

The Revolution of Dignity as a new wave of “Velvet” socio-political rebellion

The article deals with the events of the «velvet revolution» of 1989, which became prominent in the formation of the Czech Republic’s home and foreign policy, as well as it has been analyzed the role of the Czech Republic in the events that took place in Ukraine in Kyiv in late 2013 – beginning 2014.

Keywords: «Velvet Revolution», student’s demonstration, rebellion.

Rewolucja Godności jak nowa fala «aksamitnego» społeczno-politycznego powstania

W artykule rozpatrują się wydarzenia «aksamitnej rewolucji» 1989 r., które stały się wybitnymi w budowie wewnętrznej polityki Czech i kształtowaniu się jej na międzynarodowej arenie, a także analizuje się rolę Czeskiej Republiki w wydarzeniach, które odbywały się w Ukrainie w Kijowie w końcu 2013 – na początku 2014 roku.

Kluczowe słowa: «aksamitna rewolucja», studencka demonstracja, strajk

Революція гідності, як нова хвиля «оксамитових» соціально-політичних протестів

У статті розглядаються події «оксамитової революції» 1989 р., які стали визначними в побудові внутрішньої політики Чехії та становленні її на міжнародній арені, а також аналізується роль Чеської Республіки в подіях, які відбувалися в Україні в Києві в кінці 2013 – на початку 2014 року.

Ключові слова: «оксамитова революція», студентська демонстрація, страйк.

Most of the present social revolutions have been attempts to modernize the society by changing the existing socio-political system by the progressive democratic model of the state system. So, it should be noted certain analogies of revolutionary rebellions in Ukraine with the so-called Velvet Revolution, which were in Central and Eastern Europe in 1990s, among which the events in Czechoslovakia took the prominent.

In the end of 1989, despite the society expected reforms, it was nothing to improve. The system had degenerated so much it lost the ability to reform. Any change only deepened the crisis, which led eventually to the destruction of the regime. «Velvet» Revolution was the revolt of spirit, freedom and democracy. The necessity for political, economic and legal transformation was the logical culmination of the national rebellion against the existing regime.

The relevance of the research due to revolutionary spirits in the world, in recent years CIS, and increasing influence of the USA especially in the home affairs of former Soviet republics.

This article aims to clarify the events that led to the beginning of the revolution, analyze the course of the revolution and its consequences, and to identify the position of the Czech Republic in the events taking place in Ukraine.

In the research it has been studied the period beginning with "velvet revolution" of 1989 to the current events in Ukraine with analysing of their transformation through socio-political point of view of "Velvet Revolution."

The beginning, the causes, the chronology of events

The collapse of the Soviet State initiated by restructuring pushed counter-elite in Czechoslovakia for more decisive action. As the main method it had been chosen street demonstrations with the aims of provoking the authorities to use violence. At the same time the scenario for the Soviet program was launched continuous party meeting, which sharply criticized the policy of the CPC and demanded the most drastic personnel changes.

October 28, 1989 mass demonstrations of young people on Wenceslas Square in Prague were dispersed by police. Events happened again on November 17. The situation in the country threatened to get out of control, and the government took a step toward the opposition. On Nov. 19 mass organizations were founded – «Civic Forum» in Prague and «Public Against Violence» in Bratislava. Their aim was of «peaceful transition from communist rule to democracy.»

The beginning of the revolution, called «velvet», was the suppression of the student demonstrations in the center of Prague, in the People's Street on November, 17, 1989¹ [1]. But detonator of anti-government protests were rumors that spread a day later, the murder of a student (as it turned out, it was misinformation). The «victim» was a student M. Schmid, who allegedly died as a result of the use of force by police to disperse the demonstrations.

¹ Malyszewa A. Na «frontach» SNG – bez peremen // Mirowaja ekonomika i mezdunarodnyje otnoszenija. – #12. – 2004, s. 68-79.

This key event of “Velvet Revolution” was a performance directed by the secret services of the regime CHRSR. The role of the wounded student, who was placed in “ambulance” under many cameras, played a lieutenant of state security.²

On November 20 students of the capital declared a strike, which was immediately supported by almost all universities of the country during the first day (what is very similar to the events of May 1968 in France). At the same time in the center of Prague and other cities mass demonstrations began (in the capital daily number of participants reached a quarter of a million).

