
Introduction: The Czech Republic on the Doorstep of the European Union

In the years 1992-1993 the Commission of the European Communities, its Directorate General XII, initiated and sponsored the project „East Central Europe 2000“. The aim of the project was to make a comparative assessment and forecast for the four former socialist countries of the so-called „Visegrad group“ - the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and the Slovak Republic - to examine developments in those areas and from those angles that would be most relevant for their prospective entrance into the European Union. It was also to locate the main problems of such a development and to formulate policy recommendations addressed to national governments as well as to international organisations. The driving force behind the project was the desire to obtain comprehensive portraits of the countries which are the most recent applicants for EU membership. The project was co-ordinated jointly by the Institute of Human Sciences in Vienna and the Institute for Regional and Local Development in Warsaw, with Grzegorz Gorzelak as the main co-ordinator.

Four national teams were formed and headed by Éva Ehrlich (Hungary), Lubomír Falt'an (the Slovak Republic), Michal Illner (the Czech Republic) and Bogdan Jalowiecki (Poland). A vast number of studies were conducted in each of the countries on 1. economic development; 2. social and political development; 3. development in science, technology and education; 4. regional problems. The studies were summarised in four National Reports [Ehrlich et al. 1993, Falt'an et al. 1993, Illner et al. 1993, Jalowiecki and Gorzelak 1993] and later also by an over-arching Summary Report which covered the East Central European region as a whole [Gorzelak, Jalowiecki et al. 1994]. The condensed studies are presently in different stages of publication.

This issue of the Czech Sociological Review is devoted to the presentation of some of the main outcomes of the Czech part of the „East Central Europe 2000“ project. The National Report for the Czech Republic was taken as the basis and five of its chapters were re-written to be presented to readers of the Czech Sociological Review (those contributions by M. Illner, M. Sojka, P. Machonin, K. Müller, M. Illner and A. Andrlé), while two further contributions were added (D. Drbohlav and J. Musil).

In his article on European integration and disintegration, Jiří Musil opens the series by stressing the role of values and culture in integration processes. In Musil's opinion, the split of Czechoslovakia is a warning against excessive confidence in functional models of European integration and in the spontaneous effect of technical, economic and integrative organisational mechanisms.

In the second contribution Michal Illner attempts to determine who will be the main actors in the international environment of the Czech Republic over the next ten years and what relevance they may have for the post-communist transformation of the country. Special attention is paid to the European Union and to the different criteria of accession to it. There is also a brief enumeration of those characteristics the author considers specific to the Czech Republic in the context of transformation.

Milan Sojka offers a systematic and well documented synopsis of the main elements of the Czech economy, their present state and developmental tendencies. He

describes and evaluates the basic components of the on-going economic reform and their impact. As well as analysing the macroeconomic problems, he examines also the microeconomic changes which he considers to be vital for a successful transformation.

Sojka's account of the economic aspects of transformation is paralleled by a discussion of social and political change led by Pavel Machonin. He sees post-communist social transformation as primarily a change of social structure and as the implementation of meritocratic principles.

In the contribution on transformations in the fields of science, technology and education Karel Müller has managed to condense his comprehensive report into a neat theoretical framework. „Technological infrastructure“ is his central concept and he vividly documents the deep crisis which it experienced before and after 1989.

The regional dimension of post-communist transformation in the Czech Republic is discussed by Michal Illner and Alois Andrlé. They argue that regional structures can be both a barrier to and a potentiality of societal transformation. The legacy of pre-1989 regional development and the regional impact of the post-communist changes are characterised, and the factors of developmental potential of regions are assessed. One of their key observations is that the transformation is likely to re-activate some of the pre-war regional structures.

International migration is becoming one of the significant social problems in post Cold War East Central Europe, and its present and potential future development is discussed here by Dušan Drbohlav. The reader is offered a wealth of data which are not currently accessible and is alerted to the structure and size of the problem.

In this issue we preferred volume and comprehensiveness of information to analytical depth. I hope that the reader will be satisfied with what we have extracted from the „East Central Europe 2000“ project.

Michal Illner

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