

# The Velvet Revolution and Modern Czech History in the Eyes of the Czech Population\*

JIŘÍ ŠUBRT, JIŘÍ VINOPAL, STANISLAV HAMPL, MICHAL PULLMANN\*\*

## **Abstract:**

This paper systematically maps and analyses the opinions of the Czech public on the Velvet Revolution and the social situation in the periods before and after the revolution. It first focuses attention on the image of the Velvet Revolution within the context of Czech modern history, and it explores the opinions of the public on this event. It takes a special look at how the Czech public evaluates the periods before and after 1989 and their perceptions of the entire period since 1989. The Velvet Revolution and related events are viewed mostly as a positive period in Czech history, as a period of rise. The ensuing period is viewed in a similarly positive light, but not as positive as the actual act of changing the political regime. However, a significant difference was found between the Czech public's evaluation of the first and second decades after the Velvet Revolution. In the public's view, not every area of life has improved during this period and some areas are even evaluated as worse.

*Keywords:* Velvet Revolution, Public Opinion, Historical Consciousness, Public Opinion Survey

The Czech social transformation was set in motion more than two decades ago by a series of events generally referred to as the Velvet Revolution. The public perception of the Velvet Revolution and individual events connected to the fall of the Communist regime are a fundamental part of the historical awareness of Czech society (Mayer 2009). For the middle-aged generation today, who were not around at the time of the Communist coup in 1948, and were still children during the violent suppression of the Prague Spring and the onset of normalisation, November 1989 is the only major historical watershed that they were able to experience personally and actively participate in, after which they were then able to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the transition to a free society. Czech society marked the twentieth anniversary of the Velvet Revolution in 2009, and that put the events of 1989 more directly under the public gaze and raised a number of questions and discussions assessing their significance – these in

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the context of the ensuing period of post-communist social transformation (Večerník 2002),<sup>1</sup> the transition from an authoritarian post-totalitarian social system to democracy (Brokl 1990; Balík et al. 2003; Balík a Kubát 2004) and from a centrally planned to a market economy, and the gradual integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures.

These discussions revealed, among other things, that the public's opinions on basic issues affecting the contemporary Czech social order are gradually changing. While people are no less convinced that the path of development embarked on in 1989 is the right one, attitudes towards different values and rules of conduct are becoming more diverse. This makes the relationship to the past – and especially the recent past – even more significant, as recollections of a shared past are one of the most important ways in which social values and rules of conduct considered desirable are expressed (Assmann 2001: 20). Communism can be externalised, or it can be viewed as the strategy used by the 'little Czech' trying to survive in the complex world of modernising society, or communism (the idea or legacy of communism) can even be embraced (Holý 2001; Mayer 2009); however, its significance for the formation of contemporary identities cannot be denied.

The past is an important tool in conflicts over identity to the extent that it indirectly supports notions of what social order is desirable. Against a backdrop of historical scenes, which can be set within a value structure of good versus evil, progress versus decline, freedom versus oppression, the need to identify with certain values and symbols is becoming more important than their systematic justification. In this sense especially, collective memory is always socially conditioned (Halbwachs 2009) and is more an articulation of the direction of desirable conduct than of the past as a whole (with all its ambivalences, human doubts, etc.). The appeal to values inherent in collective memory does not just relate to individual strategies but also has the power to integrate society (or at least provide it with integrative elements) and persuade social actors that historical development towards the world as it is today is both right and irreversible.

This paper sets out to descriptively map the Czech public's views of the transition to a new type of political, economic, and social system, in the light of attitudes to the key preceding event of the Velvet Revolution and following a period of economic and political stabilization in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We use data from three large surveys that were conducted in 2009 to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of the 1989 events (*Actor (Aktér)* – December 2009; *Trends (Trendy)* – November 2009, and *Czech Society (Naše společnost)* – September 2009).<sup>2</sup> Whenever possible, we present a comparison spanning longer time periods or use additional sources of information.<sup>3</sup>

The paper is divided into five parts. We begin by situating the historical picture of the changes of 1989 within the context of current perceptions of modern Czech history and then present the views of the Czech public on the given event. In the third section we compare the periods before and after November 1989, and in the fourth section we assess post-revolution development. The paper closes with a discussion in which we attempt to explain some of the key findings and some of the inconsistencies in the evaluations given by the Czech public.

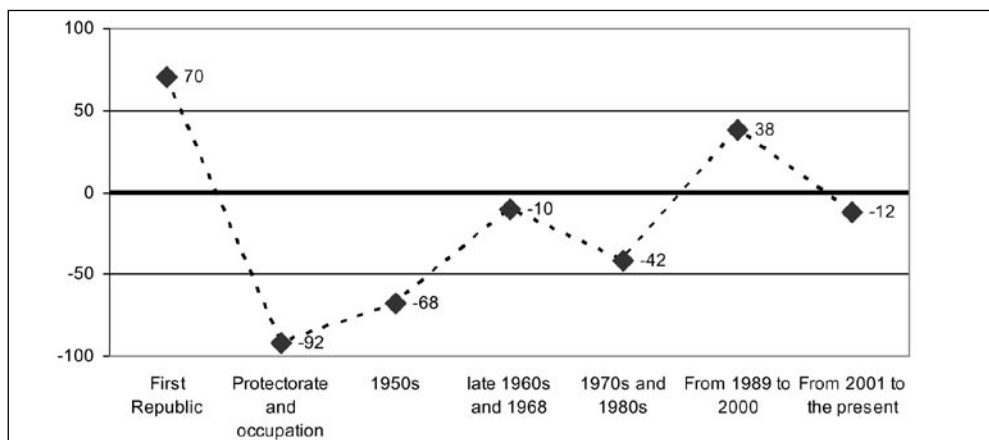
## 1. The Czech public's opinions on modern Czech history

Thematically this paper focuses on the Velvet Revolution, what preceded it, and what followed. Nevertheless, it is useful to look first at the wider context of Czech history since the First World War. The pivotal events that occurred towards the end of the century can then be placed within the context in which modern history is viewed generally by the public today.<sup>4</sup>

Let's examine the past century first from the perspective of how individual historical stages were evaluated by the public in terms of 'rise' and 'decline' (see Figure 1). In this respect, the First Czechoslovak Republic between the two world wars is evaluated best and is viewed positively today by far more Czech citizens than those who view it negatively (85% to 15%). By contrast, the period that immediately ensued, i.e. the Protectorate and the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Nazi Germany, is the stage most often viewed as a period of decline (4% to 96%), and the current Czech public views the years that followed 1948, i.e. the end of the 1940s and the 1950s, in an almost equally negative light (16% to 84%). The late 1960s and especially the year 1968 are stages evaluated almost equally as periods of rise and decline (45% to 55%), and as a result rank much higher than the two preceding periods in the aggregate evaluations of periods on the scale between rise and decline. However, the next two periods, the 1970s and the 1980s, are evaluated as ones of decline. Although in this case, negative evaluations do not outweigh positive evaluations by as much as in the case of the periods before the Prague Spring, the Czech public clearly evaluates them as periods of decline (29% to 71%). Understandably, the first decade after the Velvet Revolution is viewed predominantly as a period of rise, but even this does not get as universally positive an evaluation as the First

### Figure 1: Public evaluations of different periods in modern Czech history

(The figures show the difference in percentage points between the share of respondents who evaluated the given period as one of rise and the share who evaluated it as one of decline; 'don't know' responses were excluded)



Source: Actor 2009/12, n = 1071

Czechoslovak Republic. It is also worth noting that the second decade after the Velvet Revolution gets a different assessment than the first. While evaluations of the period 1989–2000 were prevailingly positive (69% to 31%), evaluations of the period from 2001 to the present are almost equally divided between rise and decline, with a slight preponderance of negative evaluations (44% to 56%). As we will demonstrate below, a more critical view of the period after the first post-revolution decade is apparent in all sorts of different issues and themes and would appear to be an important indication of a turning point in the development of the new democratic Czech society.