November 21, 1989 Prime Minister Ladislav Adamets met leaders of the opposition. On November 24 at the extraordinary plenum of the CPC of Central Committee not only the first secretary, but other leaders of the CPC applied for resignation³. During the next Congress, which declared commitment to the ideas and slogans of «socialism with a human face», they were expelled from the party as «preachers of Brezhnev’s ideas.»

On the fifth day of the rebellion Political Bureau of the CPC resigned the government fell. The opposition offered a quarter of the seats in the new government, but that proposal was not accepted. Since the new government refused to unconditionally transfer power to the opposition, it moved on to the next act of «revolution.» On November 26 in the center of Prague it was a great meeting, and the day after the general strike began. The next week the federal government was formed, in which the Communists and the opposition received the same number of seats.

On November 29th the parliament abolished the article of the constitution concerning the leading role of the Communist Party. On December 29, 1989 the reorganized Parliament elected its chairman Alexander Dubcek and Vaclav Havel the head of the Civic Forum became the president of CHRSR. On July 1, 1991 heads of states of the Warsaw Pact signed the protocol of the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in Prague.

Changing of the political system caused the rapid entry of new persons into the state elite. One of the main sources of the new political elite in Czechoslovakia was “Revolutionary Street” and more precisely – those politicians from the opposition, consolidating principle of whose was to deny the former regime. The core of the new political elite was the dissidents that existed in Czechoslovakia in the 70 – 80 years⁴.

The revolution in Czechoslovakia was called “velvet” because during rebellions and demonstrations there was not held a single armed clash. Students themselves, who began the strike on November 20, could not even imagine that they would gain “victory.” But even then many people seemed strange such a rapid fall of the regime, which was considered to have strength for granted.

² Privalov K. Rosija na globuse Ewropy // Itoji. - #17. - 2004. - s.38-42.

³ Korowicina M. Dwa reszenija nacionalnogo voprosa: Czehija i Slowakija do i posle 1989 goda // Slawjanowedenie. - 1995. - #6, s. 34-41.

⁴ Danjszina V. Ekonomika Czechoslovakii w 80-e gody: struktura i efektiwnostj. - M., 2003, s. 64.

One of the most common versions of explanations was version of events about "new Yalta". It was believed that George W. Bush and Gorbachev divided Europe: the Soviet Union abandoned its Eastern European satellites in exchange for economic aid, which allegedly desperately needed.

The second, also very common version can be called "failed Gorbachev's transforming of Warsaw Pact." The nature of it was that the new Soviet leadership wanted to replace old Brezhnev's "leaders" by new leaders in the countries of CMEA who could support the restructuring, but not coped with the natural course of events. This version is not very plausible, since in the USSR authorities control system in relating to the CHRSR during the second half of the 80's there was no any significant changes. "No deal" with the course of events could only, if this was the course of events, intended by the Soviet leadership.

On November 1989 the official Soviet influence was manifested in passivity. And for the CPC Central Committee, and for the Civic Forum, who led the "velvet revolution", the vital question was whether the Soviet troops remained neutral. Once it became clear that it would be neutral, the interest to the Soviet Embassy in Prague was lost. It became clear that Gorbachev handed over Eastern Europe to its geopolitical enemy.

Liquidation of planning system and the transition to a liberal market economy led to the rapid disintegration of a federal Czechoslovakia. Being a country with a high level of economic development, the Czech Republic experienced relatively painless "shock" phase of reforms and relatively quickly restores the pre-reform level of production. This, however, does not mean that the integration of the Czechs in the "western" system passed easily. Rather vice versa, this process was very controversial in the Czech Republic especially⁵ [5].

The overthrow of the totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia took place in rather favorable international conditions. Of course, the Soviet leadership headed by Mikhail Gorbachev, was tolerant to the formation of the non-communistic government in Poland, and welcomed the implementation of radical reforms in Hungary and with a certain satisfaction perceived changes in the GDR after the resignation of E. Honecker. Anti-communist revolutions in neighboring countries, the refusal of the leadership of the USSR from "Brezhnev doctrine" eventually led to the isolation and the collapse of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia.

The development of the country was accelerated by exodus of citizens of East Germany to West Germany via Czechoslovakia and Hungary in the summer of 1989. This example of the desperate residents of East Germany made it possible for Czechs and Slovaks to witness the possibility of success demonstrators.

The home conditions for the implementation of radical changes in Czechoslovakia were formed long before. The end of the 80's was marked by the crisis that engulfed "extras" – the leadership of the CPC, which marked the events with swiftness and made them unrestrained.

