



# “Apolitics”, “Anti-politics”, “Non-political Politics” and “Sub-politics” as Threats and Challenges<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT** This paper focuses on explaining “the disappearance of politics” from public space roughly a quarter century after the Velvet Revolution. From the perspective of the history of ideas it clarifies several terms, such as “apolitics”, “anti-politics”, “non-political politics” and “sub-politics,” all of which are often used interchangeably in the contemporary Czech political discourse. It outlines the different origins and development of these terms, and how they have been applied in the past. It also shows the relationship between these terms and the issue of forming “civil society”, as well as their role in “party democracy” and their current presence in the execution of political power in post-Communist countries.

**KEYWORDS** Czech Republic, political sociology, political parties, anti-politics, non-political politics, apolitics, sub-politics

**MOTTO:**

*The leaders' baffling and reason-defying incongruity prompts the baffled, disheartened and dispirited “ordinary folks” to turn their backs on and avert their eyes from Politics with a capital “P”, and to thereby allow its practitioners to get away with their game of false pretences and promises to square the circles and to reconcile the irreconcilabilities. The most effective prescription for grinding communication to a halt and for preventing its resumption is, after all, to rob it of the presumption and expectation of meaningfulness and sense. No longer can one placate one's fears and premonitions by blaming the rising anxieties about the future of democracy either on the art of hypocrisy in which the political elite have become grandmasters, or on their ineptitude coupled with personal dishonesty and corruption*

Zygmunt Bauman

Terms such as “apolitics”, “anti-politics”, “non-political politics” and “sub-politics”, which I would like to discuss in this paper from the perspective of the “history of ideas” (or more precisely the sociology of knowledge), are today often used interchangeably, or even

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promiscuously,<sup>2</sup> and therefore prevent a deeper analysis of important historical-political phenomena and social processes from the near-distant past, as well as in part those from the present. An overview and clarification of these concepts and an attempt to differentiate what they entail, both genetically and systematically, seems to be an important part of, or even a precondition for, more accurately identification of the frequently asked question today “Where have politics disappeared?”, whether or not we understand this “disappearance” as the gradual decline of the social functions of politics, as a “relocation” of its core, or as a new “functional differentiation” (Niklas Luhmann) of the entire social system.

## On the genesis and development of the problem

Since the end of World War I, we have witnessed great changes in what the term “the political” – that is, everything that traditionally belongs to the sphere of politics<sup>3</sup> – entails: the autocratic-theocratic state forms of empire and tsarism that dominated politics and power, which had earlier been considered a given, ceased to exist (in this regard Tomáš G. Masaryk characterized this situation as a *world revolution* in his book of the same name [Masaryk 1925]). New political and social “dispositives”<sup>4</sup> emerged and spread worldwide, which with varying significance and in changing form held sway throughout the entire “short twentieth century” (E. Hobsbawm), and included the homogenization of the previously clearly stratified social structure of classical bourgeoisie society, whose vertical layering had throughout the nineteenth century settled along the axis of wealth and competences, into – in its own way – an “uncertain, unsure, and anonymized” (K. Heiden), a revolting (J. Ortega y Gasset), and above all a “mass society” with ambiguous interests (E. Lederer). As Hannah Arendt demonstrated, questions of mobilizing the masses with worldviews came to the forefront, in the sense of both their perspectives and the roles of their leaders. This was accompanied by the effects of the radicalizing “war experience” (E. Jünger, T. de Chardin), the “Americanization of culture”

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2 I am of course aware that in politics in practice, phenomena, which are labelled with these “ideally typically” construed terms, are always hybrid in nature. But because we want to understand and compare them, it is necessary to define as precisely as possible just what they entail.

3 In regards to the alleged “disappearance of politics”, it is necessary to focus attention away from the frequently raised, and usually one-sided, questions of political “power” (*Macht*) and forms of its execution, and instead concentrate more on the issue of *Herrschaft* – that is, ideas about how political life is organized, about the possibilities and forms of advocating and realizing specific cultural, social, and economic interests under the conditions of actual political regimes, or more precisely, in actual political systems.