Information on how individual periods of Czech modern history are evaluated can provide insights about which periods the Czech public feels are ones in which the Czechs acted bravely and the ones of which Czechs should be ashamed. Clearly, evaluating a period as one of decline does not necessarily mean that it could not have a positive influence on the construction of historical awareness or national identity. Those periods that contemporary Czech society regards as times of the biggest decline, i.e. the Protectorate and the occupation, are, according to the public today, also the ones in which the public feels that Czechs acted bravely. Moreover, the view today is that during the relatively short period of the twentieth century Czechs acted bravely on several occasions, including at the declaration of independence in October 1918 and during military mobilisation before the Munich agreement. A significant number of people identified the Velvet Revolution as the time when Czechs showed the greatest bravery, but they are fewer than the number who identified other periods.

**Table 1: In what periods or events did Czechs show the greatest bravery**

Declaration of independence in Oct. 1918	11%
Military mobilisation before Munich in 1938	19%
Anti-Fascist resistance from 1938 to 1945	32%
February events of 1948	4%
Prague Spring 1968	8%
Anti-communist resistance from 1948 to 1989	8%
Velvet Revolution 1989	18%

*Source: STEM, Trends 2008/10, n = 1245*

The evaluations of which events in modern history Czechs feel they should be ashamed of most also provides a more differentiated picture than what can be inferred from people’s views of different periods as ones of rise or decline. The largest share of the population identified the political show trials in the 1950s as the most shameful period in Czech history. However, a significant share (14%) also indicated that Czechs should be ashamed of developments since November 1989, a view that runs counter to the prevailingly positive evaluation this period received in the categories of rise and decline. On the other hand, capitulation to the Nazis is viewed as an event to be ashamed of in modern Czech history, which further complicates the view of events around the Second World War. In the eyes of the Czech public today, this was

the period of biggest decline, but it was also the period when, according to most of the public, Czechs acted bravely, and moreover the period that triggered events that many Czechs today view as shameful.

**Table 2: Periods or events in history that Czechs feel ashamed of**

Collapse of Austria-Hungary 1918	3%
Capitulation to the Nazis	17%
Events of February 1948	13%
Political trials of the 1950s	41%
Normalisation of the 1970s and 1980s	12%
Developments since 1989	14%

*Source: STEM, Trends 2008/10, n = 1245*

Predictably, as the limits of personal experience and memory vary, answers to both of these questions depend on what generation a person belongs to. People over the age of 60 more often than others highlight the military mobilisation prior to Munich and the anti-Fascist resistance as sources of pride. Conversely, people aged 18–29 identify the Velvet Revolution. The older generation regards the normalisation period in the 1970s and 1980s as a shameful period somewhat less than others, and by contrast see developments since 1989 as shameful (STEM 2008a, 2008b).

## 2. Evaluations of the Velvet Revolution

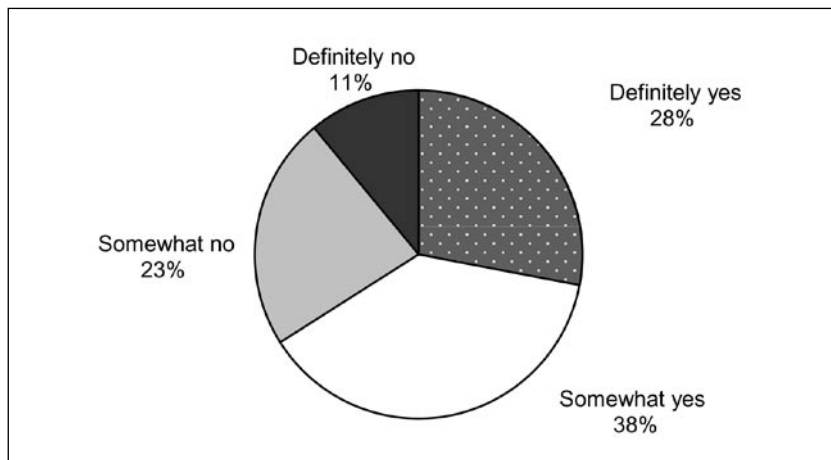
As noted in the preceding section, although the Velvet Revolution is one of the events most frequently mentioned as a period for which Czechs can be proud of their bravery, a portion of the public view the period that followed as one worthy of shame. Consequently, evaluations of the Velvet Revolution or of subsequent events or related aspects are not entirely unequivocal. Let's now take a look at how the Velvet Revolution is assessed by the Czech public today.<sup>5</sup>

With respect to general evaluations, two-thirds of citizens today judge the Velvet Revolution to have been one of the most important events in Czech modern history, while the remaining one-third takes the opposite view. Opinions on this issue depend to some degree on age and education level, as young people and people with higher education are more likely to highlight the Velvet Revolution as important, while older people and people with lower education are less likely to do so.

Opinions on other similarly formulated questions follow similar lines. For example, those Czechs who believe that the change that occurred in 1989 was worthwhile far outweigh those who do not, and this view has strengthened steadily in the past two decades.

