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Birgit Hofmann:

“Don’t talk to Communists”: The Instrumentalisation of the Communist Past in the Czech Republic’s Political Crises in 2005/ 2006

About the author:

Birgit Hofmann is currently writing her PhD, entitled: The Prague Spring in Western Europe: Political Discourse about the “Socialism with a Human Face” in France and West Germany. Since May 2006, she has been a member of the post-graduate programme “Overcoming Dictatorships and Establishment of Civil Society in Europe” at the University of Heidelberg, supported by the Heinrich Böll Foundation (led by Prof. Dr. Edgar Wolfrum, Heidelberg, in co-operation with Prof. Dr. Carola Sachse, Vienna).

Email: birgit.hofmann@politik.uni-freiburg.de

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Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen

Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen

Klagenfurter Straße 3

28359 Bremen

Germany

e-mail: fsopr@uni-bremen.de

Language editing: Hilary Abuhove and Christopher Gilley

Abstract

During the years 2005 and 2006, the Czech Republic faced a series of massive political crises. Corruption scandals were followed by a fierce election campaign, which produced a stalemate: After the June 2006 elections, neither the Social Democrats (ČSSD) nor the Conservatives (ODS) were able to form a stable government. Allusions to the Communist past played a vital role during the crises and were instrumentalised by several sides in different ways. My project investigates which role the “politics of memory” played in this period of time and what purpose it served. My research proves two main hypotheses: first, that references to the Communist past are used as a weapon in the context of legitimisation and de-legitimisation of political identities. Two kinds of anti-Communism come into play here: *strategic anti-Communism* and *moral anti-Communism*. These require some differentiation, as the borders may often appear blurred. Second, the post-election aftermath can be seen to reveal a polarised – in a problematic way – post-Communist society. On the other hand, it may signify a party system with distinct right and left wings that offers true political alternatives. I conclude that the polarisation that was manifest during the crises is mainly centred on the question of how to deal with the unreformed Communist Party (KSČM). The crises showed how flexible strategic anti-Communism is, and how, contrary to all the rhetoric, some of the strategic anti-Communists amongst the ODS may be willing to accept the KSČM as a political actor. The anti-Communist movement’s role was ambiguous: On the one hand, it may have contributed to an important attempt to come to terms with the Communist past; on the other hand, some of its actors tend to seek scapegoats for the Communist past in a society that was deeply affected by Communism. The question in the near future will remain if and how to talk to Communists.



Fig. 1: Cover of the Czech weekly magazine Týden, April 2005: “Red Ride”; Stanislav Gross, the former Social Democratic prime minister, is presented as a swine on which the former head of the Communist Party, Miroslav Grebeníček, is riding; the headline accuses Gross of putting power in the hands of the Communists.

1. Introduction

During the years 2005 and 2006, the Czech Republic faced a series of massive political crises. Corruption scandals were followed by a fierce election campaign that produced a stalemate: After the June 2006 elections, neither the Social Democrats (ČSSD) nor the Conservatives (ODS) were able to form a stable government. The situation remained unresolved until December 2006, when a coalition made up of the ODS, the Christian Democrats (KDU-CLŠ) and the Green Party finally managed to gain power.

This harsh power struggle and the inability of the two big parties to form a stable government reveal the deep polarisation of the Czech political spectrum, which is based on political identities. These identities are, as I assume in the context of this paper, partly based on the Communist past. During the election campaign, the ODS tried to raise the spectre of a Communist threat. Back in 2005, as shown on the magazine cover, former Prime Minister Gross was already being depicted as a swine and accused of taking a "red ride", shorthand for his close co-operation with the Communist Party in parliament. Has the Communist past truly become a decisive political issue in a divided society?

In my project, I want to investigate the roles played by the "politics of memory" and political identities rooted in the Communist past and what purpose they serve. In order to understand today's situation, it is important to know some basic facts about the Czech "de-Communistation" process: The Czech Republic implemented very strict legislation to overcome its Communist legacy and to purge the old elites after 1989. On the other hand, unlike in other Eastern European countries, the Communist Party (KSČM) remained almost entirely unreformed. Although it was initially marginalised after 1989, it now enjoys fairly stable voter support. In recent years, the Communists have started to co-operate with the Social Democrats in parliament. But there is also a growing anti-Communist movement. It consists of heterogeneous actors and is responsible for public actions against Communist influence and the Communist Party itself. "Don't talk to Communists", the slogan of an anti-Communist festival in 2003, hints at the problematic side of dealing with the past in this way.

