

Media Coverage - Source: ČTK (10/6/2009)

Prague, Oct 6 (CTK) - The Czech Republic did more in order to come to terms with its totalitarian past than the rest of the region, Michael Kraus, U.S. political analyst and historian of Czech extraction, said at the opening of the conference 20 Years After - Communist Regimes in Central and Eastern Europe today.

Kraus, who teaches at Middlebury College in Vermont, said it was true that most people in the Czech Republic had the feeling that the country had not come to terms with its Communist past "efficiently and good enough".

However, the Czech Republic created legal conditions for property restitutions that went farther and deeper than in other countries, Kraus said.

Kraus also cited the lustration law that barred from access to senior civil service posts former senior officials of the Communist party and some of its bodies.

Kraus said in its later, more perfect form, the legislation became a model for other countries in the region.

"When trying to evaluate this, it is vital on what chair you sit," Kraus said.

Pavel Zacek, director of the Institute for the Studies of Totalitarian Regimes, said he wanted to pay attention to the lustration laws and their application in the Czech Republic.

He said he wanted to highlight not only the debate from the early 1990s that had prompted the passage of two lustration laws, but also their application. There should be also a discussion on how much the Czech Republic still needed the lustration legislation 20 years after the overthrow of the Communist regime, Zacek said.

Kraus said coming to terms with the legacy of Communist regimes was a long-term process. The experience of Western democracies that have been coming to terms until present with their past, such as the war time, has revealed that it is impossible to terminate it, he added.

The two-day conference has aroused much interest. A commission of international experts has chosen 35 lectures that will describe a variety of aspects of the life under the Communist regime, including indoctrination, advertising, gastronomy, fashion and art of the late Communist era.

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Prague, Oct 6 (CTK) - Return of the Communist regime to the Czech Republic is still a threat even 20 years after its fall, Mirek Topolánek, leader of the center-right Civic Democratic Party (ODS), said at the opening of the international conference "20 Years Later," staged by the Institute for the Studies of Totalitarian Regimes, today.

"The society of freedom still has some cracks, it is fragile and vulnerable. The public sphere is mainly to blame," said Topolánek, prime minister in 2006-2009.

Problems are caused not only by politicians, but also by courts and the media. The civic sphere, that includes private businesses and small tradespeople, has made the biggest progress since the fall of the totalitarian regime, Topolánek said.

Many problems of Czech society, not existing in Western countries, have their origin in totalitarian thought, ingrained in people. "As a result, I do not primarily see any hope for the future in economic and political achievements, but in the new generation," he added.

Topolánek attacked the rival Social Democrats (CSSD). He highlighted the coalitions of the Social Democrats with the Communists in some regional governments and warned of a similar coalition on the national level after the elections next year. The Social Democrats have repeatedly dismissed the idea.

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