

Czechoslovakian media and the European dimensions of the Prague Spring. A case study on *Literárky*

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the Prague Spring and its European context, focusing on the journal *Literární Listy*. Firstly, I outline the situation for the press and censorship of the media before 1968 in Czechoslovakia. Secondly, I show the changes and opportunities brought about by the Prague Spring. Thirdly, using examples of some articles from *Literární Listy* I try to show not just a particularly Czech, but the European context of journalism of that time.

Keywords: Czechoslovakia. 1968. Prague. Spring. Communism. Media.

Los medios de comunicación checoslovacos y las dimensiones europeas de la Primavera de Praga. Un estudio de caso sobre Literárky

RESUMEN

Este artículo explora la Primavera de Praga en su contexto europeo, centrándose en la revista *Literární Listy*. En primer lugar, se esboza la situación de la prensa y de la censura de los medios de comunicación de masas antes de 1968 en Checoslovaquia. En segundo, se muestran los cambios y oportunidades abiertos por la primavera de Praga. En tercero, usando ejemplos de algunos artículos de *Literární Listy* se intenta mostrar no sólo el periodismo checo de aquel tiempo, sino el contexto general europeo.

Palabras clave: Checoslovaquia. 1968. Primavera de Praga. Comunismo. Medios de comunicación.

Telling the truth

“Draw out the truth. [...] The truth is there where the man is keen on something, is stirring up, is being burnt by something. A truth that doesn't make you burn, a neutral truth, a cold truth should be called its true name: a lie. The truth is spurt- ing from the depth, in no case from the concrete.”¹

The above mentioned quotation was the fifth rule in how to write a periodical, published in the first volume of *Obroda*. *Obroda* was a Czechoslovakian magazine, which came into being during the Prague Spring. This volume was published after the invasion of the Warsaw Pact troops, even after the first regulations, which aimed to reestablish censorship in Czechoslovakia.² It was clear that there would be no future for the freedom of speech; a freedom, which had been won just some months before. But this paragraph was at the same time evidence of the will to keep freedom of speech.

The article was published by *Obroda* in October 1968. A formal abolition of censorship took place four months before. But in reality freedom of speech had actually existed since the pioneering plenum of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia at the beginning of the year (3th – 5th of January 1968). So Czechoslovakian society had had an opportunity to taste the freedom of speech. And it is no wonder, they didn't want to relinquish it.

Government control of the press had lasted as long as socialist Czechoslovakia itself. The government institutions and laws governing freedom of speech changed repeatedly during the after war period. But the existence of censorship lasted uninter- rupted through all this time. Immediately before the Prague Spring censorship was covered by the act no. 81/ 1966, which was enforced from January 1967.³ This act was an amendment to the restrictive act of 1950.⁴ It guaranteed, at least in the- ory, a lot of civil liberties unlike the previous law. It gave citizens the right (para- graph 1) – in line with the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech – to use

¹ BEDNAŘ, Kamil: "Magna charta zásad o tem, jak dělat nebo nedělat časopis", *Obroda*, 1 (1968), p. 2.

The quotations, as far as not marked differently, are translated by the author. *Obroda* was a weekly journal, its editor-in-chief was Jiří Šůva. The first number was published on the 9th of October 1968.

² The draft of new regulation regarding censorship was outlined on the 12th of September 1969, the National Assembly voted for this regulation on the next day. Cf. HOPPE, Jiří: *Pražské Jaro v médiích. Výběr z dobové publicistiky*, Prague-Brno: Ústav pro Soudobé Dějiny AV ČR-Doplněk 2004, p. 17, original version of the document: pp. 396-398.

³ In 1967 the institution dealing with censorship previously *Hlavní správa tiskového dohledu* was renamed into *Ústředí publikační správa*.

⁴ More about censorship in Czechoslovakia: MALÝ, Karel: „Presserecht und Zensur in der Tschechoslowakei in den Jahren 1945-1990“, in: ANDĚL, Michal; BRANDES, Detlef; LABISCH, Alfons, PEŠEK, Jiří; RUZICKA, Thomas (eds.): *Propaganda, (Selbst-)zensur, Sensation. Grenzen von Presse- und Wissenschaftsfreiheit in Deutschland und Tschechien seit 1871*, Essen: Klartext Verlag 2005, pp. 223-233, especially pp. 227-232.

mass media to gain information and to express their opinions on all aspects of life in society and on the functioning of the state.⁵

The mission of the law aimed to support the development of citizens themselves as individuals, but by the same degree socialist society as well. The second paragraph treated this aspect in detail, addressing the mission of printed magazines and the mass media. The mission of this law was to help in offering current, real, versatile and complete news from all spheres of life in Czechoslovakia and from abroad. It should also help in supporting and implementing at all levels the interests and aims of socialist society. The law also aimed to play a part in the development of a socialist consciousness of its citizens. All this should take place under the guidance of the constitutional rules, ideals and politics of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party, which was understood to be the leading force in the state and in society.⁶ It is not difficult to understand that many of the above mentioned aims were mutually exclusive and were subservient to the interests of the Communist Party.