The goal of my project is to use the years 2005/ 2006, which saw many crises, to spotlight the use of the "politics of memory" in various policies in the Czech Republic. My research proves two main hypotheses:

First, I show that references to the Communist past are used as a weapon in the context of the legitimisation and de-legitimation of political identities. There are two main strains of anti-Communism – *strategic anti-Communism* and *moral anti-Communism*, which I will differentiate, as their borders may often appear blurred.

Second, I would like to point out that the situation could on the one hand symbolise *a polarised – in a problematic way – post-Communist society* that has not yet managed to overcome the past or to form truly post-Communist societal cleavages. On the other hand, it could be indicative of *a party system with clearly delineated right and left wings*, offering true political alternatives.¹

At this point, I would like to describe the measures the Czech Republic took after 1989 to come to terms with its Communist past. In the second part of the paper, I plan to show the connection between the Communist past and the current political identities in the Czech Republic. In the third part, I focus on the instrumentalisation of the Communist past during the political crises in 2005/2006 and analyse them as a question and matter of political identities.

1 For the aspect of polarisation in post-Communist party systems in general, cf. Gryzmal-Busse, Anna: Coalition Formation and the Regime Divided in New Democracies, in: Comparative Politics, No. 1, 2001, pp. 85–104.

2. Coming to terms with the Communist past in the Czech Republic

One of the most important legislative measures taken to address the Communist past² in the Czech Republic was the law proclaiming the illegitimacy of the Communist regime.³ It declared that the Communist Party, which had ruled the country from 1948–1989, had violated human rights, spread terror, flouted property laws, destroyed the environment, etc. The so-called "Communists' law" reflects a desire for a strictly new kind of national self-construction based on distancing the country from Communism. It was followed by other measures belonging to the instrumentarium of what I call "*direct*" *politics of memory*⁴: the abolishment of the Communist Party's leading role and the confiscation of its property, the rehabilitation law, a lustration law, a law concerning access to the secret police's files, the establishment of an institution to investigate the Communist past (which is currently being bolstered by the establishment of a second similar institution), etc. The Czech Republic is considered very successful regarding the exchange of old elites and is often compared with the former GDR in this respect.⁵ However, as in other post-Communist Central and Eastern European countries, trials and court decisions regarding former Communist elites are rare.⁶ These kinds of legislative measures are an important part of the question of how to deal with the Communist past.

The other part is even more complex. It is what I like to call "*indirect*" or "*symbolic*" *politics of memory*: the symbolic interpretation and incorporation of the Communist past into the process of self-construction on different levels. The *national identity* and the various *political identities* exist on the collective level (political parties) while *individual political identities* (which are beyond the scope of this paper) obviously concern the individual level. These levels of national self-construction and identity are interconnected, as are the direct and indirect politics of memory.

In the Czech Republic, as many scholars attest, the Communist period has kind of been "cut out" of history and the process of national self-construction. It is seen as something foreign, an import from Russia that has nothing to do with the authentic, traditional Czech identity.⁷ There is some truth to this construct; however, it does not paint the complete picture. In fact, the Communist past has not been entirely excised; it is mainly the references to and visibility of the nation's historically deep Communist roots that have been cut out. Furthermore, the current view of the past can be interpreted as a symbolic pushing away or rejection of Czech Communist ideals.⁸ Of course, from the beginning, the national identity of the Czech part of

2 Cf. Pauer, Jan: Die Aufarbeitung der Diktaturen in Tschechien und der Slowakei, in: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte, 2006, No. 42, pp. 25–32; Brenner, Christiane: Vergangenheitspolitik und Vergangenheitsdiskurs in der Tschechischen Republik, in: Leviathan, 1998, No. 18/Special Edition, eds. Helmut Kohlstruck/ Michael Kohlstruck: Vergangenheitspolitik am Ende des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts, Opladen: Leske&Budrich, pp. 195–231; Benda, Vaclav: Aufarbeitung der kommunistischen Vergangenheit in der tschechischen Republik, in: Unverhau, Dagmar; Benda, Vaclav: Aufarbeitung der kommunistischen Vergangenheit in der tschechischen Republik, in: Unverhau, Dagmar (ed.): Lustration, Aktenöffnung, demokratischer Umbruch in Polen, Tschechien, der Slowakei und Ungarn. Referate der Tagung des BStU und der Akademie für Politische Bildung Tutzing vom 26.–28.10.1998, Münster, 1999, pp. 131–140. Rupnik, Jaques: Was tun mit der kommunistischen Vergangenheit? Tschechische Republik, in: Transit, 2001, No. 22, pp. 108–129.

