stated that "the repetition of the debate on 1968 leads us nowhere". Thus, the challenges of the modern era require a different debate than the one based on outdated historical and social foundations⁹⁴.

Although the interpretations, significance and effect of the Prague Spring remain current and relevant, the image of the moment seems to fade among European collective memory, which is preserved and reaffirmed as "lessons of the Czechoslovak past", both a bridge to European dynamics in the context of new challenges, but also as a pedagogical act, stimulating the action of not repeating previous mistakes ("Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it")⁹⁵.

The "lessons of the Czechoslovak past" cannot be dissociated from the understanding that Václav Havel saw in the speech he delivered to the Council of Europe on May 10th 1990, in which he was reaffirming Europe's vision as a forum for freedom. The perspective is taken up through the dialogue-debate between Václav Havel and Jacques Delors on February 1st 2001, with reference to the issue of the coexistence model of the Member States of the European Union. Václav Havel reaffirmed the message-lesson of the Prague Spring, a current and relevant landmark, to overcome the fear of dreaming what seems impossible, a condition for turning the imagined projection into reality. "The dream" that remains even today is exactly what Václav Havel "dreamed" in 2001 – building a "better Europe".

⁹² *Ibidem*.

⁹³ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁵ Dumitru-Cătălin Rogojanu, *The pedagogy of memory and history. Reflections on the Romanian Gulag*, in "Studies on literature, discourse and multivultural dialogue, Section: History and Cultural Mentalities", Târgu Mureș, 2014, p. 298, Available at: <<https://old.upm.ro/ldmd/LDMD-02/LDMD%2002%20-%20History.pdf>>, Accessed 27 May 2021.

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