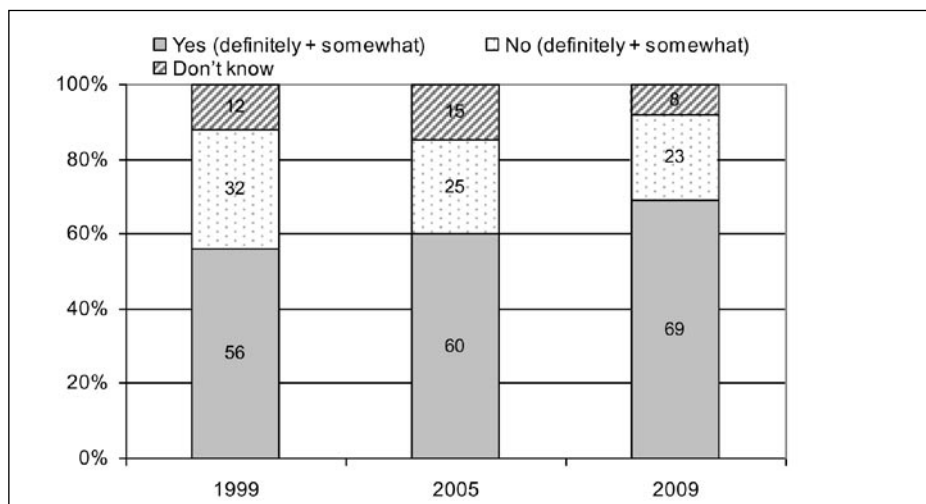
Wide recognition of the importance of the events of November 1989 is also demonstrated in the polls, according to which the majority of the public (73%) feel that even today it is important to remember the events of the Velvet Revolution (Kunštát 2009: 7). As well as gen-

**Figure 2: Is the Velvet Revolution one of the most important events in Czech history?**



Source: STEM, Trends 2009/10, n = 1278

**Figure 3: Was the change that occurred in 1989 worth it?**



Source: CVVM, Czech Society (1999/10, 2005/5, 2009/9), for details see Veselský (2009)

eral evaluations, in connection with the twentieth anniversary of the Velvet Revolution some studies conducted in the Czech Republic examined this event in more detail and observed the opinions and attitudes of the contemporary public towards various aspects of the Velvet Revolution.

One such aspect is whether, in the opinion of Czech citizens, the previous regime was defeated by the revolution or whether it collapsed itself; or why the Velvet Revolution actually happened. According to the CVVM's research findings, roughly one-half of the public believe that it was a genuine revolution, while almost two-fifths believe that the communist regime collapsed on its own. (Kunštát 2009: 6) In the same study, asked about the actual causes and sources of the Velvet Revolution, respondents inclined towards secondary modality, which means that most responses identified the direct cause of the Velvet Revolution as circumstances like the bad Communist Party government in the normalisation era (indicated by 23% of respondents), the regime's disintegration and inability to reform itself (18%), or external, foreign-policy reasons such as the decline of the eastern bloc (13%). The active dimension, represented, for instance, by a longing for freedom, the elimination of totalitarianism, and the introduction of democracy, corresponds more with the idea of revolution as action and is found in just 17% of responses, but this does not entirely disqualify views that the event was revolutionary in character. Given that on this point respondents were presented with an open question asking what had caused the Velvet Revolution, it is no surprise that respondents would be inclined to highlight those factors to which revolutionary change was necessarily reacting. (For details of the poll results, see (ibid.)).

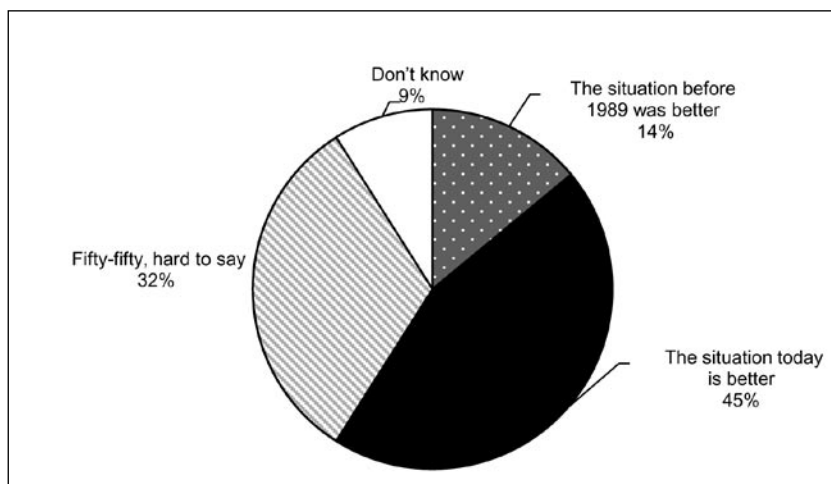
The above-noted studies also showed that most of the Czech public today believe that the Velvet Revolution was a society-wide movement (62%) and not just the result of the actions of dissident groups (30%), and that the political changes in 1989 had the support of most of the nation (61%) or even all of society (11%). The image of 1989 as a revolutionary event is also supported by the view held by most of the public that the objective of the processes that occurred in 1989 was revolutionary change (61%) and not simply reform of the communist system (28%), and in the view of two-thirds of the Czech public the main objective was political (74%) and not economic change (18%) (ibid.).

Some of these opinions can be compared to the results of surveys that were conducted by the Institute for Public Opinion Research at the Federal Statistics Office during the last ten days of November and the first half of December 1989. Although there is no question that most citizens at that time were in favour of the transition to democracy, ideas about what would come next were understandably vague. Just 3% of the population at that time expressed the opinion that Czechoslovakia should follow the 'capitalist path' of development. Between November and December there was a slight decrease in the number of people who wanted to follow the 'socialist path' (from 45% to 41%), while there was an increase in the share indicating that further development should take the form of 'something in between', some kind of 'third way', a compromise between notions of the advantages of contemporary socialism and capitalism (from 47% to 52%) (Slejška et al. 1990). The view of these events twenty years later is naturally quite different from what it was for those who were experiencing them first hand and for whom they were part of the vivid present, in part because during the immediate post-revolution years the Czech public's understanding of the concepts of socialism, communism, and capitalism significantly changed.

### 3. Opinions on the situation before and after 1989

The social changes triggered by the Velvet Revolution in November 1989 ended the twenty-year ‘normalisation’ era, the term used by the Communist authorities for the period following 1968, when everything that could be associated with the Prague Spring and the revival process was crushed. The Czech public’s socio-historical interpretations of events, including comparisons of society before and after November 1989, have been the subject of both academic and private sociological research since the early 1990s. Let’s look at the public’s evaluations of the situation before and since 1989 in this research.

**Figure 4: The Czech public’s evaluation of the situation before and since 1989**



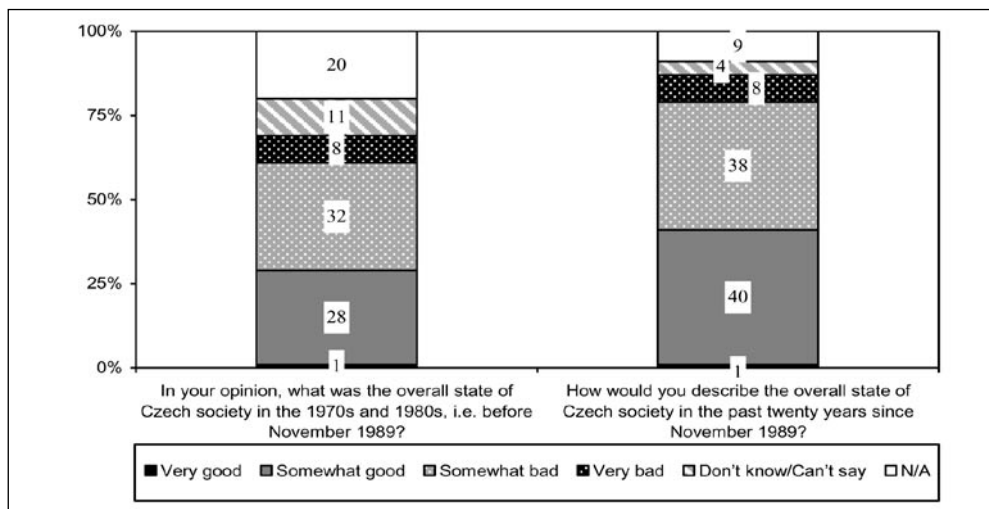
Source: *STEM, Trends 2009/10*, n = 1278, cf. *Tabery (2009)*