3 The original Czech Version: Sbirka zákonů České republiky; www.sbirka.cz.

4 I define "Politics of Memory" or "Geschichtspolitik" with reference to Edgar Wolfrum, who describes it as the „active [...] part of producing images of the past, addressed to a broad public“ (Translation B.H.); cf. Wolfrum, Edgar: „1968“ in der gegenwärtigen deutschen Geschichtspolitik, in: APuZ, Nos. 22–23, 1998, pp. 28–36, here p. 30.

5 Cf. for example: Šrubar, Ilya: Elitenwandel in der Tschechischen Republik, in: APuZ, No 8, 1998, pp. 21–33. Eyal, Gil: The origins of postcommunist elites. From the Prague Spring to the breakup of Czechoslovakia, Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2003. Brenner calls the exchange of elites in the Czech Republic comparatively radical, cf. Brenner, Christiane: Vergangenheitspolitik und Vergangenheitsdiskurs in Tschechien 1989–1998, p. 210.

6 Pauer resumes that by 1995, court trials had been initiated against 190 persons, of whom only 29 received jail sentences. Cf. again Cf. Pauer, Jan: Die Aufarbeitung der Diktaturen in Tschechien und der Slowakei, in: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte, 2006, No. 42.

7 Cf. for example: Weiss, Hilde; Reinprecht, Christoph: Demokratischer Patriotismus oder ethnischer Nationalismus in Ost-Mitteleuropa?, Wien: Böhlau, 1998; Holy, Ladislav: The little Czech and the Great Czech Nation. National Identity and the Post-Communist Social Transformation, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

8 After World War II, Czechoslovakia was one of the very few Eastern European Countries to show strong support for

the former ČSSR (ČSFR after 1989⁹) *was strongly rooted in anti-Communist sentiment*. One could even say that anti-Communism heralded a new approach towards the national self-legitimation of the Czech Republic. Further evidence is provided by the institution of important national holidays.¹⁰

To the outside world, this clearly anti-Communist national identity appears to work well; no matter which government is in power, the Czech Republic is known for its harsh criticism of Communist regimes the world over (such as those in Cuba or China). However, the fragility of this anti-Communist stance became sharply visible when the unreformed Communist Party (KSČM) won stable and growing support from Czech voters. The Party's victory raised the question of how to deal with the Communist past in the most visible way, especially since the Party had managed to establish itself as an important actor on the political scene. "To talk or not to talk to Communists?" became one of the most important questions during the political crises in the Czech Republic in 2005/ 2006.

3. "Don't talk to Communists": the Communist past in the Czech Republic as a matter of political identities

To convey the complexity of the whole picture, it is necessary to introduce the relevant political identities, which here refer to political parties and political movements, i.e. actors visible in the public eye or the official sphere.

One of the main brokers of Czech anti-Communism was the Conservative Party, the ODS, under the former Prime Minister and current President Václav Klaus; it was especially influential during the first transition period after 1989/90. Klaus's "polarisation politics"¹¹, which exploited the negative aspects of Communism to construct a black-and-white politics, were not mainly driven by a desire to come to terms with the past or to reflect upon it; the main goal was to push through his approach towards market liberalism.¹² I call this kind of anti-Communism *strategic anti-Communism*¹³. It is characterised by instability, flexibility and a lack of normativity. It was used as a strategic tool to legitimise ODS politics when the party was in power

the Communist Party, as demonstrated in the first free elections in 1946. It also tried to establish its own national path towards an idealised Communist utopia, as embodied in the brief Prague Spring of 1968. After the suppression of the Prague Spring, during the long and bitter period of so-called "normalisation", the ideals and belief in Communism seemed to disintegrate into massive resignation. Cf. for an overview of the Czechoslovakian Communist past, e.g.: Pauer, Jan: Prag 1968. Der Einmarsch des Warschauer Paktes. Hintergründe – Planung – Durchführung, Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1995.