After the Prague Spring the atmosphere in which the mass media operated had completely changed. The Central Committee of the Communist Party decided on the 4th of March 1968 to suspend the act of 1966 and to move the responsibility for censorship from the Ministry of the Interior to another institution. The result was the inexistence of censorship. Two days later a report from this sitting reached the public and caused a complete breakdown of taboos in the media.⁷ The institutional control of the media was cancelled by the legislative act N^o 84/1968 from the 26th of June 1968 including the short phrase (paragraph 17): "Censorship is inadmissible".

How could it happen? Some remarks on the Prague Spring

The change to paragraph 17 is rooted in a short and most intensive moment in the history of Czechoslovakia, namely the Prague Spring. In order to examine the reasons of the Czechoslovakian experiment to democratize the communist system, we have to take a look at the time preceding it. In opposition to other countries of the Eastern bloc and the communist movement all over the world, the Prague Spring in 1956 did not mark a watershed in Czechoslovakian history, but a starting point as Reinhard Veser outlined in his small book about the Prague Spring. Thought processes started to develop, which couldn't be stopped later by censorship. Journalists, philosophers, economists as well as political and legal scientists began to emancipate themselves from communist dogmas.⁸

⁵ For other paragraphs see original version: Zákon č. 81/1966 Sb. z 25.10.1966 o periodickém tisku a ostatních hromadných informačních prostředcích, cf. HOPPE, op. cit. pp. 385-392.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 386.

⁷ KWAPIS, Robert: *Praska Wiosna*, Toruń, Adam Marszałek 2003, p. 50.

⁸ VESER, Reinhard: *Der Prager Frühling 1968*, Erfurt, Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Thüringen 2008, p.19.

It is not so easy to identify one specific turning point in this process, but we can find some events which mark the emancipation process of the intellectuals as well as 'normal' citizens. One such event was the 4th Congress of the Association of Czechoslovakian Writers, which took place at the end of June 1967 in Prague. A look at some of the speeches given during the congress suggests a definitive break between the Communist Party and Czech and Slovakian writers. Most of the participants of the congress criticized the cultural politics of the state. The opening speech of Milan Kundera was censored by the Party, but after the censorship he gave some remarks criticizing the state's cultural policy as an act of vandalism.⁹ The next speaker, the former Stalinist Pavel Kohout, compared the level of freedom in the press in the ČSSR and the West, which turned out obviously in favor of the latter.¹⁰

In the next part of his lecture Kohout read – by the request of the majority of participants present – an open letter of Aleksandr Solženicyn, in which the author criticized the mutilation of Russian literature through censorship. When Kohout read the letter, the 'Secretary of Ideology' of the Communist Party, Jiří Hendrych, left the congress.¹¹

The real highlight of the Congress was the lecture of Ludvík Vaculík a day later. Ludvík Vaculík criticized in his speech every aspect of communist rule in Czechoslovakia: that the politicians ruling the state have no moral strength. Furthermore, he outlined that the communist state hasn't solved any problems for its citizens in relation to (among others) housing, schools and the economy.¹² We shouldn't forget that Vaculík was at that moment still a member of the Communist Party. His speech – because of his harshness – had shaken most of the participants. Nobody was used to hear open criticism of the Communist Party.¹³ The already mentioned Jiří Hendrych tried to regain a favorable position with faithful communists, but it was impossible. He merely achieved, that Vaculík, Kohout and Václav Havel were not elected into the Central Committee of the Association of Czechoslovakian Writers. The critical speech was soon followed by critical responses and repressions. The communists removed the journal *Literární Noviny* (Literary News) from the Association of Czechoslovakian Writers, new editorial staff were appointed and the

⁹ Milan Kundera (born 1929 in Brno) Czech writer, author – among others – of the books: *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, and *The Joke*. He lives since 70's in exile (France).

¹⁰ Pavel Kohout (born 1928 in Prag), Czech novelist, poet and playwright; former member of the Communist Party, an active participant in the Prague Spring, then dissident and founding member of the *Charta 77*.