4 Michel Foucault introduced the term *dispositive* in the late 1960s and early 1970s as he transitioned from the concept of the archaeology of knowledge to genealogy. He used the term with three meanings: First, to refer to a *network of relationships*, created in a certain time and place, between individual discourses, institutions, laws, political actors, administrative measures, regulatory decisions, philosophical principles, and so on and acting as a *heterogeneous unit*. Second, it serves as a dominant *strategic orientation* for dealing with emerging situations. Third, it acts as a unifying platform, which justifies certain practices and enables *entrance into a new field of rationality* (Foucault 2004).

(jazz, slapstick films, dance, fashion), the establishment of different generational cohorts with differing political, social, and economic experience and with differing interests, the emergence of post-war calls for gender equality, growth in the significance of organizing and legitimizing ideologies, the transition from professional parties to ideological parties, and so on.

Already in the 1920s Max Weber could sense social phenomena such as the breaking away of the private sphere, lowered interest in public affairs, the personalization of politics, the uprooting of social interests, and growing tension between political conviction (*Gesinnungsethik*) and political responsibility (*Verantwortungsethik*). He analyzed them (in a structural analogy with Marx's concept of "commodity fetishism") as the result of the penetration of *capitalistic-rational material pressures* into most spheres of individual and social life. In this regard Weber used the metaphor of the "iron cage of bondage" (*eisernes Gehäuse der Hörigkeit*) of economic rationality (Weber 1921: 63). And in connection he called attention to the unloosening of the original unity of liberty and politics, the result of which, in his opinion, was the economization of the ends, a specific pushing away of human liberty (*the causality of freedom* in the Kantian sense) into irrelevant areas of life (Weber 1922: 133).

Weber's analysis of the pressures of instrumental rationality and economic calculation as general patterns of behaviour in capitalist society was built upon by conservative thinker Carl Schmitt with his concept of the present as an "epoch of neutralization and depoliticization" (Schmitt 1940: 120–133). In his opinion, after theology, science, the absolutist state, and so on, economics and later technology became "new centres of social life", whose "immanence", which truly is completely "neutral" and merely "an instrument and weapon", that "serves everyone" and is "culturally blind", which enables universal connections and the ability to rule everything, but at the cost of a special manner of simplifying things. "The technology of power," according to Schmitt, begins to replace politics, or more precisely it "decentralizes" and "neutralizes it" (Schmitt 1940: 127).

Many ideas and values, which earlier had served as the most general code for expressing group needs and class interests in society (humanity, moral equality, social justice, democracy, etc.), were marginalized and took on ever more limiting instrumental attributes ("identity democracy", "national democracy", "people's democracy", and, for example, Putin's contemporary "sovereign democracy").

We encounter Weber's key signature of politics for the twentieth century, as something spread out between "conviction" and "responsibility", again in the 1950s in the USA in relation to the necessity of maintaining the balance of power. At the time, an explicit thesis about "the end of politics" appeared as well, particularly about the end of foreign policy, as a result of limited possibilities under the circumstances of the "Cold War" and the contest between "East" and "West", which simplified how the world was viewed as well as how it was spatially arranged. Politics came to be ever more frequently replaced by or subjected to expert decision-making in the public sphere, borne by instrumental rationality, calculating aims, and the means of rational choice.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Let us recall those manifestations of the "end of politics" that were discussed at the time: the limitation of strategic possibilities in negotiating as a consequence of developments in military technology; the binding of freedom of political decision-making and the removal of elemental differences

“Politics has come to its end”, it was claimed, because bureaucrats, experts, and the technocrats of power, economists and journalists, and above all politicians themselves – in short, everyone who plays on the field of politics – had allegedly suffocated politics, as they bound it with strict rules of calculation (of purposes and risks), of the balance of power, and of mutual acceptance, as well as by compensating for the interests of power (see the behaviour of the West during the Hungarian Revolution or the Russian occupation of Czechoslovakia – sanctions, of the type imposed today, would never have occurred to anyone).