9 One of the main reasons for the Velvet Divorce in 1993 was the divergent approaches of the political Slovak and Czech elites towards coming to terms with the Communist past. Whereas the Slovak leader Mečiar was not ready to make a decisive break, the Czech leader and first Prime Minister–today President–Klaus sought a rash, clean break; mainly, of course, in order to push through his liberal economic reforms; cf. e.g. Innes, Aby: Czechoslovakia: the short goodbye, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

10 The 17th of November, for example, commemorating the biggest anti-regime demonstration in Czechoslovakia (in 1989), which ultimately led to the dissolution of the Communist regime; this official holiday is known as the day for "Freedom and Democracy". In 2003, the first national memorial for the victims of Communism was established in Prague; since 2004, on each 27th of June, the Czech Republic officially remembers the victims of the Communist regime.

11 This term is used by Rupnik, who describes the period under the first ODS government as a "period of polarization," cf. Rupnik, Jaques (2001): Was tun mit der kommunistischen Vergangenheit, p. 113.

12 Rupnik, Jaques: Was tun mit der kommunistischen Vergangenheit; Innes, Aby: Czechoslovakia: the short goodbye, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

13 Pauer describes what he calls "Systemantikommunismus" (systemic anti-Communism) very convincingly, as follows (translation by B.H.): „It basically stressed the wrong-headedness of the economic planning, the centralism, and the socialist ideology. In the spirit of the economist Friedrich A. von Hayek, Communism was seen as a gigantic arrogant utopia that was directed against the 'natural social system' having been proven through a long cultural evolution, and had destroyed its institutions and organisations like family, community, private property, the state, law and free market. [...] This transferring of criticism against communism to every kind of socialism and social democratic politics [...] is tantamount to an ideological [...] extension of the 'communist danger'". Cf. Pauer, Jan: Die Aufarbeitung der Diktaturen in Tschechien und der Slowakei, in: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte, 2006, No. 42, pp. 25–32.

after 1990 and to shape the entire political system via its measures. After the ODS lost power in 1998 and until it regained power in 2006, strategic anti-Communism was an effective medium for accusing the current government of being backward, incompetent or immoral.

Anti-Communism is not only a strategic tool, but also a sort of moral issue; this is why it is necessary to differentiate between the ODS's brand of anti-Communism, as embodied in its most prominent figure, Václav Klaus (who had no problem with taking the Communist Party's support when he was elected as a President in 2003), and the anti-Communist movement that symbolises what I call *moral anti-Communism*. The movement is not a homogeneous social movement, but a kind of heterogeneous, spontaneous co-operation between different anti-Communist actors who are emerging from a revitalised civil society. It is represented mostly through temporary public actions such as preventing the Communist Party from gathering at their traditional place for the 1st of May commemoration with a "1st of May without Communists" demonstration. Other actions include anti-Communist rock concerts and the collection of signatures for a petition to dissolve the Communist Party. One of the main goals of this growing anti-Communist movement is to exclude the Communist Party from the party system, or at least to force the Party to critically investigate its own past.¹⁴ The movement includes students from the "Velvet Revolution"¹⁵ and former dissidents; its most prominent figure is Václav Klaus's eternal counterpart, the former President Václav Havel. Whilst Klaus mainly uses anti-Communism to underscore the Communist past in an attempt to discredit all left-wing ideas as well as former Prague Spring reform-minded Communists and dissidents, Havel's kind of anti-Communism urges Czechs to remember the past and to heed it as a warning for the future.¹⁶ The label *moral anti-Communism* is not to be interpreted in a normative way here, i.e. as referring to the movement's self-description and goals. Its sometimes radical, possibly problematic approach towards the question of how to deal with the Communist past is embodied in the slogan "Don't talk to Communists".¹⁷ The slogan was used in an ironic way, but nevertheless illustrates how exclusionary identity politics can be, and how they can ultimately produce a polarised atmosphere. Precisely this kind of atmosphere emerged during the crises that unfolded in 2005/ 2006. Another background factor to consider is that the anti-Communist movement is, of course, used and instrumentalised by the Conservative Party, the ODS, in its fight against the Social Democratic Party. Moreover, the ODS and the anti-Communist movement, whose main actors belong to a 1989-generational, technocratic and conservative elite, have close links.¹⁸