¹¹ Aleksandr Solženicyn (1918-2008), Russian writer, novelist and dramatist; author of the well known books *The Gulag Archipelago* and *One day in the life of Ivan Denisovich* about the labor camp system in the Soviet Union; was awarded Nobel Prize in literature 1970. Jiří Hendrych – at this time 'Secretary of Ideology in the Central Committee of the Communist Party, cf. VESER, op. cit., pp. 34-35.

¹² Ludvík Vaculík (born 1926 in Brumov), Czech writer and journalist. Author of the well known manifest "2000 Words" of the Prague Spring (see below), samizdat writer.

¹³ *Ibidem*, pp. 34-35.

journal put under the control of the Ministry of Culture and Information.¹⁴ Vaculík, Antonín Liehm and Ivan Klíma were excluded from the Communist Party.

A few attempts were made to stop a new process, which had already started in the country. The public found out quickly about the contents of the rebels' speeches. An atmosphere of restlessness persisted and the process of democratization had definitely begun.

There was not much time left before the next turning point occurred. The reason was banal, the results, however, were far-reaching. The evening of the 31st of October saw the continuous breakdown of lights in a student residence in Prague. In reaction to this the students organized a demonstration through Prague during the night, carrying banners with the motto "More light!". They were not only referring to the electricity cut and the circumstances in the residences, but also to the political situation and the narrow-mindedness of the Communist Party. The police reacted harshly; some of the demonstrators were heavily injured.¹⁵

But the actual turn, a turn with serious consequences, took place in December of 1967. On the 19th of December a plenary session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party began. The main point of the discussions was the severe criticism of Antonín Novotný.¹⁶ The harshest comment was voiced by Alexander Dubček, who demanded the resignation of Novotný. He also spoke - among others things - about equal rights of Czechs and Slovaks.¹⁷ The discussion was then postponed until the beginning of January 1968. The consequence of the plenum at the beginning of the New Year (3rd - 5th of January) was a radical change in the country's political development. At first, the positions of the President and General Secretary were divided. Dubček was elected to the position of General Secretary, while Novotný stayed in the position of President.¹⁸ The process of democratization began. Without going into details - there is a multitude of publications about the Prague Spring¹⁹ - I will attempt to illustrate the process of democratization, focusing on the press, more precisely on the journal *Literárky*.

¹⁴ The journal *Literární Noviny* had a long Czech tradition. It had been already published in the interwar period, continued after the World War II and was re-founded as a journal of the reorganized Association of Czechoslovakian Writers in 1952.

¹⁵ TOMASZEWSKI, Jerzy: *Czechy i Słowacja*, Warsaw, Trio 2006, pp. 237-238.

¹⁶ Antonín Novotný (1904-1975), Czechoslovakian communist politician; since 1953 (as successor of Klement Gottwald) until 1968 - General Secretary of the Communist Party; 1957-1968 - President of Czechoslovakia.

¹⁷ Alexander Dubček (1921-1992), Slovakian Politician, political leader of the Prague Spring, General Secretary of the Communist Party (5th January 1968 - 17th April 1969) of Czechoslovakia.

¹⁸ This only lasted for a while, until the 27th April 1968. His successor in this position was a general of World War II, Ludvík Svoboda.

¹⁹ Apart from the already mentioned titles some further Czech examples: BENČÍK, Antonín: *Osm měsíců pražského jara 1968*, Prague, Práce 1991; PADEVĚT, Jiří (ed.), *Československo roku 1968*, 2 vol., Prague, Parta 1993;

From *Literární Noviny* to *Literární Listy*. Democratization of the press

In the political and other spheres began a process of change, democratization and renewal. On the 24th of January 1968 Eduard Goldstücker was elected as a chairman of the Association of Czechoslovakian Writers and the Association got control of *Literární Noviny* back.²⁰ Partly to mark the beginning of a new period the journal was given a new title: *Literární Listy* (Literary Pages). The journal *Literární Noviny* of the Ministry of Culture was published from this moment (until April 1968 when it was shut down) under the title *Kulturní Noviny*. The atmosphere in which it operated was favorable. At the start of February the Committee of the Communist Party decided to publish all reports of its meetings and also those of the Secretariat. It was a step towards greater transparency. The next measure was the elimination of the censorship directive, which had been introduced by Novotný in 1966. The official abolition of censorship took force some months later, in June of 1968 (see paragraphs above). As already mentioned, the conditions for a free discourse about any aspects of political and social life had existed long before the change in the law. The disgraced mass media got and used the chance to inform citizens about the support for the reforms and the request for the resignation of Novotný.²¹ One of the results of the newly won quality of life, including the freedom of speech, was an increased interest in mass media. The circulations more than doubled. Circulation of the *Reporter* and *Literární Listy* increased dramatically. Starting in March 1968 with 120,000 copies (after the take-over by the Ministry of Culture, P.G. J.), it rose quickly to 400,000.²² This growing interest was again a sign of an interest in politics: the ordinary people began to enter a forum, which they had previously not been allowed to enter or which had been of little interest to them due to the domination of the communist propaganda.