A look at the breakdown of public opinion shows that citizens regard the situation today as much better than the situation before 1989, but there are still many who take a ‘fifty-fifty’ view of which period was better. However, the fact that the period since 1989 is evaluated as better than the period before does not necessarily mean that the public’s perception of the present will be very different from their evaluation of the past. For example, in the Actor 2009 survey, respondents were presented with separate questions to evaluate the periods before and after 1989 and each question on the ‘state of Czech society’ was formulated differently. When the differences between the two periods are evaluated from different viewpoints and in different contexts, the results are also different.

Here the two periods are clearly not evaluated as differently as might be expected given the answers to the question about which period was better and considering the prevalingly positive view of the Velvet Revolution as such. The explanation for why the public’s view of the ‘state of society’ in 2009 is not dramatically different from its view of the normalisation period can be sought in two areas: (1) in the critical view held of some specific steps that were



**Figure 5: Evaluations of the state of Czech society during the normalisation period and today**



Source: *Actor 2009/12*,  $n = 1071$

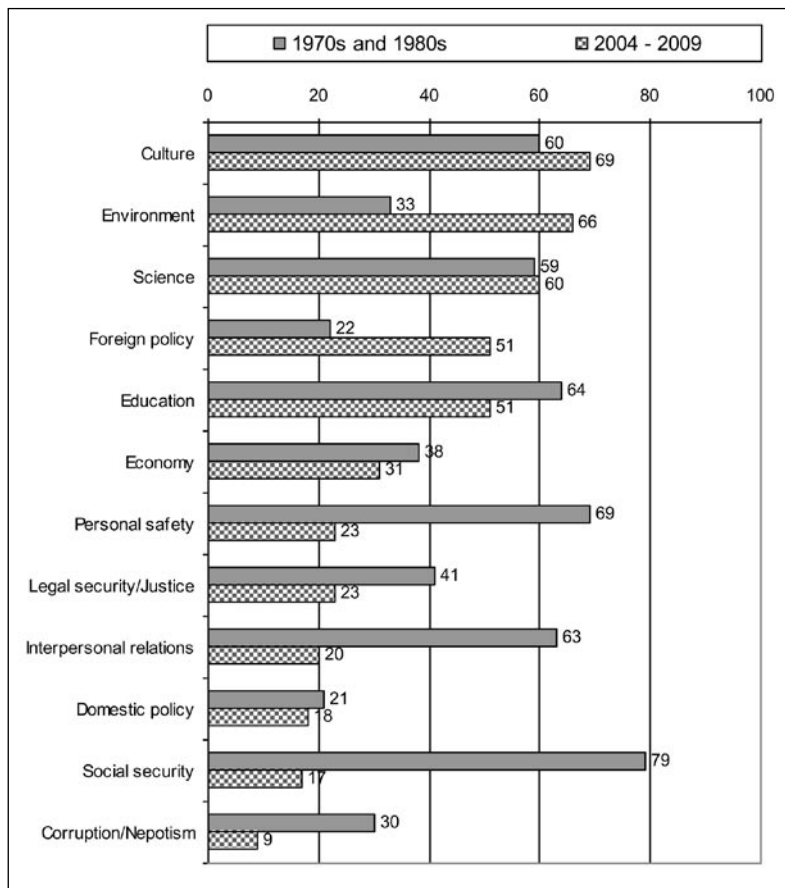
undertaken in the Czech Republic in connection with the revolution, and (2) in the general opinions on the state or functioning of key areas of people's lives then and today.

With regard to the first point, not all the key goals and reforms that followed in the wake of the revolution are viewed by the Czech public as successful or even as right. For instance, Trends, the survey carried out by STEM in October 2009, showed that almost one-half of the population (44%) believe that one of the rallying cries of the Velvet Revolution was not successfully fulfilled, namely, 'Back to Europe!', which expressed the need at that time for a change in the geopolitical and cultural-civilizational orientation of the country, its emancipation from the Soviet sphere of influence, and its integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures, and also the need for the country to 'catch up' and keep pace with the economies and living standards of Western countries (STEM 2009c). The CVVM survey also showed that a substantial portion of the Czech population believe that some key post-1989 steps were not fair, steps like coupon privatisation (54%), large-scale property restitution (44%), and price deregulation (42%). A significant part of the population also harbours doubts as to whether the lustration act (29%) and the restitution of family property (22%) instituted by the government were the right steps to take.<sup>6</sup>

The sources of public dissatisfaction with the current situation, which Figure 1 shows in contrast with the first decade after November 1989, can be analysed in the light of more information obtained in the *Actor 2009* survey and in research by CVVM (Tabery 2009). With the results of these surveys it is possible to compare evaluations of the situation during the normalisation period and the situation today but with respect to different areas of life. The two studies agree in that areas evaluated as worse 'at present' (*Actor 2009*) or 'in the period since 1989' (CVVM) compared to the period before 1989 include social secu-

**Figure 6: Evaluations of selected areas of Czech society in the 1970s and 1980s and in the past five years**

(Figures indicate the sum of responses 'very good' + 'somewhat good')



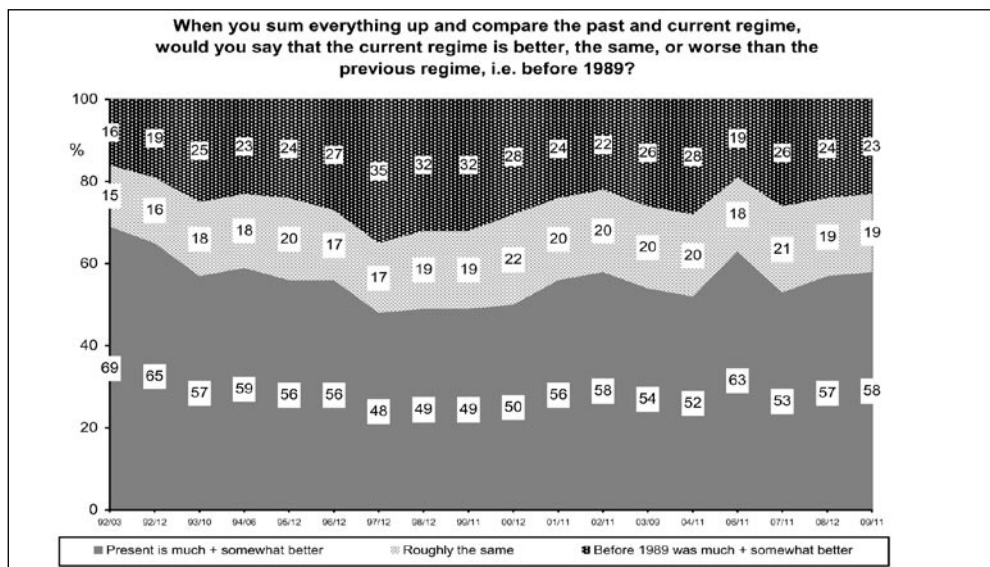
Source: *Actor 2009/12*, n = 1071

erty, personal safety, interpersonal relations, and old-age security, some of the most important existential values.<sup>7</sup>

The Czech public’s criticism of the current situation and some post-1989 steps raises the question of which political regime the Czech public today regards as better – the one that existed before 1989 or the one that exists today? This subject has been studied continuously by STEM since 1992 and the complete findings are presented in Figure 7.