The third important political actor in this context is clearly the Social Democratic Party, the ČSSD. Unlike other social democratic parties in Central and Eastern Europe, it is not the descendant of a former state party; however, especially under former Prime Minister Jiří Paroubek, it took a distinctly left-wing shape and started to co-operate with the Communist Party in the final years before the 2006 parliamentary elections by allowing the Communists to support the instable and scandal-hit Social Democratic government. The Czech Republic is practically the only country in Central and Eastern Europe in which an almost completely unreformed Communist Party like the KSČM can be found. Today, however, different political wings exist within the party; one of those wings serves the traditional electorate with its conservative

14 Zrušme komunisty (Let us abolish the communists), see: www.zrusmekomunisty.cz.

15 Vaněk, Miroslav: *Sto studentských revolucí. Studenti v období pádu komunismu v Československu (100 student revolutions. The students during the time of the fall of communism in Czechoslovakia)*, Praha: Lidové Noviny, 1999. Suk, Jiří: *Labyrintem revoluce: Aktéři, zápletky a křižovatky jedné politické krize. (The Labyrinth of Revolution: Actors, complications and crossroads of a political crisis.)* Praha: Prostor, 2003.

16 In 2005, Havel stressed during the commemoration of the 17th of November 1989: "Our history and its continuity is [...] the road to our identity. We can't forget and at the same time seek our identity. We have to find our identity to know what we are today and what we were yesterday." Cf. 17. November – schicksalhafter Datum der tschechischen Geschichte, Radio Prag, 18th of November 2005, <http://www.radio.cz/print/>. (Translation by B.H.)

17 The Czech original slogan: "S Komunisty se nemluví". Cf. the Czech homepage of the organisers: http://www.sds.cz/docs/prectete/e_kolekt/s_k_s_n.htm; cf. also: Rusek, Michael: K petici "S komunisty se nemluví", in: *Britské Listy*, 12.6.2003; Jurza, Michal: S komunisty se nemluví? A odkdy?, in: *Britské Listy*, 1.12.2003.

18 Interview with Dr. Vladimír Handl, Center for International Relations, Prague, on 25th of November 2004. As there is no scientific literature about the actors of the anti-Communist movement up to now, the conclusions drawn here are based on the study of newspaper articles and expert interviews like the one granted by Vladimír Handl.

opinions, whereas the other wing is more reform-oriented.¹⁹ It can be inferred that the ČSSD, which had before the elections declared that no coalition with the Communists was possible, had to legitimise its co-operation with the KSČM; Paroubek had been demanding a fresh apology for the Communist past from KSČM leaders (ostensibly in order to come to terms with the problematic history between the Social Democrats and Communists, or so he declared).²⁰ During the pre-election period, the ČSSD, already under public fire due to its politics of co-operation, accused the ODS of "primitive anti-Communism".²¹ This may illustrate how references to Communism/ anti-Communism create and re-create political identities in the Czech Republic.

4. Czech political crises in 2005/2006 and the instrumentalisation of the Communist past

Crises can magnify the problems within societies and within the political system. The Czech Republic endured just this sort of political crisis when corruption scandals led to the resignation of Social Democratic Prime Minister Stanislav Gross in the spring of 2005. However, the crisis did not end there; scandals continued to be produced by both major political parties, even including a slap in the Social Democratic Minister of Health's face from an ODS politician. The year 2006 saw a harsh run-up to elections, in which the two major parties, the ODS and ČSSD, fought each other bitterly. After the elections, which for the first time in Central and Eastern Europe brought a Green Party into parliament, a stalemate occurred: The coalition of the three parties under the leadership of the conservative ODS (with the Green Party and the Christian Democrats) obtained 100 seats in parliament; the Social Democrats and the Communist Party occupied a total of another 100 seats. Attempts to form an ODS-led government failed, and a struggle began that would last for months.²² I argue that political identities played a decisive, sometimes hidden, sometimes overt role in this scenario, although the officially decisive political questions during the election campaign, such as the reform of the health care system, the tax system (the ODS planned a flat tax), workers' rights, etc., were certainly not trivial.