⁵ Jindřich Dejmek, *Diplomacie Československa Díl I. Nástin dějin ministerstva zahraničních věcí a diplomacie (1918-1992)* / Jindřich Dejmek. – Praha: Academia, 2012, s. 320.

The impetus for the deployment of protests in Ukraine, which was called Revolution of Dignity, was not signing an association agreement with the EU by the President of Ukraine. This decision has brought thousands of people, mostly students, on the streets of Kyiv. After the brutal beating of peaceful protesters on Independence Square by the detachment «Berkut», rebellion had a qualitatively different nature – from student protests against no agreement with the EU, it became a mass campaign of resistance power.

The reason for such rapid transformation of public opposition was critical attitude to the authorities and to the policy that they were implementing.

So, confidence indexes to the institutions of power of Ukraine ranks last among European countries. Trust to parliament was 1.99 on a 10-point scale (last among European countries), dissatisfaction with government – 2.25 points, confidence in the judicial system – 2.26 points (last place), confidence in the police – 2.5 points (last place).

This shows that the political power of that time, in fact, lost its legitimacy. After all, it should benot only the legitimacy of power formation, but if it is considered to be legitimate by general population.

A serious worsening socio-economic situation, total corruption, systematic curtailment of democratic rights and freedoms, the inability to resolve existing problems by legal means and democratic procedures are the factors that pushed people to revolutionary action.

According to international institution's rate since the last parliamentary elections democracy in Ukraine «slipped» with 53 positions (incomplete democracy) to 79 (hybrid mode).

Among all the countries of Europe only in Ukraine it was recorded the greatest setback in the field of democracy. In accordance with this indicator, Ukraine is in seventh place in the world – it was outstripped only by six countries: Fiji, Iran, Ethiopia, Egypt and Gambia. In terms of freedom of speech in Ukraine it is on 131-133 place together with African states such as Zambia and South Sudan.

All these become the factors that brought the people to resist the government. But usually the only one worsening of socio-economic situation and the critical level of civil rights and freedoms cannot be sufficient reasons for the social revolution. In other countries with the worse indicators they are not flashing. The social revolutions usually start when people are completely disappointed in the government's ability to improve their.

The important factor that reinforced the revolutionary mood, was the f discrimination of more or less number of the population – formally equal. In their eyes the government does not have complete legitimacy, national or religious leaders often act as counter-elite of revolutionary action. Indicative in this aspect is the fact that the bulk of the protesters – mostly Ukrainian speakers in western Ukraine, Greek Catholics on religious affiliation. Their solidarity with the protesters also expressed Crimean Tatars, almost all major religious denominations except ROC.

But the main reason that raised people to public resistance was the inability of the new political elite begin the reforming of Ukraine. It continues its independent existence as inefficient

hybrid of old post-Soviet and new oligarchic methods of management and leadership. The present political crisis in Ukraine is only the external expression of deep systemic crisis, which is now experiencing the state, not reformed since the collapse of the former USSR.

Lack of political will for real reform, the accumulation of errors and miscalculations since the 1990s led to the crisis in the state. Thus, the total state and guaranteed debt of Ukraine grew in 4.3 times in the last 8 years only and amounted to 69 billion dollars USA. And despite the fact that GDP fell by 0.6%, industrial production – by 5%, agricultural production – by 11.7%.

With all the identity issues facing Ukraine today, they do not occur in isolation but in the context of world political process. Ukrainian event undoubtedly affected the world political processes, but no less influence on the course of present Ukrainian revolution.

The main factors that destroyed the totalitarian system in Czech Republic and Slovakia were the civil power. If by mid-1989 their performances against the existing regime had largely moral character and not actually carrying a real threat to the existing political system, all these events and their increasing consistency and mass point to resolve the «bottom» – ordinary citizens of Czech Republic and Slovakia refuse totalitarianism.

It was at the crucial and the decisive moment in history, the real moral leaders of the Czechoslovak society were artists, intellectuals – nonconformists, dissidents and lawyers. An outstanding role in the revival of the spirit of resistance against the totalitarian regime belonged to the activists of «Charter – 77». Among the leaders of the opposition movement of the late 80s most popular were V. Havel, Ivan Dinsber Cardinal F. Tomasek, F. and J. Hajek Kryhel. Slovakia's reform forces grouped around Alexander Dubcek, M. Kovacs, M. and J. Knyazka Montenegrin. Opposition's leaders repeatedly offered to the leadership of the CPC to start a dialogue regarding the prospects of social development. But the ruling circles not only underestimated his opponents, but also bet on forcible counter opposition-minded students and intellectuals.