Regardless of how critically some areas of society are evaluated and the small share of people who do not take a negative view of the period before 1989, and in conformity with the general evaluations presented in the introduction to this section, the majority of the Czech public in 2009 gave the current regime a better evaluation than the previous one, roughly one-fifth evaluated them as equal, and just one-fifth evaluated the current regime as worse.

**Figure 7: Public opinions on the regime before 1989 and the current regime in a time series comparison**



Source: STEM, Trends 1992–2009

Primarily young people and citizens with higher education (upper secondary and university) consistently regard the current regime as better. Yet, given the demographic ageing of the population and the development of society in 2009, supporters of the post-1989 changes even predominated among people in the over-60 age group, where previously they had formed the minority and were outweighed by supporters of the previous regime.

Nevertheless, a times series of opinions since 1992 shows that in the history of the independent Czech state the shares of supporters of the current and previous regimes have changed significantly. The share of supporters of the pre-1989 regime grew until 1997/1998, and until autumn 1999 it remained over 30%. It is important to remember that this period of the nineties represented a turbulent period in Czech politics, when the government acknowledged making some serious mistakes and had to introduce an austerity package. This was followed by the collapse of the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), the installation of a caretaker government, and then the creation of the Opposition Agreement. Support for the current and previous regimes became most even in October 1999 (44% : 35%), when public disagreement with the Opposition Agreement came to a head and a large civic initiative emerged in protest against this political arrangement (on the political scene represented by the Quad Coalition, in the sphere of civic initiatives particularly by Impuls 99” and “Thank you, Leave Now”). From the start of 2000, with various fluctuations, supporters of the previous regime began to decrease and at present they make up less than one-quarter of the adult population (STEM 2009b).

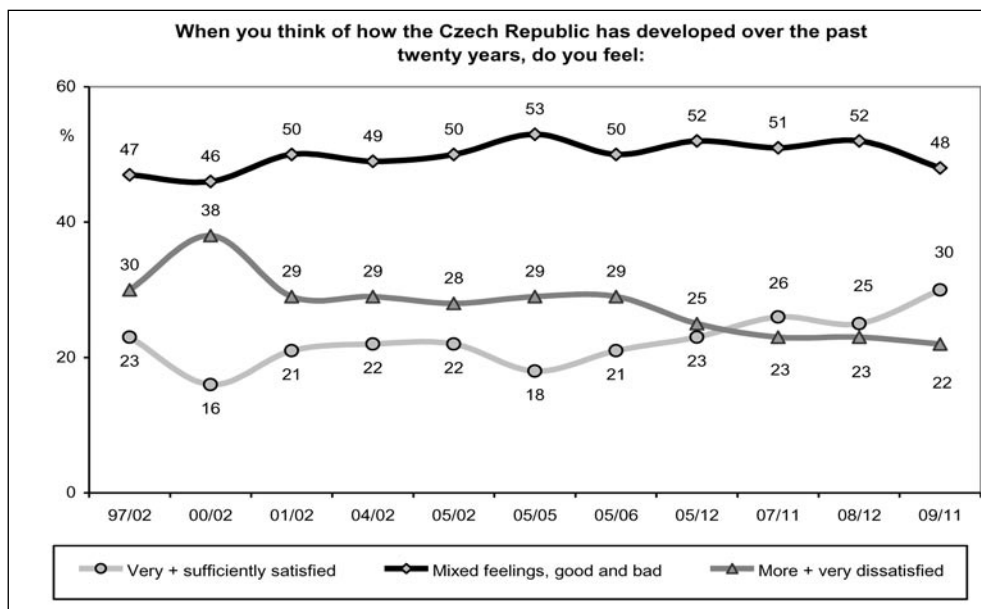
The issue of the possibility of returning to the previous regime also has a bearing upon how the two regimes are evaluated. From the answers to this question over the past dec-

ade it is apparent that, despite the quite critical view of current society, the vast majority of Czech citizens have no desire to go back to the past regime (79% in 2009) and an even larger share of the public consider the prospect of going back as unlikely (89% in 2009) (Veselský 2009).

#### 4. Opinions on the development of Czech society in the past twenty years

As indicated above, the fact that most people consider the post-1989 regime to be better than the regime that existed in the country before 1989 does not mean that citizens are wholly satisfied with how the country has developed over the past twenty years. Since 1997, the STEM agency has posed a question that asks respondents to take stock of the period since the Velvet Revolution, and the results show that approximately one-half of respondents consistently have mixed feelings about the country’s development since 1989. In the other half, the number dissatisfied with development slightly outweigh the number satisfied. Since 2005 the numbers have grown roughly even and current data indicate a further drift in public opinion towards an overall sense of satisfaction with development. In 2009 30% of the public were ‘satisfied’ and 22% ‘dissatisfied’, but there was still one-half that had mixed feelings.

**Figure 8: The public’s feelings about the country’s development since 1989 in a time comparison**



Source: STEM survey, Trends 1997–2009

The current state of society receives a slightly better evaluation from people who are younger, more educated, financially better off, and politically right-wing. Conversely, it gets a slightly worse evaluation from people who are older, less educated, less financially well off, and politically left-wing. If we look at the views held by the supporters of the five strongest political parties, we find at one end optimism among the supporters of ODS and at the other end the strong dissatisfaction of communists and non-voters. Supporters of the Social Democrats (ČSSD) typically have 'mixed feelings' (STEM 2009b).

According to responses to other questions posed in the survey *Trends 2009*, 43% of respondents agreed with the opinion that the twenty-year period since 1989 is one of the best periods in Czech history, but a larger share, 57%, disagreed with that opinion. We should recall that according to findings from the same research, 66% of Czech citizens regard the Velvet Revolution as one of the most important events in Czech history, while 33% maintain the opposite view (see Figure 2). A comparison of responses to the two questions above thus indicates that a not insignificant portion of the population inconsistently evaluate the Velvet Revolution and the post-revolution period. An analysis of the combined positive and negative responses to the two questions indicates that:

- 40% of the public consider the Velvet Revolution to be one of the most important events in Czech history and the two decades that followed as one of the best periods in Czech history;
- 26% of the public regard the Velvet Revolution as one of the most important events in Czech history, but do not regard the two decades that followed as one of the best periods in Czech history;
- 31% of the public do not think that the Velvet Revolution was one of the most important events in Czech history or that the two decades that followed represent one of the best periods in Czech history;
- the remaining 3% do not regard the Velvet Revolution as one of the most important events in Czech history but do think that the two decades that followed are among the best periods in Czech history.