## Conservative cultural criticism of politics

Today we encounter most frequently what is called “a-politics”. Generally, this attitude involves the overall rejection of politics, that is, it is based on inaction and disinterest in the public sphere, distrust in politics and the possibilities it offers, and may be motivated by populist criticism of “those above” and their corruptness, or by elitist distancing from mass collectivism, mediocrity, and the inadequacy of politics. Here convictions of the incompetence of politicians and the ineffectiveness of politics, of the abstract emptiness of political programmes, and the unprincipled nature of coalition agreements rule.

The term “apolitics”, or more precisely “apoliticalness”, is perhaps the best way to label the most general current tendency. Lowered voter turnout is considered a European-wide sign of this trend. In 1975, on the national level in Western Europe 85 % of voters went to the urns; in 2012 only 75 % of eligible voters turned out. In Central Europe the decrease has been even more dramatic. In 1991 voter turnout was 72 %, a figure that dropped to just 57 % on the national level in 2012. In the Czech Republic the numbers are even more stark, particularly in turnouts for senate and EU elections, and in many cases in municipal elections as well, where turnout fluctuates at around 30 %. Decreasing voter turnout is becoming more prevalent among the less educated.

There are several reasons for this trend; here, some of them can at least be outlined:

- a loss in the penetrating power of political solutions has occurred due to their relativization (within coalitions) against the platforms of individual political parties;
- fear of manipulating expectations has grown;
- centralized power and politics has lost contact with the day-to-day life of ordinary citizens;
- the social structure of European societies has changed (the breakdown of class-based society, the rise of new professional groups);
- mass characteristics of life have expanded (in the Czech Republic this includes the breakdown of “First Republic” society after World War II and after 1948 as a result

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in group, class, professional (and so on) interests to the arguments of experts; the mere compensatory character of political realism; the disappearance of political ethos and leadership qualities; lobbyism and lowered voter participation; the ideologizing of ideas during campaign season and the subsequent neutralization of these ideas in opportunistic-pragmatic action; interdependence between parties and voting blocs, and so on.

of totalitarian interventions in the social structure, etc., party purges at the onset of normalization, etc.);

- consciousness of belonging to a particular social class has weakened, as has consciousness of local, professional, and group identity (the breakdown of "class" consciousness, social, cultural, and regional origins);
- tension between social interest and political choice has grown;
- a horizontal restructuring of society has occurred (with the advance of urbanization);
- structural changes in political organization as a result of the weakening or direct breakdown of nation states, which emerged in the nineteenth century and bore the unified interests of the political and economic elite, a group that in the globalizing economy has begun to fall apart.

"Apolitical" attitudes, which put group interests, private needs, and individualized activities (see, for example, the effects weather and second home ownership have on voter turnout) above public interests, are today regularly manifested, particularly in principled non-participation in elections, or the casting of a protest vote, as well as in complaining about politics. These phenomena are relatively widespread, but nonetheless have not had any contact with intellectual "apolitical" arguments.

The potential of "apolitics" is fundamentally oriented towards the non-civil, and the frequently held belief that only one political truth exists is usually also undemocratic. To generalize, it could be said that those who are "apolitical" are those who criticize politics but do not vote and who consider utilizing civil society for change as a form of naiveté, careerism, or elitism.

Thomas Mann, for example, gave this "apolitical" attitude a socially acceptable form in his reflections on the causes and consequences of World War I, collected in his *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* [Reflections of an Non-political Man] (Mann 1919), in which he anticipated later arguments of conservative and individualistic criticism of the basic convictions and concepts of the West (in the sense of a cultural entity, not a geographic locale) and even questioned the basic function of politics – in the sense that for him a presupposition of political action is mere activism and the irrational desire for change, impatience, and disrespect for a historically developed life order and for cultural values, the maintenance of which he considered to be most important.