The journal had the best Czech writers on its editorial staff after it was once again under the auspice of the Association of Czechoslovakian Writers. We can find on its pages the articles of the journalistic elite, i.e. Dušan Hamšík (chief editor), Bohumil Hrabal, Ivan Klíma, Karel Kosík, Milan Kundera, Jan Procházka, Antonín Liehm and Ludvík Vaculík.

²⁰ Eduard Goldstücker (1913-2000), a Czechoslovakian historian of literature, publicist and expert on German literature and Franz Kafka. Cf. his memories: GOLDSTÜCKER, Eduard: *Vzpomínky 1945-1968*, Prague, G plus G 2005.

²¹ Cf. SEGERT, Dieter: *Prager Frühling. Gespräche über eine europäische Erfahrung*, Bonn, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung 2008, p. 17. See especially the Part: Chronologie der wichtigsten Ereignisse, pp. 16-24.

²² "SVOBODA". *Die Presse in der Tschechoslowakei*, Zürich, Internationales Presseinstitut 1969.

The European dimension of the Prague Spring. Debates on the columns of *Literárky*

“Everybody who knows anything about the world and wasn’t absolutely blind during the last months, will confirm, that Czechoslovakia is one of the most peaceful countries in Europe.” – wrote Liehm in *Literární Listy* on the 11th of July 1968.²³

Did this statement of Liehm reflect the actual situation? In the following paragraphs I will outline central aspects of the debates in *Literárky* and will try to put them into a European context. The aim of this is to identify in how far the Prague Spring can be understood as part of the European movement of 1968 and to what extent it was an independent event, adapted to the reality of state socialism on the Eastern Side of the Iron Curtain. It should be mentioned that the direction and the debates of *Literárky* weren’t an exception in the Czechoslovakian press. Other journals also discussed similar topics. In *Literárky* these discussions reached a high intensity due to the fact that its authors understood that they were active participants in the political changes in the country. On the question on the predomination of political themes in the journal Liehm answered: “We want to continue to be intellectuals, who feel they are responsible for politics. We hope, the freedom we wish for, will not lead to intellectuals feeling overwhelmed as it happened in the Federal Republic of Germany.”²⁴

Hamsík wished for *Literárky* to get away from provincialism and to give the journal a European character. In light of the permanent lack of paper, the running of the journal wasn’t easy.

In the first volume of *Literární Listy* Eduard Goldstücker published an article under the title “Eppur si muove!”²⁵ Reflecting the political situation in the country he wrote: “From the 5th of January this year I feel we [...] all long to realize an ideal of socialism, i.e. a human brotherhood and freedom, we are filled with a cheerful consciousness that we are returning from misleading paths back onto the right way.”²⁶

In order to assess the program of the new version of *Literárky* we have to take a look at an interview with the editor-in-chief, Dušan Hamšík, recorded by the Slovakian counterpart of *Literárky*. Answering the question on the direction of the journal, he said:

²³“SVOBODA”. *Die Presse in der Tschechoslowakei 1968...*

²⁴ SCHÜRENBERG, op. cit.

²⁵ GOLDSTÜCKER, Eduard: Eppur si muove!, *Literární Listy* 1 (1968), p.1. Eppur si muove! – means – “And yet it moves!” and the legend put it into the mouth of Galileo Galilei as a comment on the earth moving around the sun.

²⁶ Ibidem.

“We want to concentrate on questions addressing “today’s extent of the Czech problem” (*dnešní podoba české otázky*), furthermore, on the reconstruction and realization of original ideas of socialism in our country, practical and intellectual explanations for the political processes of the 50’s, and finally, the institutional and legal assurance of civil liberties in our political system. [...] We definitely don’t want to be merely a particular literary journal. [...] We want to be clearer than we have been up to now and a platform for the whole writers’ community without giving up the task of criticism and we prepared a number of improvements in the areas of *literature and life*”.²⁷

There is no possibility to show in detail how this motto was used in the everyday practice and to analyze all the aspects of all the contributions published in *Literární Listy* during the Prague Spring. In the following paragraph, I will focus on some of them and try to highlight the possibilities of understanding them as European debates about the condition not only of the ČSSR but also the European continent.