But the fact that a Grand Coalition was never truly taken into consideration reveals the dominance of political identities. Two hostile camps emerged, embodied in the two leaders of the main parties, Jiří Paroubek and Mirek Topolánek. Both were hit by scandals²³ and never tired of attacking each other. All manner of allusions to the Communist past re-actualised the political identities; I will provide three examples. First, during the election campaign, the Conservatives handed out half a million DVDs of the German movie "Good Bye Lenin"²⁴, in order to *illustrate the Communist danger the country faced in their eyes and for which the only solution was voting ODS*; the ODS was essentially presenting itself as the *saviour of the*

19 Cf. for an overview and analysis of the Czech discussion about the Communist Party: Adam Drda/ Petr Dudek: *Kdo ve stínu ceka na moc. Cesti komuniste po listopadu 1989* (Waiting for power in the shadow. The Czech Communists after 1989), Praha/Litomyšl: Paseka, 2006; Dolejší, Václav: *Jak se komuniste snaží hrát na dvě strany. Dilema KSČM: chce se distancovat od minulosti, aby přilákala nové voliče a zároveň neztratila ty skalní* (How the Communists seek to play to two sides. The dilemma of the KSČM: it wants to distance itself from its past, gain new voters, and at the same time, not lose the traditional voters), in: *Mlada Fronta Dnes*, 24th of May, 2005.

20 Paroubek said that an apology was important, as there were many questions that "our parties" had to clear up, cf. again: Dolejší, Václav: *Jak se komuniste snaží hrát na dvě strany*, in: *Mlada Fronta Dnes*, 24th of May, 2005.

21 Paroubek, Jiří: *ODS vydírá primitivním antikomunismem. Mirek Topolánek na kongresu ODS* (The ODS exercises a primitive anti-Communism. Mirek Topolánek at the ODS congress), in: *Lidové Noviny*, 5th of December 2005.

22 Cf., as a working paper analysing the election campaign: Lebeda, Thomas: *Die tschechische Politik vor den Wahlen*, Working Paper 2, 2006; also, see: Homepage Friedrich Ebert Foundation, KAS Außenstelle Prag: *Tschechien: Regierungskrise beendet, 23.1.2007*; see: Homepage Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, etc.; and see also: *Parlamentní volby a co přijde po nich* (National Elections and what will come afterwards), in: *Týden*, No. 22, 2006, pp. 16–18.

23 One of the most important scandals was the Kubice Affair, in which Paroubek and his government were accused of illegally observing other politicians and journalists; murder even factored into the scandal. Topolánek was accused of corruption and intransparent business deals.

24 Cf. Topolánek's explanation of this idea on his own homepage: www.topolánek.cz/good-bye-lenin-vola-ods.html.

electorate. However, the action resulted in a scandal in which even the German movie company became embroiled in the end.

Second, Paroubek was called a "dictator" in August by ODS Vice President Petr Nečas for his refusal to accept any telephone calls from the ODS. The accusation was a clear attempt to *delegitimise the political enemy by casting doubt on his democratic competence and trying to expose the hidden undemocratic core of his personality*; the use of terms and expressions related to political dictatorships underlines this attempted delegitimation. The allusions added additional weight to the accusation, which was obviously intended to showcase the accuser's relative democratic competence.

Third, Paroubek himself produced similar allusions: Right after the June elections, he compared the events during the election with the "methods used in February 1948 by the Communists"²⁵ (at that time, the Communists had seized power in a kind of coup d'état). His statement not only equated "red" with "blue" (blue is the colour of the ODS); he also tried to *delegitimise the ODS's democratic competence* by alluding to the past in order to *create a sense of danger*. On June 6th, demonstrators in Prague denounced this comparison and demanded Paroubek's resignation. This proves two points: On the one hand, *allusions to the Communist past* are being used to *bolster the legitimacy of a statement and to gain the public's undivided attention*. However, this attention was, as shown by the demonstrations it caused, negative. These events suggest that Paroubek was perhaps not seen as qualified to make such a reference; his history as a left-winger and kind of "door-opener" to the KSČM stripped him, in the eyes of a certain audience, of the right to do so.

