

Reviews

HLOUŠEK, Vít – KOPEČEK, Lubomír: Záchrana státu? Nepolitické a semi-politické vlády v České republice a v Československé republice.

Brno : Barrister & Principal, 2012, 120 pp.

Vít Hloušek and Lubomír Kopeček from Masaryk University in Brno belong to the top researchers of political science in Central Europe. The reviewed publication called “Rescue of state? Nonpolitical and semi-political governments in the Czech Republic and in the Czechoslovak Republic” is their last common publication. It is the first publication ever dealing with nonpolitical and semi-political cabinets in the Czech Republic. The importance of this book is indicated by the fact that these kinds of governments are deeply rooted both in the Czech political system and Czech politicians. It is not only a current issue, but very often a phenomenon occurring largely in the interwar period in the Czechoslovak Republic. The authors even think that not only the Czech politicians, but also the media and society are so accustomed to nonparty cabinets that persistent instability of party governance will cause next nonstandard governments.

The reviewed publication is a small thin book divided in seven chapters.

The first chapter is the shortest one in the book and deals with government instability in the Czech Republic as a phenomenon in the Czech political and party systems. The authors highlight that in modern history of the Czech statehood (from 1993), nine political and two nonpolitical governments ruled in the country. However, this situation damages not only the operation of Czech policy, but important political and social reforms as well, which cannot be passed in Parliament because of frequent changes of the government.

The second chapter is focused on the existence and operation of transitional governments in a wider European context. Big differences in understanding of this term are brought to attention. Finally, the authors decided that the best way is to consider nonpolitical and semi-political governments as two different types. The composition of government is the main distinguishing point. While a nonpolitical government is characterized by dominance of non-party members, a semi-political government has a balanced ratio between party and non-party people.

At the beginning of the third chapter, the authors deal with functions and roles of governments and political parties in the current democratic political systems. They are also focused on the governance issue in the context of representativeness and responsiveness, noting that the range of these two

attributes depend on political system settings. Comparing the current Czech Republic with Czechoslovakia in the interwar period, the authors favour the major model of democracy, because the Czech society is ethnically, religiously and socially a very homogenous state now. The main argument for urgent changes in the political system is the instability of Czech governments. As they say, the government average durability is only 23 months, what is less than two years and only two governments (out of 11) ruled the whole electoral period.

The next chapter is about history of nonpolitical and semi-political governments in the Czechoslovak political system. The authors underline the interwar period because this historical era is known for its instability and frequent nonpolitical governments. After having analyzed the situation they came to the following conclusion: The main reason had been to prevent a political crisis. Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, “the father of the Czechoslovak state” is known as a supporter of nonparty cabinets. He was influenced by the American and Austria political system. A second admirer of “clean policy” was Václav Havel. The authors notice some parallels in terms of nonpolitical governments between them.

The fifth chapter is the biggest one in the reviewed monograph and is focused on two nonparty cabinets in the Czech Republic after 1992. The authors analyze the reason of formation, creating and duration of these types of governments, and define the scale of a nonpolitical/semi-political government. They have little troubles with defining Tošovský’s government because the proportion of party and nonparty ministers was frequently changed. This situation was caused mainly by the split up the ODS and the ODA. The authors also deal with the influence of president and political parties on creating of government emphasizing different causes of its formation. Nonparty cabinets in the Czech political system are accompanied by a paradox situation. On the one hand, Prime minister and other ministers are very popular in the Czech society, but on the other hand, the effectiveness of government is too low, especially in the case of Fischer’s cabinet.

Kopeček and Hloušek evaluate these two nonpolitical cabinets as a political failure. In comparison of the interwar governments which were created mainly as a reaction to internal and external enemies, the Tošovský’s and Fischer’s governments had the task to lead the country to an early election. Both were characterized by large limits in decision-making powers and were focused only on political-administrative functions. The authors also criticize the relevant Czech political parties in this period. In their opinion, it is not only a crisis of political parties and that of governance, but a crisis of the whole political elites. As evidence they show that the level of fulfillment of the functions of political parties is very low.

The last, seventh chapter is focused on the solutions to enhance the Czech governance stability as proposed by the authors. They deal with two fields which would strengthen stability. Firstly, as for the electoral system, they propose to implement major elements to increase stability and responsiveness. Secondly, it is a relation between parliament and the government. They propose two basic stabilization instruments: a constructive expression of distrust and mechanism of the negative parliamentarism. After outlining where and how these mechanisms work, they come to the conclusion that a constructive expression of distrust would be very suitable for the Czech political system. In addition, the current Petr Nečas's government coalition has promised to implement this mechanism in their coalition treaty.

The publication called "Rescue of state? Nonpolitical and semi-political governments in the Czech Republic and in the Czechoslovak Republic" certainly deserves attention, because it is a unique book dealing with research of nonpolitical and semi-political cabinets in the Czech Republic. Lubomír Kopeček and Vít Hloušek consider their book to be not only a research work, but also a contribution to the discussion about the current state of Czech politics. Therefore, I highly recommend this book for students, teachers, research workers, but also for the general public.

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