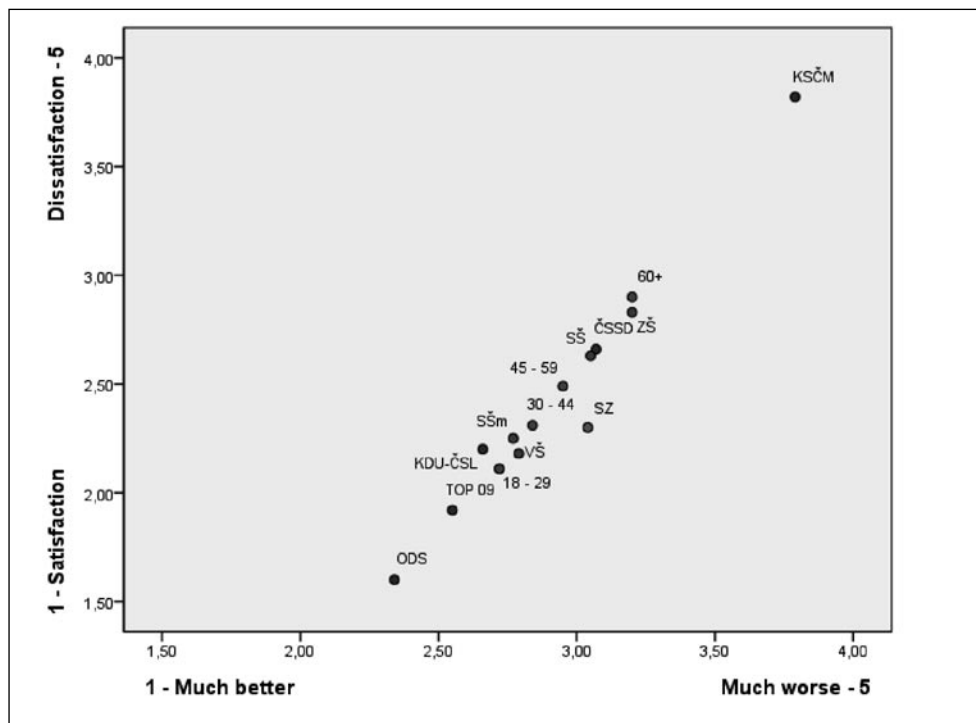
As already indicated, opinions on the period since 1989, like those on the Velvet Revolution as such, are connected with a person's ideological-political views. Supporters of ODS in particular take a positive view of the Velvet Revolution and the period of the past twenty years. Supporters of TOP 09 and the Christian Democratic/Czech People's Party (KDU-ČSL) share this positive view of the Velvet Revolution, but are somewhat more critical of the past two decades. Supporters of ČSSD take an appreciably less favourable view of development since 1989 – only around one-third rank the period since 1989 as one of the best in Czech history. It is not surprising that the most negative views are found among supporters of the Communist Party (KSČM), who only rarely evaluate the Velvet Revolution and the ensuing two decades in positive terms.

Opinions on the twenty-year-old event vary, however, in relation to socio-demographic characteristics, in particular age and education. The view that the Velvet Revolution was one of the most important events in modern Czech history and that the past twenty years represent one of the best periods in the country's history is held mainly by people who are more education, materially better off, and younger. For example, while only one-third of people with basic education or over the age of 60 believe that the past twenty years rank among the best periods

in Czech history, among people with higher education or ages 18–29 the figure is more than one-half (STEM 2009c).

Figure 9, which combines the Czech public’s opinions on the current regime compared to the previous regime with opinions on development in the past two decades, reveals similar findings. In addition to differences between some population groups, overall the evaluation of real development since 1989 is more positive compared to how the current regime as such is evaluated in comparison to the regime before 1989.

**Figure 9: The Czech public’s feelings about development in the Czech Republic since 1989 in a time comparison**



Source: STEM, Trends 2009/10, n = 1278

**Note:** x-axis: ‘When you sum everything up and compare the past and current regimes, would you say that the current regime is better or worse than the previous regime, i.e. before November 1989. (1 Much better – 5 Much worse)’  
 y-axis: ‘When you think about the development of the Czech Republic over the past twenty years, i.e. since November 1989, do you personally feel: (1 Very satisfied – 5 Very dissatisfied)’

The same survey also shows how the public evaluated changes in individual areas of the life of society that occurred over the past twenty years. People take a *very positive* view of all the choices and opportunities they have that were denied them under the previous regime. The borders opened up and people can now openly express their opinions and form groups, associations, and other organisations. People can elect their representatives in real elections

and choose between multiple parties. These are all areas that are positively evaluated by almost 90 % of citizens.

The large majority of the Czech population (around 80 %) are also convinced that they have much greater opportunities to achieve something or own something, that there is an incomparably larger selection of goods and services, and that it is possible to accumulate a considerable amount of private property. They also feel that opportunities have opened up for people who are hardworking and talented, that there are new educational opportunities, and that, on the whole, people are able to assume control of their own fate.

The most important 'constitutional' changes that have occurred since 1989 are evaluated *mostly positively*. Almost 70 % of people view the creation of an independent Czech state as a positive change, and the same share of people view the fact that the country became a member of NATO and the European Union favourably.

The public's evaluations of the basic economic changes in the country are *not unequivocal*. Three-quarters of the public support the introduction of a market economy, two-thirds support the influx of foreign capital. Conversely, two-thirds of Czechs take an unfavourable view of the differences in income and property that arose with the development of a market economy. The current state of security in old age and illness are evaluated very negatively (72 % of respondents), and the conditions of life for families with children do not fare much better (63 % view the situation in this area unfavourably).

Public order and public safety are evaluated *negatively* (68 %), while interpersonal relations and morality in society are evaluated *very negatively* (almost 80 %).

