

Czech republic essay sample

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Czech Republic is in Central Europe and South East of Germany. Initially it formed the western part of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic. Czech and Slovak had remained united for more than 75 years but they split in January 1993 to form two separate states. Since the split that necessitated the formation of the republic it has made significant changes or advancement especially in terms of the economy. Czech Republic is perceived to be a democratically stable and secure state where there are checks and balances in place to ensure accountability and efficiency but this is an understatement. The political development seems to be moving at a slower pace than the thriving or positive economic growth. Political corruption in Czech Republic affects its governance and promotes human right abuse.

This paper will give a brief history of the Czech Republic especially on the events that led to its formation as well as its economic state. In discussing the country's economy important aspects like the GDP, unemployment rates, population size and growth will be addressed. Thereafter the effects of the political corruption on governance will be tackled. In 1600s the Czechs had lost their national independence to the Hapsburgs 1620 at the Battle of White Mountain. They were ruled by the Austrian Monarchy for the next 300 years. However, when the monarchy collapsed at the end of First World War, the independent country of Czechoslovakia was formed. U. S. President Woodrow Wilson had a significant impact or influence in its formation. Although the Czechs and the Slovaks had varying cultural orientations as well as economic and technological advancement the two were interested in uniting and they succeeded.

Czechoslovakia was the only east European country that remained a parliamentary democracy from 1918 to 1938. It was however adversely affected by minority problems. Some minority members were sympathetic to Nazi Germany and they undermined the new Czechoslovak state. In September 1938 there were both external as well as internal pressures when France and the United Kingdom succumbed to Nazi pressures to force Czechoslovakia to surrender the Sudetenland to Germany. Through Hitler's influence Germany invaded Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939 and made it a German protectorate. Although by then Slovakia had already declared independence it was greatly controlled by Germans. After a civilian uprising against the Germans in Prague, May 1945 approximately 2.9 million ethnic Germans were expelled from Czechoslovakia.

The Czechs and Slovaks were reunited after the war and national elections were held in 1946. It was hoped that Czechoslovakia that would act as a bridge between East and West. After a while people were dissatisfied with the slow economic advancement that communism brought about and this led to a change in leadership in 1968. Significant changes took place for instance the step to give socialism a human face by ensuring freedom of speech, travel, religion and assembly. This was a step forward in encouraging public participation in the political arena after years of silence. Other War Saw pact countries invaded and occupied Czechoslovakia in August 20, 1968. They included the Soviet, Hungarian, Bulgarian, East German, and Polish troops. This led to the declaration that the invasion was a violation of socialist principles, international law, and the UN Charter by the Czechoslovakia government. The period between 1970 and 80 is also

referred to as the ‘normalization period’ and this was characterized by much calm.

The Velvet Revolution was precipitated by the effects of human right activists who complained of the government’s failure to implement human rights provisions of documents it had signed, including the state’s own constitution; international covenants on political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights. The activists formed or rather signed the Charter 77 manifesto. Communists were very much against the pro-democrats as was evident with their violent dismissing of their peaceful demonstration in November 1989. However this was short lived as communism lost popularity when the Charter 77 and other groups joined forces advocating for bureaucratic reforms as well as civil liberties in the country. They gained massive support and this precipitated the collapse of communism and the president was inclined to resign.

However a coalition government with a communist minority was formed in December 1989 and the first free elections held in 1990 where more than 95% of the total population participated. There was however much pressure especially in 1992 that led to the split of Czech and Slovakia in January 1993. Although there are discrepancies between the two regarding the ownership of public property there is a general mutual and peaceful relationship between them. The current president is Vaclav Klaus who has the following among other powers; formal head of state, has the right to nominate Constitutional Court judges, dissolve parliament under certain conditions, and enact a veto on legislation.