How the journal and its authors understood the connection between literature and life is apparent in the article “The Unnaturalness of a nation” by Milan Kundera.²⁸ Kundera started by interpreting Czech history not as something natural, but on the contrary, as being opposed to the history of other big European countries. Kundera said that Czechs had missed some important phases that had taken place in European history. They had to arrange the European context for themselves. Nothing had been given to the Czechs naturally: neither their language nor their Europeanisms. Their ongoing European responsibility is a choice between leaving the Czech language barren, merely as a European dialect, or being a European nation with everything this means.²⁹

Kundera didn’t stop at the analysis of Czech history, but he tried to put it into a current context and asked about the role and place of contemporary Czech literature. His goal was not to define socialist literature in Czechoslovakia merely by its limits: “We know that every kind of freedom has its limits [...]. But no progressive period defines itself by its restrictions!”³⁰ According to this statement Kundera judged the condition of socialist literature and said, that it won’t have any positive sense of itself as long as it is unable to view itself as free.

²⁷ JAKÉ BUDOU NAŠE NOVINY?, *Literární Listy* 1 (1968), p. 3. For other positions see ŠKVORECKÝ, Josef: *Nachrichten aus der ČSSR. Dokumentation der Wochenzeitung „Literární Listy“ des Tschechoslowakischen Schriftstellerverbandes Prag, Februar – August 1968*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp 1968, especially the part: Projekt einer Zeitung, pp. 11-51.

²⁸ KUNDERA, Milan: Nesamozřejmost národa, *Literární Listy* 4 (1968), p. 6. This article was a written version of his contribution to the 4th Congress of Czech Writers and had been already published in *Literární Noviny* 38 (1967), but in a shorter version. Another article about the question of freedom in the literature: CHALUPECKÝ, Jindřich: Literatura a svoboda, *Literární Listy* 14 (1968), p. 9.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

But the publishing of the article by Kundera in its complete form and also of the articles by other intellectuals showed that Czech literature was on a promising path and finding a positive sense of itself and this certainly not within Czech borders.

We can understand a series of articles published by Karel Kosík in *Literárky* titled "Our present crisis's a kind of continuation of this debate about the European destiny of the Czechs."³¹ The author inquired in some of these articles about the meaning of the Czech nation. The "Czech problem" (*Česká otazká*) he understood as a fight for a solution, a solution for a small nation in central Europe. "A nation comes naturally to a stage in which it has to defend itself against destruction, but it is a nation when it is concerned with more than its existence. An abstract existence cannot form a program and sense of a nation. Where existence is everything, the nation is getting nothing."³² Concepts such as *božnost* by Palacký or Masaryk's *humanita*, Kosík understood as a historical answer to the question on the sense of human existence. Built on such a basis, a Czech person can be understood as a subject in central Europe, a subject between East and West, between Catholicism, Protestantism and Orthodoxy, between Rome and Byzantine, between renaissance and reformation, between individualism and collectivism etc. In this context the Czech problem has to be discussed as an international question or it will not be a relevant question at all.³³

Putting his analysis into the context of the Prague Spring Kosík noticed: "Our contemporary crisis is among other reasons also a bankruptcy of casualness. That, what was believed to be obvious, appeared to be unclear and blurred. What seemed to be definitive and solved, turns out to be a provisional agreement."³⁴

Czech writers and intellectuals didn't think the situation in their country was unique. Not only were the question of equal rights between the Czechs and Slovaks, but also the relations to other socialist countries key issues in the debate. I would like to outline only two of the many relations that existed: the relation to the Polish People's Republic and to the Soviet Union.

³¹ Cf. among others: KOSÍK, Karel: Naše nynější krize, *Literární Listy* 8 (1968), p. 3; 10 (1968), p. 3; 11 (1968) p.3; 12 (1968) p. 3.

³² KOSÍK, Karel: Naše nynější krize, *Literární Listy* 10 (1968), p. 3.

³³ Ibidem. The question of the place and role of central European nations in Europe was a popular one among central European writers and publicists. For Polish examples, from approximately the same time see: Antoni Gołubiew, Juliusz Mieroszewski. (These authors also address the distinction between subject and object).