The Communist past was not the only element represented in these allusions; far more important was the *role of the Communist Party*. During the elections, the KSČM came under enormous pressure from all angles. In June, rumours that the Party's leader, Filip, had collaborated with the secret service during Communist times began to fly within the party. Meanwhile, externally, the party's legacy was put on the agenda by the anti-Communist movement in and outside the parliament, by both strategic and moral anti-Communists. Under the leadership of Václav Havel, the anti-Communists urged the electorate to vote to unseat the Communist Party. Their slogan was "Vote! The future is our choice". The poster showed faces behind barbed wire²⁶ – a dramatic image to say the least.

Nearing the end of the crisis, in November, the second chamber of the parliament, the Senat, discussed a proposal for an investigation of the KSČM and its loyalty to the constitution. A ban on Communist propaganda was also suggested, an idea that had come up several times before; in parliament, at least, the motion was blocked by an informal coalition of the ČSSD and the KSČM. What the Communists were not, however, able to prevent was the dissolution of its youth organisation KSM in October 2006 – an event that triggered left-wing protests all across Europe.

The KSČM's role was more ambiguous, however. It was not only a party under pressure, but the counterpart to the potential ODS-Green Party-KDU-CSL coalition. It also represented a certain trump card for the ČSSD, as their leaders knew about the possibility for the Communist Party to serve as a political partner in parliament. During the first period of the crisis, and then intermittently, the Social Democrats strengthened the position of the Communist Party by declaring that they would only take part in coalition and crisis talks if the Communists were allowed to do so as well.

In addition to the boon to its relationship with the Social Democrats, the crisis period brought another success for the Communists: the "strategic anti-Communist" Václav Klaus was the first president of the Czech Republic to invite the head of the Communist Party to engage in talks. Klaus did so in mid-July, when the crisis was at one of its many peaks. It was during the many crises in the Czech Republic in 2005/ 2006 that it became obvious that the question of how to deal with the KSČM was too important to ignore. This also became evident to the head of the Christian Democrats: When the Social Democrats persuaded their former coalition partner, the KDU-CSL, to open up coalition talks about a minority government supported

25 Cf. Paroubek mluvil o únoru (Paroubek spoke about the February [of 1948]), in: IDNES, 9th of June, 2006. www.idnes.cz.

26 Cf. e.g. Straňáková, Barbora: Osnatým drátem proti KSČM (Barbed Wire against the KSČM), in: Lidové Noviny, 25th of June, 2006; cf. one of the homepages of the Anticommunist Movement: www.antikomunismus.cz.

and also tolerated by the Communist Party in August, KDU-CSL president Kalousek was forced to resign: His party committee did not approve of his "talking to Communists".

5. Conclusions

The crises in the Czech Republic 2005/ 2006 revealed some deeply-rooted conflicts – especially the question of how to deal with the Communist past and its most visible remnant, the Communist Party. It became clear that the polarisation of the political spectrum was not only due to tactical reasons, although it was in part. The stalemate also symbolised the polarisation between the left and the right that had been slowly emerging since 1989, and may have already reached its climax under the Social Democrats' comparatively sharp left-wing leadership during the 2006 elections and their aftermath. The polarised situation in the Czech Republic is not solely – but merely partly – the result of Vaclav Klaus's polarisation politics after 1990; the polarity also provides evidence of a party system that is evolving to include true political alternatives. I therefore argue that although the situation after the elections was truly critical and problematic, the polarisation should not be perceived as a wholly negative development.

Furthermore, it is important to note that Klaus's gesture of inviting the head of the Communist Party to talks shows how flexible *strategic anti-Communism* is, and how, contrary to all the rhetoric, some of the strategic anti-Communists amongst the ODS may be on the verge of accepting the KSČM as a political actor. Far more interesting is how to go about analysing what I call *moral anti-Communism* – an anti-Communist movement with heterogeneous actors and possibly heterogeneous goals. On the one hand, the movement symbolises the need to perpetually discuss the problems of dealing with the past, including how to compensate the victims of Communism (who are also part of the movement); on the other hand, the anti-Communist movement may contribute to a hysterical and exaggerated polarisation process, which hardly facilitates the examination and analysis of the Communist past. A polarised climate promotes the hunt for scapegoats, especially in a society whose Communist movement was not imposed from the outside, but came from within; the Czechs were therefore deeply involved with and affected by Communism. However, in order to analyse this question, it must be determined how great the influence of the Communist Party in today's Czech Republic really is. As the crises described here revealed, the question for the near future will of course be, if and how to talk to Communists.