In order to distinguish the views of different population groups on the past twenty years of development of Czech society and its current state, we assessed all 24 areas as a whole. In each area the positive evaluation variants were combined as well as the negative ones, the total score was calculated, and the research respondents were divided into four groups:

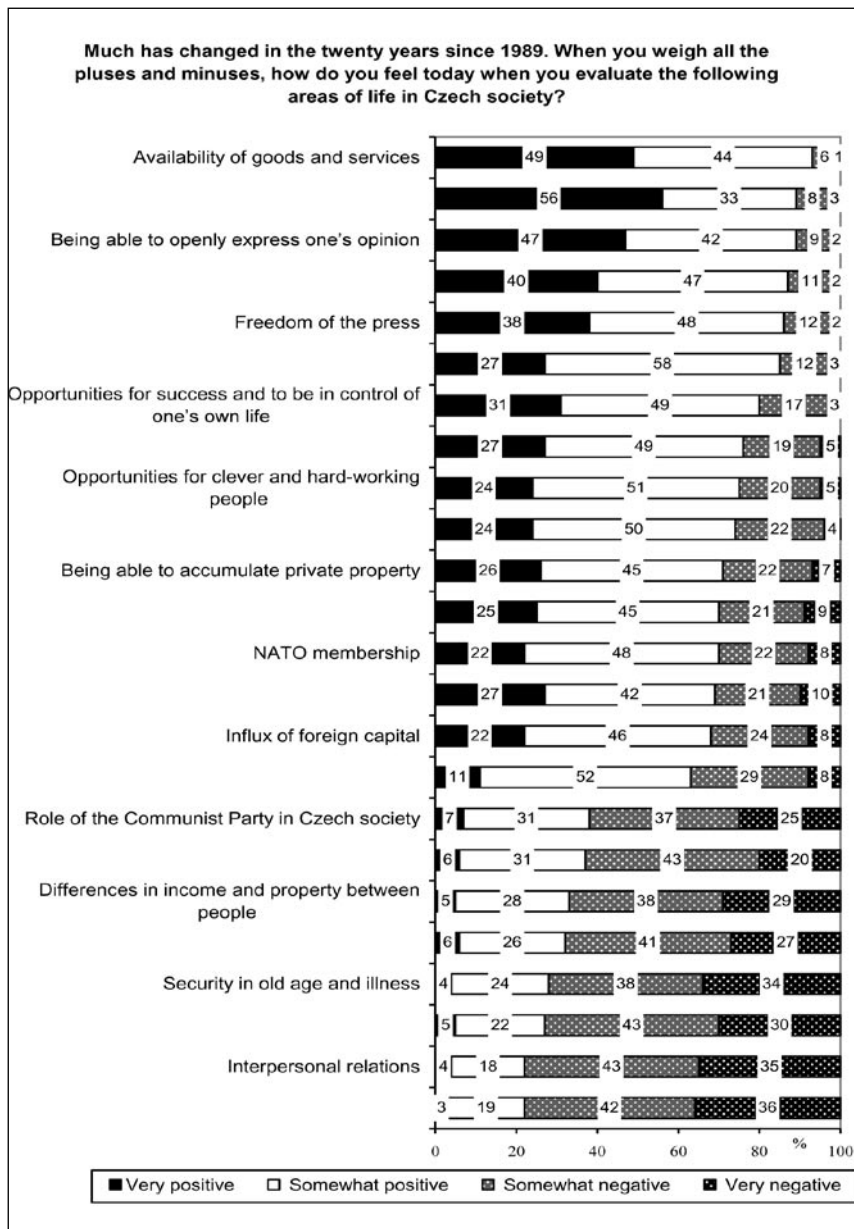
- A) *Clear supporters* of the post-1989 changes (19–24 positive evaluations) – 25 % of people
- B) *Mostly satisfied* with development since 1989 (15–18 positive evaluations) – 30 % of people
- C) *Somewhat critical* of the current situation (11–14 positive evaluations) – 26 % of people
- D) *Opponents* of the changes since 1989 (0–10 positive evaluations) – 19 % of people

Which socio-demographic, economic, and political characteristics had an effect on the evaluations of the state of Czech society twenty years after 1989? The strongest dividing line between supporters and opponents of development since 1989 was political orientation, whether on a general level (when people self-categorise on a left-right scale) or in concrete form as an expressed party preference. It is worth mentioning the critical view taken of society by those citizens who refuse to take part in elections, which in 2009 contained a large group of disgusted citizens.

Material status was another strong factor dividing the population into those who viewed the state of society positively and those who saw the situation after twenty years of development towards democracy as negative. People who in their own words were materially secure were in the vast majority of cases supporters of current development; people who were not well off tended to criticise society more. Material security was closely connected with social status. At one end of the scale were mainly students and business people, supporting the changes since 1989 and positively evaluating the current state of society; at the other end of the scale – those mainly criticising the current situation – were senior citizens.

**Figure 10: Evaluations of individual areas of the life of society over the past twenty years**

(Data for the Czech Republic in %, October 2009, n = 1278 respondents ages 18 and over)



Source: STEM, Trends 2009/10, n = 1278



Age and education were also factors that, to a slightly lesser extent, divided the population over the question of the state of society twenty years after the revolution. When differentiated by education there was no group whose evaluations stand out as extremely negative. However, when differentiated by age, people over the age of 60 were identified as giving particularly negative evaluations. People with basic education were actually somewhat more supportive of the situation since 1989 than people with a vocational certificate.

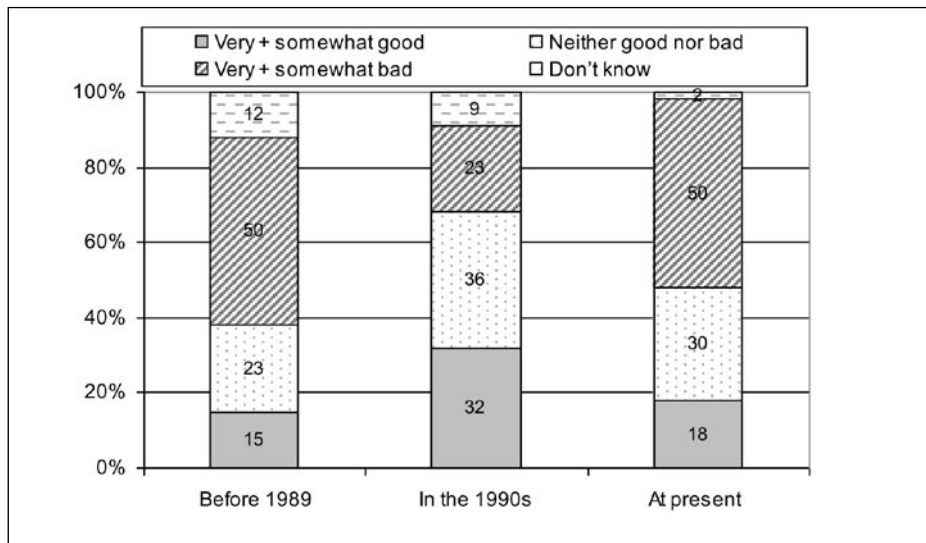
Clearly, today, the Czech public's views on the development of Czech society since 1989 are not unequivocal; there are differences between different socio-demographic groups, and also between evaluations of individual steps and changes. This is ultimately also demonstrated by the evaluation of change in the 'overall quality of life', which we can regard as a kind of aggregate indicator. Here again, the results indicate prevailing satisfaction, but are not unequivocal: 63% of people evaluate the 'overall quality of life' positively, 37% negatively<sup>8</sup> (STEM 2009a).