³⁴ KOSÍK, Karel: Naše nynější krize, *Literární Listy* 11 (1968), p. 3. Other articles analyzing the "Czech problem" and the process of the democratization: PROCHÁZKA, Jan: Naše cesta, *Literární listy* 11 (1968), p.1; KOHOUT, Pavel: Občane – a ci teď ?, in: *Literární Listy*, 12 (1968), p. 1, 3; KALIVODA, Robert: Demokratizace a kritické myšlení, *Literární listy*, 11(1968), p. 6; MÜLLER, Vaclav: Co je to socialismus?, *Literární Listy*, 13 (1968),p. 1, 3; PATOČKA, Jan: Falešná teorie národa a slovensko, *Literární Listy*, 13 (1968), p. 1; NA TĚMA ČESKO-SLOVENSKÉ, *Literární listy*, 15 (1968), p. 1, 3; KUNDERA, Milan: Malý a velký, *Literární Listy*, 23 (1968), p. 1.

In examining the relationship with Poland we have to be aware that the situation in this country was far from being a peaceful and quiet one at this time. With the student protests in March and the anti-Semitic campaign, which followed the protests, began one of the darkest periods in post-war Polish history.

The position of the General Secretary of the Polish Communist Party wasn't difficult to define: He was opposed to everything that happened in Czechoslovakia and couldn't accept that "They [the Czechs] write and say everything they want".³⁵ This is not surprising: the cause of the student protests in Poland was the ban on the performance of a play by the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz, illustrating the lack of freedom of speech. But the reactions and reports in *Literárky* were not reflecting the views of Władysław Gomułka. Their argumentation focused on topics that were of interest to the ordinary citizen.

And the journal dedicated a pretty large space to these topics. Reports in the Czech mass media mainly focused on the situation in Poland rather than on other socialist countries and - unlike the press in other socialist countries - referred to information in the West-European mass media. Czech journalists tried to compare the situation in Poland to the situation in Czechoslovakia before January 1968. A motto, which confirmed this kind of reception, was the most popular in Poland during those days: "All of Poland is waiting for its Dubček!" (*Cała Polska czeka na swego Dubczeka!*). The best known article about the situation had been written by Jiří Lederer with the title "Poland of these weeks", analyzing the somber atmosphere after the student protest in Poland.³⁶

A completely different relation was that of Czechoslovakia to the Soviet Union. From the beginning of the Prague Spring it was obvious that the Czechs and Slovaks, with Dubček as their leader, were balancing on a knife edge.³⁷ The tone of the socialist media in other countries became increasingly harsher. The process of democratization in the ČSSR was understood as a danger to the other countries in the Eastern Bloc. But Czech intellectuals tried to explain their own position and to interpret the Prague Spring as a chance for the renewal of socialism and not as an

³⁵ BLAŽEK, Petr: "Všechno dostane jiný směr". Vliv polského Března na Pražské jaro, in: BLAŽEK, Petr; KAMIŃSKI, Łukasz; VÉVODA, Rudolf: *Polsko a Československo v roce 1968*, Prague, Dokořán 2006, pp. 45-63, here: 47. See also other articles in these book, i.e.: EISLER, Jerzy: Vliv Pražského jara na polský Březen, op.cit, pp. 33-44. The Polish edition of this conference volume: KAMIŃSKI, Łukasz (ed.): *Wokół Praskiej Wiosny*, Warszawa, IPN 2004.

³⁶ LEDERER, Jiří: Polsko těchto týdnů, *Literární Listy*, 10 (1968), p. 10; 11(1968), p. 13; 12 (1968), p. 11. There were also plenty of other initiatives taken by Czechs, such as the offering of a study- and work place for Leszek Kołakowski and Bronisław Baczko after their exclusion from Warsaw University or actions like the sending of the postcards addressed to Polish politicians with the content: *Long live democracy!* Cf. BLAŽEK,

Op. cit., pp. 51-53.

³⁷ Cf. GARLICKI, Andrzej; PACZKOWSKI, Andrzej: *Zaciskanie pętli. Taine dokumenty dotyczące Czechosłowacji 1968*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Sejmowe 1995; PAUER, Jan: *Prag 1968 : der Einmarsch des Warschauer Paktes; Hintergründe - Planung - Durchführung*, Bremen, Edition Temmen 1995.

abandonment of it. In May 1968 Eduard Goldstücker wrote in his article “Let’s negotiate, friends” to journalists in other socialist countries about the need to find a common language. Furthermore, he called for the renunciation of aggressive comments, which had been issued abroad about the situation in Czechoslovakia.³⁸ The argumentation that different, pluralistic forms of socialism could be possible continued.³⁹