Economic wise the Czech Republic has been fairing quite well. The GDP growth rate per year has been fluctuating with time. The World Bank estimates that for the period 2001 to 2007 it moved from 3, 1, 4, 5, 6, 6 and 5. The unemployment rates shifted from 8. 8 to 7. 9 from the year 2000 to 2005. The year 2006 saw the unemployment levels decline to 7. 7%. It is important to note these rates were higher in areas prone to coal and steel production especially in Northern parts of both Bohemia and Moravia and also among the older and the less skilled population. In 2005, the industrial sector contributed to the country's economy by 39. 5% the same proportion it had had in 2000. Agriculture contributed to approximately 4% of the total employment in 2005 a drop from 5. 1% in 2000.

Its major trading partners include Germans and Russia. Major industries in Czech Republic are motor vehicle, machine building, iron and steel production, metalworking, chemicals, electronics, transportation equipment, textiles, glass, brewing, china ceramics, and pharmaceuticals. Significant agricultural products include sugar beets, fodder roots, potatoes, wheat, and hops. Natural resources in the country include hard coal, soft coal, kaolin, clay, graphite, timber

2007 economic statistics for the country indicate that the real GDP growth rate was 5. 7%. GDP per capita was \$24400. Agriculture comprised 2. 4%, industry 39. 7% while services contributed up to 57. 9%. The labor force was 5. 35 million out of which 4. 1% was on agriculture, industry 37. 6% and services 58. 3%. Unemployment rate was 6. 6% and the inflation rate 2. 6%. In terms of the country's budget the revenues were \$69. 49 billion and

expenditures were \$75. 8 billion. Its public debt was equivalent to 31. 1% of GDP.

The population growth in 2005 to 2006 was -0. 1 with a female to male ratio of 105: 100. The urban population growth rate from 2000 to 2005 was -0. 2% pa while the rural population growth rate was 0. 3% pa. In the same period the fertility rates were 1. 2 and the infant mortality rate was 6. The literate level statistics indicate that the rate of education enrollment was quite high for both males and females. In 2004, the United Nations (UN) estimated that the Czech Republic used approximately 4. 8% of the total Gross National Product (GNP) on education. Current or most recent statistics indicate that the population is 10, 220, 911. The age structure is as follows 0-14 years account for 13. 8% with 723, 521 males and 684, 786 females. Those between 15-64 years they constitute 71. 2% with 3, 653, 679 males and 3, 619, 872 females. Those in the age bracket 65 years and above form 15. 1% of the total population with 604, 419 males and 934, 634 females.

There is high prospect for the country in terms of trade especially due to the fact that it became a member of the European Union in 2004. The EU will create conducive environment in the business world and this will have a significant impact on the country's economy. After the privatization of most industries since the early 90s the Czech Republic enjoys a thriving consumer production. State ownership that was approximately 97% in business has declined to less than 20%. The government is also committed to promoting economic advancement through the promotion of foreign direct investment. To further encourage investment there has been effective policies to

enhance investment for instance the development of infrastructures.

The Czech Republic is a parliamentary democracy where by the citizens can make significant changes through elections.

However of significant effect is the fact that the elections are held on basis of confidentiality, generality as well as equality. The citizens elect 200 members in the Chamber of Deputies where they serve for a term of four years. Anyone aged 21 years and above is eligible to become a deputy in the Chamber. The senator's elections are held to determine who heads the upper chamber of parliament and eligible candidates must be over forty years. They are selected through a majority voting system. Presidential elections are indirect through a joint conference of both houses but a candidate must be nominated by 10 senators or 10 deputies and must be above forty years of age. When one receives an absolute backing or support from both the deputies and senators they become the president but if such is not the case then a second up to a third round becomes necessary.

Citizens of the Czech Republic who have reached 18 years of age are eligible to vote for a candidate ticket of political parties. They can also change the order of candidates through the 'voting by preference votes'. The right to vote is not only general but also equal and direct. There also the regional elections that became effective in 2000 where all citizens above 18 years are eligible to vote or vie for a regional administrative seat and they can also change the preference of candidates. Other elections include the municipality elections and the election to the European parliament all of which are direct confidential and require a minimum of 5% votes.