Mann's culturally critical defence of the *non-political man* as a cultural actor grew from his "patriotic" distancing from the phenomena of the emerging mass society and mass culture, which Mann referred to with terms that are from today's perspective confusing: democracy, bourgeoisie, the West, civilization, and so on. In his opinion, in them disappeared "every distinction between that which involves an individual and that which does not" (Mann 1919: 451). Western society, which according to Mann is dominated by the bourgeoisie – he mentions England and France in particular – is in his opinion anathema to both the spirit and culture. Democracy, revered in these places, represented for him the one-sided domination of the social sphere and the "Herrschaft" of politics over life and culture. And for him, politics itself meant a "minimum of competence" (Mann 1919: 291) because it is constantly being replaced more and more by mere voting. To Mann it seemed the situation was fake and unbearable "when the supra-individual is confused with the social, or when it is misplaced completely

within the social: thereby one ignores the metaphysically supra-individual; for it is the personality, not the mass, that is the most special carrier of the universal” (Mann 1919: 232). And in his opinion this also involved the existence of the nation, which – as opposed to “humankind as a mere sum of individuals” – is a similar “metaphysical creature” and a bearer of culture, whose “value, dignity, and charm [...] definitely emerge from what distinguishes it from others” as well as “from what all nations have in common, mere civilization” (Mann 1919: 232).

“The domination of the political”, which according to Mann barbarically endeavours to integrate spirituality with politics, needs to be avoided; to do so every artistic, and in particular every “spiritual act”, must take a principled stand against the political-social sphere (Mann 1919: 236). The “non-political”, however, was not just something negative for Mann: “I do not want a parliamentary and party economic system that devastates all life with politics [...] I do not want politics. I want objectivity, order, and decency” (Mann 1919: 246; similarly pp. 232, 451).

We can construe Mann’s criticism of politics at the end of World War I as an “ideal type” of apolitical attitude, which we can still encounter today in some conservative and neo-conservative circles, where the shared experience of the nation, the settled values of its coexistence, the legality of the existing order, and the productivity of its structures contrast with politics as a loosening sphere of civic duty and activism, stemming from the abstractions of society and endeavouring for social and systematic changes in the name of development, modernization, the needs of new institutions, and the rise of marginalized groups and the legitimacy of their demands. To adherents of apolitics, Europeanization and globalization may seem to be threats similar to the totalitarianisms of the twentieth century. Distrust in the possibilities of politics and the demands to limit it just to the execution of power, sovereignty, and the maintenance of a framework of values is therefore often connected with distrust in the possibilities of, or even the existence of, society as a distinct sphere of interests and needs between the individual and the state, as we encounter in Baroness Thatcher’s famous thesis that “there is no such thing as society; there are individual men and women, and there are families”, or in the statement of French prime minister Édouard Balladur (1993–1995): “I am an apolitical person”.

### **The possibilities of grounding in the pre-political sphere: “non-political politics” and “sub-politics”**

In the late-twentieth-century Czech Republic, the concept of “**non-political politics**” was debated at length, out of historical perspective, and with little understanding. This concept drew only from the writings and speeches of Václav Havel, particularly those that emerged during normalization, with no regard for the historical traditions of Czech politics. At the same time, this term was often used as a synonym for “**a-politics**”, or it was superficially identified with the more general issue of *civil society*, moreover inaccurately interpreted as the ideology of the “third way” between capitalism and socialism. It was, however, overlooked that the issue of *civil society* had been, since the time of the Scottish Enlightenment (A. Ferguson, A. Smith, and J. Millar), a legitimate component of all reflections on the socio-political dimensions of the capitalist organization of political economy and on their value

assumptions – frugality versus luxury, productive industriousness versus corruption, respect for performance and respect for society-wide viewpoints, fair play, the validity of contracts, and so on. Since the mid-eighteenth century interpretations of the term civil society were strongly linked to the increasing entrenchment of the capitalistic way of life and the stabilization of its values (urbanity, rationality, democracy, progress, civil equality, etc.).

The issue of “non-political politics” emerged in the nineteenth century amongst the Central European *stateless nations* struggling for emancipation (Czech, Poles, etc.), that is, nations that for various reasons had been denied the possibility of expressing their own national, economic, and foreign policy interests. In the Czech lands T. G. Masaryk expounded upon this term, following the contemporary debate. He combined the Polish idea of “organic work for the nation”, which was developed in the later third of the nineteenth century after a failed uprising, with Havlíček’s idea of “small acts for the nation”, and he promoted both with the generally human ideas of justice, political and civil equality, democracy as a lifestyle and humanity as the inner tie that binds, if possible, all human activities together.