The highlight of this democratization process was a text titled “2000 Words”, written by Ludvík Vaculík and signed by many other Czech intellectuals.⁴⁰ This text is a central manifesto of the Prague Spring. The additional publishing of this manifesto in three other newspapers: *Práce*, *Mladá fronta* and *Zemědělské noviny* is, according to Dieter Segert, a sign that different groups in society had been reached.⁴¹ Not that the contents were revolutionary – the main points had been pointed out many times during the Prague Spring – much more important was the message. Vaculík and other intellectuals criticized the evolution of socialism in Czechoslovakia after World War II. The elections had not made any sense, truth had not won, the theoretical law had not had any effect in real life. Vaculík called the new process, starting in early January 1968, an “installment payment” for all the guilt the communists had accumulated in the time before. The author judged the contemporary situation not as a win of something better and something new, but as a result of the weakness of the previous system. He wrote: “The truth doesn’t win us over by itself. The truth is left when everything else has been wasted! There is therefore no reason for national victory celebrations; there is only a reason for new hope.”⁴²

Writing about plans for a new plenum of the Communist Party, calling for a new system of production and distribution, demanding the resignation of people, who abused their positions, the author tried to define core issues of democracy. The part of the manifesto, which could worry other socialist countries, gave support to the government in case of interference of foreign powers with domestic politics of Czechoslovakia. Vaculík wrote: “We can say to our government we would stand behind it – if necessary with weapons – as long as we gave our mandate to whatever the government is doing. We can assure our allies, that we will adhere to all contractual, friendly and economic agreements.”⁴³ But the following sentences show that the allies couldn’t really rely on this. Vaculík wrote in the last paragraph: “This spring, just as after the war, we got a great new chance. We have now again the opportunity to take our common matter, which has the working title “socialism”

³⁸ GOLDSTÜCKER, Eduard: Domluvme se, přátelé, *Literární Listy*, 12 (1968), p. 10

³⁹ Cf. HAMŠÍK, Dušan: Zasloužíme se svobodu tisku?, *Literární Listy*, 16 (1968), pp. 1-2; PITHART, Petr: Politické strany a svoboda slova, *Literární Listy*, 17 (1968), pp. 1, 3; CHYTIL, Václav: Smysl programů politických stran, *Literární Listy*, 17 (1968), p. 5; SLÁMA, Jiří: Objevování pluralistického socialismu, *Literární Listy*, 17 (1968), p. 15.

⁴⁰ VACULÍK, Ludvík: Dva tisíce slov, *Literární Listy*, 18 (1968), pp. 1, 3.

⁴¹ SEGERT, op.cit., p. 35.

⁴² VACULÍK, op. cit., p.1.

⁴³ Ibidem, p. 3.

into our own hands and to give it its own profile. [...] This spring is coming to its end and will never come back again. We will know in winter.”⁴⁴

Although there were plenty of debates held and texts written about the manifestations of the Czechoslovakian variant of socialism, for example the article written by Michal Reiman, the feeling of risk and danger increased.⁴⁵ The journalists and draftsmen still played with well-known cultural images, such as the poster picturing a Soviet soldier with an extended finger asking “Did you sign 2000 words?” or a picture titled *Liberté, égalité, fraternité* showing Ulbricht stylized as Marianne with a copy of *Neues Deutschland* and a bayonet in his hand.⁴⁶ All these were merely attempts to control the fear. The possibility of an invasion of the Warsaw Pact troops was becoming increasingly likely. In the volume of the 15th of August, chronologically the last one before the invasion, there was an announcement of a new article series by Dušan Hamšík, titled “Writers against the power. Why has *Literární noviny* been forbidden?”⁴⁷

In reality, there was no possibility to talk and to read about the reasons that caused the ban of *Literární noviny*. *Literární listy* had - after the intervention of the Warsaw Pact troops - the same problem. In the night from the 20th to the 21th of August the Czechoslovakian dream of a ‘socialism with a human face’ came to its end. The journalists and the media fought against the invaders, but the outcome was clear.