Despite the potential that the Czech Republic is proud of there are still vital issues that need to be addressed if the expected progress is to become a reality. Membership in the European Union is one of the aspects that are considered to be of a great positive impact on the republic. This was evident when the country's economy surged soon after it became a member of the EU. Exports increased significantly and the agricultural sector also thrived. However, corruption and the country's leadership cause or rather warrant much worry in the growth and development of the country.

The political progress did not seem to match the economic advancement in the region. Few politicians took the initiative of inspiring the electorate and the political life seems to be worse than it previously was. Sluggish movement in reforms entailing crucial sector like war against corruption, pension and education systems, transfer of authority or rather decentralization to regional administrations, speed up of the judicial system as well as the integration of Roma minority places the political arena of the Czech Republic on the spot. Passing effective legislations that would benefit the citizens seems a far fetched dream and what has taken much influence is the quantity of political points that politicians attain rather than the quality of what they produce.

Rampant corruption is seen even at the top most level of governance or authority as was the case in the 2005 turn of events. The prime minister Stanislav Gross fell from power over corruption allegations. Concerns were raised about how he financed a luxury apartment. Eye brows were also raised on the realization that his wife's business partner operated a brothel

that had been indicted for insurance fraud. This was a clear indication of a high degree of poor governance, stunted political party development where corruption is evident. The overall effect of such rampant corruption by significant people in leadership led to the lack of faith in the government and most citizens became confused with the politics in the country. A research established that approximately 70% of the total population lacked their bearing in the country's politics.

The prime minister had earlier declined to step down stimulating much anger from the Czech citizens. The scandal was a clear indication that political ambitions were blended with business interests. This was probably the reason behind the bad state of the political system as it formed loopholes that would be exploited by the politicians for their own personal interests. His down fall could however be viewed as one with a significant impact as it would act as a lesson to other politicians that they needed to be more cautious as their actions might be followed with consequences. To most commentators this was a significant move in the country's political culture. It was also significant to the public as it intensified their awareness on the interrelationship between politics and business dealings a move that is quite unethical.

After Gross was succeeded by Jiri Paroubek, significant improvements were made in the republic and soon a coalition was established that slowed down the would-be radical reforms in health, education as well as the social security. The notion that Czech Republic resembles a fully operational democratically stable and secure state where there are checks and balances

in place; this is an understatement as is evident in its inability to solve its political crisis. Efficiency and accountability that characterize any effective democracy are lacking in the Republic no wonder its democratic governance rating is at 2. 50.

The Stanislav Gross scandal also affected the electoral system as it made the party lose its popularity. All in all with the Jiri succession the tarnished image was somehow revived. Equal representation is however lacking as the system does not allow ‘ new faces or parties’ thus undermining the minority representation like the Roma. Due to this the country ranks at 2. 00 in terms of electoral rating. Politicians in the Czech Republic dislike the activities of Non governmental Organizations (NGOs) which try to advocate for human rights in the republic and more so those advocating for public policy change. To them, such organizations are just out to interfere with their work and thus unnecessarily complicating their activities. To this effect minimal reforms can be passed in the legislature and the civil society rating is at 1. 50.

There lacks transparency in major business dealings in Czech Republic both at the local as well as national level. The outcomes of the country’s highest control body, the Supreme Audit Office regarding the massive irregularities and misappropriation of funds through various government contracts are ignored by the politicians who have the power to change the situation. The politicians regard the body as incompetent and inefficient. They also show much laxity on issues affecting the body for instance after the death of the body’s head it took two years to elect another president. It is also quite unfortunate that a democratic republic influences the nomination of

individuals in the public administration as this would be a step forward to promoting inefficiency in the system.

Despite the fact that the legislature is independent from the executive this autonomy has not been effectively adhered to as is evident in its inability to stop the parliament from passing of excessive but also poorly prepared laws. Lack of expertise, poor communication and insufficient cooperation among the existing ministries further hinders the effectiveness of the public administration as a body. Independence of the legislature was also questioned especially regarding the manner in which the police seemed reluctant when handling the Gross case.