## 5. Discussion

The results of all three surveys conducted around the twentieth anniversary of the Velvet Revolution provide a relatively detailed portrait of related events. Although each of the three surveys looked at individual themes and issues in a slightly different way, they present a similar overall picture of perceptions of these key events in modern Czech history. Within the context of Czech history the events of the Velvet Revolution are primarily viewed as a period of rise, as a positive stage in Czech history. The ensuing period is also seen in a mainly positive light, although not as emphatically as the actual act of changing the political regime. The Velvet Revolution certainly kindled many expectations, but far from all of them have been met. Moreover, there have been many consequences to the transformation of the social order that at the time of the political change could not have been foreseen by the public or at least would not have been felt as much as they came to be felt later. Because of this, and because of the understandable emotional ties felt towards the period before 1989 by those who spent most of their life in it (and this does not mean just the defenders of that period), the evaluations of the differences between the two periods are not as dramatic as might be expected on the basis of the evaluations of the importance of the Velvet Revolution itself (on the 'equivocal repudiation' of the communist dictatorship by the Czech public, see Mayer (2009), Příbáň (2001)).

On top of these facts, there was also a shift in the opinions of the Czech public after the first post-revolution decade. The results of all three surveys discussed in this paper show that there is a visible difference in Czech society today between the image of the first and second post-revolution decades. Figure 1 clearly shows that two-thirds of the Czech public describe the period between 1989 and 2000 as a rise period and just under one-third as one of decline, while the second decade is viewed much more critically, with less than one-half of the public describing it as a rise period and more than one-half as a period of decline. The idea that the Czech public take a different view of the first and second decades after the revolution is also supported by the results of the CVVM survey, which indicate that the public's evaluation of the *politics* in the Czech Republic during the first decade is much better than for the past decade.<sup>9</sup>

**Figure 11: Evaluation of the political system in the Czech Republic before and since 1989**



Source: CVVM, *Our Society 2009/9*, n = 1046; see also Veselský (2009)

## 6. Conclusion

If we were to express the findings of different evaluations of the first and second decades after the revolution in an encapsulated form, we could use the phrase: ‘it started out well, but then something went wrong’. In conclusion, let’s take a closer look at the question of why, despite the mainly positive view of the social change in 1989, the following two decades are not evaluated more favourably; why does so much of the Czech public have mixed feelings about this period?

One possible answer is the different ways in which the development of society and the state of various areas in the life of society are evaluated. By no means every area of life has improved in the public’s opinion, and some existential aspects such as social security, interpersonal relations, and public safety have, in the opinion of citizens, seriously deteriorated in comparison with the situation before 1989.

The areas of social security and more generally the economic climate are perhaps the key to understanding why the evaluation of development changed after the first decade. In the face of rising unemployment and the government austerity package introduced in 1997, the security offered under the previous regime may have acquired key significance and changed how the public around the turn of the millennium viewed society’s development. As noted above and described in more detail in Červenka (2009b), the Czech economy began to run up against its first serious difficulties at the end of the twentieth century. The first cracks began to appear in the firmament of expectations of prosperity that had been

kindled over the months immediately following the revolution and more or less satisfied during the first years of the transformation. A combination of these factors is no doubt behind the fact that around that time the atmosphere in Czech society began to be described as the ‘bad mood’.

Given that in the second decade after 1989 there was no substantial improvement in the political and economic situations or in interpersonal relations, it is no wonder that the Czech public branded this period as one of deteriorating conditions. The dissatisfactory political situation was reflected, for instance, in an appreciable decrease in the level of voter participation and trust in institutions (Červenka 2010), and affected a number of other areas, such as undermining certainty about the dissident version of the revolution (Gjuričová a Kopeček 2008). Controversy also arose over the ‘third resistance’. In this context, it will be interesting to observe how the Czech public will respond to further economic, political, and social developments.

The combination of these factors has undoubtedly led to a situation where in Czech society today people have even started talking about a so-called “bad mood”. The roots of the critical evaluation of the first decade of the new millennium may be found in the second half of the 90s, and the circumstances of entry into the second decade after the revolution, which took place in the Czech Republic under the banners of opposition and civil protest (the “Thank you, Leave Now”, televisions crisis). Because major improvements did not come in the economy, politics, or interpersonal relations in this decade, it is not surprising that the perception of the Czech public is of worsening conditions.

As shown by surveys in recent years, developments in the world and European economies, as well as changes on the Czech political scene after the elections to the Chamber of Deputies in 2010, affect many aspects of life in contemporary Czech society. It is therefore a matter for further study how the public will react to the significant changes at the turn of the second decade of the 21st century and how, in light of them, they will assess the current and past development of Czech society.

## Endnotes:

1. We should add that one dimension of the sociological discussions that continued for a long time in Czech sociology was the question of whether the changes that occurred after 1989 should be conceptualised as a transformation or a transition. The former approach, for instance, is that found in the work of Pavel Machonin and Milan Tuček, who advanced a transformation concept based on modernisation theory (Machonin, Tuček 1996; Machonin, Mlčoch, Sojka 2000; Machonin 2005). The transition approach is represented in particular by Jiří Kabele, who discusses transition and transitivity in relation to social constructivism (Kabele 1998, 2005).
2. *Actor 2009 (Aktér 2009)*: A survey conducted by the Department of Sociology at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, among 1071 respondents over the age of 18, quota sample, December 2009.  
*Trends (Trendy)*: A survey conducted by the Centre for Empirical Research (Středisko empirických výzkumů; STEM), with 1278 respondents over the age of 18, quota sample, November 2009.  
*Czech Society (Naše společnost)*: a survey conducted by the Public Opinion Research Centre at the Institute of Sociology AS CR (CVVM) with 1046 respondents over the age of 15, quota sample, September 2009.

3. Mainly press releases on research conducted by the CVVM (Institute of Sociology AS CR) (Červenka 2006, Dimitrová 2007, Červenka 2009a, Kunštát 2009, Veselský 2009, Tabery 2009) and STEM (2009a, 2009b, 2009c).
4. For more detailed context of the historical awareness of the Czech population, their views of Czech history, and the nature of the historical process, see Šubrt and Vinopal (2010).
5. The main empirical sources of information on this theme are: the *Czech Society* research conducted by the Public Opinion Research Centre in September 2009 (Kunštát 2009, Tabery 2009, Veselský 2009), and research from the *Trends* series conducted by STEM agency in November 2009.
6. For more details and a comparison of the results of surveys from 2009 and 2005, see Červenka (2009a).
7. On the other hand, areas that receive a better evaluation today than under the previous regime include access to information, being able to travel, being able to live in freedom, being able to openly express one's opinions, access to culture and the standard of living, foreign policy, and the environment. For more detailed results of the CVVM survey, see (Tabery 2009).
8. The contradictory view in society of the changes that have occurred in the Czech Republic over the past two decades is also apparent in the fact that approximately two-thirds of the public see the Communist Party's current role in society as negative, while the others regard it as positive (STEM 2009a).
9. This doesn't necessarily imply that the course of development of society in general is also seen negatively. (Compare with Figure 8.)

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