After a few weeks, which only saw the publication of some special numbers and moments of fear, as well as moments of cooperation between ordinary people and the government, the *Literárky* came back for a while. But once again, it got a new title: *Listy*. This title was a sign for a new turning point in the political life of Czechoslovakia. It took some time until the normalization began to penetrate all spheres of civil and political life. But it had to happen. And it did happen. *Listy* was published until April 1969 (no. 19). Then it was forbidden. After the ban of *Listy* there was no space left for this kind of journalistic narration and argumentation. A

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ REIMAN, Michal: “Demokratický socialismus“. Možnosti a omezení, *Literární listy*, 20 (1968), pp.1, 6. For the position of this author during the Prague Spring see also the interesting interview with him, taken by Dieter Segert: SEGERT, Dieter: *Gespräche ...*

⁴⁶ Cf. *Literární Listy*, 23 (1968), pp. 3, 13. Another article from the 15th of August was kept in the same tone and title the week before the invasion of Warsaw Pact troops: *Nenecháme se ŠIKANOVAT ani sKANdalizovat!*, also: We don’t allow anyone to harass us and to picture us as scandalous. Included was a part of the Czech word for harass, namely **ŠIK** the name of the Ota Šik, the author of the economic reform for Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring. The second bold part of the word **sKAN**-dalizovat, was a referring to one of the most important citizen groups of Prague, namely KAN, also: Klub angažovaných nestraničů, also: Club of the Activist Independents. Cf. *Literární Listy*, 25 (1968), p. 1.

⁴⁷ Ibidem, p. 16.

mere reminder of this historical journal was another journal under the same name, which was first published in 1971 and edited in exile in Rome by Jiří Pelikán.⁴⁸

But the repressions hit not only *Literárky*. All the media settled back under the old authority: With the law no. 127/1968 of the 13th of September the possibility of censorship was re-established. It took just some time until it was used again in the official media.⁴⁹ One of the comments on this reads as follows: "Censorship has been introduced again. It is nothing beautiful. We couldn't write about many things. At times we will not write about true things. The censorship will restrict us strongly. But it will never be able to force us to write conscious lies."⁵⁰

The later years of 'normalization' show that this declaration was an unfulfilled dream. During the era of normalization the media, even the press, suffered for many years a level of moral and partly also intellectual atrophy.

Conclusion

Having analyzed the articles published by *Literární Listy* and keeping in mind the context of the Prague Spring they were written in, I finally try to answer the question: Was there anything European in these debates? Can we interpret this phenomenon as one element of the European revolution or should we rather see it as a specific moment in the history of the Eastern Bloc, in isolation from other European elements?

The answer seems to be easy and complicated at the same time. It is obvious that the Prague Spring has to be put into a global context. Not only intellectuals, but also students protested against the narrow-mindedness of respective governments in power. But the reasons and the aims in Czechoslovakia were different to those of Western countries. The aim was not the abolition of capitalism, but the introduction of some of its characteristics into the ossified, socialist system. The freedom of speech had been given in the West to the protestors before they had started to protest. They had any rights they needed at their disposal. In Czechoslovakia the intellectuals had to fight for them. There was merely a similarity to the student revolution in Poland, with one distinct difference: in Poland the revolution failed and ended with an anti-Semitic campaign. In this sense there was a kind of moment of crisis, which was typical for the Eastern Bloc.

But were the aims of Czech intellectuals only self-orientated? Not at all. Looking at the analyzed texts, we found examples, which show that the authors didn't

⁴⁸ Jiří Pelikán (1923-1999), Czech publicist, politician during the Prague Spring, director of Czechoslovakian television at this time, an opponent and journalistic activist against the invasion of the Warsaw Pact troops; since 1969 in exile.

⁴⁹ The original name: Zákon č. 127/1968 Sb. Z 13.9.1968, jimž se obnovovala možnost cenzury médií; Cf. HOPPE, op. cit, pp. 396-398.

⁵⁰ UTITZ, Bedřich: "Je něco ještě horšího než cenzura ", Politik 8 (1968).

want to present the Czech problem as a unique problem. Milan Kundera put the 'Czech problem' into a European context; Kosík wanted to find something else as the basis for a nation than only the question of existence etc.

Reacting to the situation in Poland and the attacks of the allied socialist countries, the Czechs tried to place themselves at the centre of relationships instead of isolating themselves from others.

Furthermore, the text "2000 Words" was the best example for a text, which attempted to mobilize citizens. This is also an indication for the existence of a civic society. Once again: Democratization was a permanent form in the analyzed texts. The Prague Spring was not a game without any connection to other countries, or to its own history. The Prague Spring understood itself as a renewal with the aim of Europeanization of Czechoslovakia. It tried to put the Czechs and Czechoslovakia into the European context. The only problem was: the Western European countries may have accepted and admired the changes, but in the moment of the danger – and this came with the 21th of August 1968 – they abandoned it; just like an unimportant subject within the sphere of contemporary politics.