Effective democracies allow for freedom of speech and expression and this is quite evident in the media which should be allowed to operate without government interference whatsoever. Although there are many independent and diverse media within the Republic, political influence cannot be undermined especially behind the scenes. For instance although the parliamentary deputies increased the license fees with a view of supporting the public television it banned advertising and this raised eye brows as to where they would get their finances from. The implication here is that there might be financial as well as political influence. The banning of a popular political program is also a characteristic of declining democracy in the ‘parliamentary democracy’ republic.

The reason behind the ban of such a program illustrates the way the political elites in the republic are out to exploit the citizens by hindering the effective dissemination of information. It is also a way of evading public accountability

as questions would be raised through such a program. The question of whether the recent hard earned independence was all in vain rings in many people's minds with such occurrences. The independent media is rated 2. 00. The local democratic governance has made significant progress in crucial areas like in education and health care especially at a regional level. However the greatest challenge was inadequate finances which must have been due to the rampant corruption as well as poor governance in the republic.

The responsibilities at hand by far outweigh the funds at the local administrations disposal. The local democratic governance is also ranked at 2. 00. The judicial systems in the Republic are also questionable. Reforms geared to increase efficiency in the system are ignored and so are the legislations that would eliminate discrimination or provisions that would boost gender equality. It is ironical how improvements regarding judicial appointments and their pay rise were easier to make than reforms to promote efficiency. All in all 2006 registered a slight improvement in the NIT rating as it shifted from 2. 50 to 2. 25. Corruption was rated 3. 50 in 2006 and it is evident that it is widely spread both in the local as well as the national level.

Human right abuses in the Czech Republic are seen in various aspects. A clear example is the delays in the judicial system especially given the fact that ' justice delayed is justice denied'. Loopholes in the judicial system ensure that corrupt politicians are able to escape scorch free. According to the Bureau of Human Rights and labor report there are incidences of

violence against children. Gender discrimination against women can be seen by the wage disparities between males and females. Incidences of human trafficking both for sexual exploitation as well as for forced labor are also reported. Sexual harassment against women in the work place is also a common thing in the Czech Republic. Another common injustice is evident in the manner the neo Nazis violently attack the Roma minority. Discrimination is also evident in the manner that the minorities access social amenities like education. Women and minorities were generally misrepresented in politics and also in the government.

In the Chamber of Deputies women formed 30 out of 200, 10 out of 81 in the senate, 2 out of 15 in the cabinet and 5 out of 15 in the Supreme Court. The minorities were not represented at all in the above positions. Abuse of office remained a big problem in Czech Republic and it jeopardized public trust in the integrity and honesty of government officials as well as in the political parties. Bribery was also a common thing in the republic as was the case for over 10 custom officials. The law in Czech Republic does not prohibit prostitution which gives the local governments authority to prohibit it, limit or regulate it. According to NGOs report sex tourism is a problem and it involves both the males and females alike. Again the law has no provisions regarding sex tourism. In some instances it involves juveniles and this is a clear indication of human rights abuse. Prostitution is wide spread in border areas as well as in the major cities across the country.

Advertisement of brothels through fliers is prohibited but this does not deter the activities. Commercial sex exploitation of children was a serious problem

that needed immediate attention. Cases of sexual abuse against minors as was the case with a member of the Qatar royal family were illustrations of how children rights were not respected.

It was however established that most minors in the prostitution industry were runaway cases. Again, most male adolescents in prostitution did it for survival purposes. The rampant or unprecedented rates of prostitution have made the interior ministry to consider legalizing prostitution so that it can help solve the problem of child prostitution and through it the government can earn taxes. The argument brought forward is that if it is legalized then it can be easily regulated and separated from other illegal deals. The sex trade is associated with organized criminals that easily perpetrate their activities through collaboration with corrupt officials.

The paper has intensively illustrated how regardless of the economic growth in the Czech Republic a lot needs to be done if ‘ effective growth and development’ is to be felt. People’s well being is not only seen in their economic performance but also in other aspects like how their political organization is. Democracy ought to be respected so that human rights are respected too. Czech Republic should address its rotten political culture so that corruption is eliminated and human rights respected.

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