The winning of new political forces led to the restoration of legislative and executive power at the federal level and local authorities. In June 1990, elections were held in the Federal Assembly, in November 1990 – to local councils⁶.

In the pre-election period «Civic Forum» and DPN transformed into a movement that united the independent citizens and small parties. Revived party and those who played a minor role in the Communists launched the «public forum» and DPN fight competitively. By 1990 in Czechoslovakia there were 40 parties.

On March 29, 1990 the Federal Assembly abolished the old name of the country – the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic; in April it was replaced by a new name – the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic. From 1 January, 1993, there are two independent states – Czech and Slovak Republic⁷.

⁶ Prichodjko V.O. "Nizna revolucija" w Czechosłowaczyni ta formuwanja nowoji wnutrisznjoj ta zownisznjoj polityki krajiny. – Uzgorod, 1999, s. 94.

⁷ Vagner A. Uczasniki «barchatnoy revoluciji» – o grazdanskom proteste kak obszern dele [Resurs elektronoczny] Radio Svobody: <http://www.svoboda.org/content/article/24474984.html>

In contrast to the development of democratic values during the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia Ukraine inertia attempts to use popular discontent led to the emergence of PR party movement – Maidan without politicians! The peak of present opposition's mindedness was the episode where public figures and activists, not politicians and parliamentarians had formulated a package of political power. Obviously, beating of protester students led (contrary to the expectations of the authorities) to outbreaking of revolutionary upsurge. This was the highest expression of revolutionary energy of the protesters. The time when a revolutionary situation could escalate into a real revolution.

However, this did not happen. The revolutionary energy of the protesters «burnt». It came to overthrow monuments, negotiations, minor skirmishes, songs and prayers. Authorities stood and moved in a revolutionary situation favorable for a point of confrontation. What is more – professional or unprofessional government opposition – subject of another study.

Events of euromaidan 2013, in comparing with Orange Revolution in 2004 when new political elite had not realized the revolutionary tasks outlined demonstrated a clear detachment from the realities of political life not only to the ruling elite, but opposition political parties and politicians.

Deploying without proper motivation and training nationwide campaign – «Arise Ukraine!» – At the time the highest elevation of revolutionary opposition political forces were not ready for it. Radical in words and in action, they played the role of peacekeepers rather than petrels of Revolution of dignity.

The negative attitude to political parties is not political technology of Bankova Street, as it is now trying to apply some drastic policies, and the result of all previous activities of Ukrainian political parties, both ruling and opposition.

Thus, civil society acted not against political parties themselves, but against the political parties in their current form, parties against elements of the existing system.

Effectiveness

Action of «velvet» revolutions were directed not against the government, against the system itself – against the conservative society and its outdated political and ethical values. It was a struggle of generations, parents and children. Thanks to real moral leaders of the Czechoslovak Society of Artists, scholars and dissidents lawyers socio-political formation ended outbreak contemporary modern society.

At present, Czech Republic is a fully democratic country with a stable political culture and growing economic power, but between the events of 1989 could draw a parallel with the events that occurred in late 2013 – early 2014 in Ukraine in Kyiev, as the Czech Republic can mediate with the EU.

Revolution is actually a continuation of the Orange Revolution and another attempt of the Ukrainian society to change not only the ruling elite, but also to force it to carry out the revolutionary programme.

Events of euromaidan and post-Soviet transformation of 1990s of the previous century clearly showed that the fall of communism and the subsequent political transition does not necessarily lead to the establishment of various forms of liberal democracy. In particular through the development of Ukraine and other states that were part of the Soviet Union, were more complex and dramatic ways than in Central and Eastern Europe.

Unfortunately, the lack of true leaders united in their goals for the good of the people and Ukraine, isolation from the realities of life of the average Ukrainian not only the ruling elite, but also the opposition political forces and politicians, personal ambition, caused the loss of territorial integrity and are a threat to its sovereignty.

At the same time a new generations are coming on the political arena that dictates a new procedure for Ukrainian politicians, through the establishment of a "new politics", different from the previous, not only by name, form, but also content that is undoubtedly one of the main achievements of the current revolutionary rebellion in Ukraine.