Opposed to the Young Czechs’ nationalist liberalism, which was unproductive as far as values are concerned but nonetheless found long-term success (and which after the Velvet Revolution returned in spectacular fashion), in the term “non-political politics” Masaryk emphasized the party-transcending unity of civil interests and society-wide values: education, responsibility, mutuality, honour, industriousness, and open-mindedness. At the same time, he viewed it as a means of cultivating the political sphere, as well as for improving civic self-consciousness and political literacy. Another important idea for Masaryk was that “non-political politics” within the multinational monarchy established a more general framework and context for political endeavours for a national life, or more precisely, for the life of society as a whole. In this regard, this orientation of “non-political politics” is an important cultural assumption and precondition for “political politics”, or more precisely, “party politics”.

For example, in *Česká otázka* [The Czech Question] Masaryk wrote: Czech politics must cease being just “politics”, [...] it must be based on deeper, more universal cultural work, it must be the practical application of political education and education in general. But this education never existed and still does not. Czech politicians must [...] be able to, for the affairs of the nation, utilize all the benefits of the steady progress of modern science (Masaryk 1895: 168, 181).

Rejecting false ideas of Czech historicism based on forged medieval manuscripts, against illusions about the greatness and permanence of the national substance, and particularly against compensatory nationalism<sup>6</sup>, which emerged from these forgeries, Masaryk saw in “non-political politics” possibilities for new forms of socializing the nation and building the Czech identity. It was to become another means for relating day-to-day life to more general principles, and especially for expressing more long-term political interests. It should be pointed out, while resisting the possible ideological temptation that arises from there, and which was applied in some of Masaryk’s later theses contained in *Světová revoluce* [World Revolution], that the Czech rise is in its own way paradigmatic, that it melts into general historical progress and is “interweaved into world history”.

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<sup>6</sup> For more on this, see the penetrating interpretations of Czech politics in Loewenstein (1997).



Today, the question may be asked, whether or not “**sub-politics**” or more specifically a plurality of “life politics”, can be considered a special form of non-political politics. The authors behind these related concepts, recently deceased German sociologist Ulrich Beck and British sociologist Anthony Giddens, use them to reject the traditional tension between “private and public”; “sub-politics” for them occurs outside of parties and parliaments: in public, within movements, in communities, in specific places, and in small groups, which does not mean that it has no influence.<sup>7</sup>

Both authors share in common an attempt to restore the concept of “the political” on a new foundation and with new intentions and above all new subjects; in some ways this is reminiscent of Ferguson’s afore-mentioned idea of *civil society*, stationed above mere *commercial society*, or in the given case above partisan politics. At its core is the decentralization

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<sup>7</sup> The term “sub-politics” comes from Ulrich Beck; Anthony Giddens works with the phrase “life politics” (Giddens 1992). These authors reject pessimistic analyses of the present stemming from misunderstanding ongoing changes, and which proclaim the insignificance or even the end of many sociologically relevant categories (the subject, family, childhood, work, history, class, politics and nature). With Giddens the forms of “life politics” are connected to his concept of modernity as an *institutional transformation*, where the label of *modernity* “refers to modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence” (Giddens 1990: 1). Characteristic of Giddens’s concept is its emphasis on the *discontinuous* “nature of the development of modern society” (Giddens 1990: 4) and its potential to disintegrate, manifesting in differentiation, fragmentation, and mechanic political unitarianization, which was supposed to compensate for this breakdown. Thus, Giddens, along with Beck, within the social sciences, thematized, in a non-relativist manner, the new form of contemporary social and cultural changes. He noted that these changes usually happen faster than culture and society can respond with a more permanent form of institutional stabilization (as well as the stabilization of values) (Giddens 1992: 26–27). Simply put, modernization results in transformations that occur at such a tempo that they usually seem to be discomforting and uncontrollable. Therefore, “modernization” according to Giddens can be characterized as the permanent disembedding of old institutions, values, norms, attitudes, behaviours, orientations, and so on, as well as that which has relatively recently settled into the sediment of culture, and simultaneously as a complementary process of constant attempts at re-embedding changes that have occurred, or more precisely of institutionalizing them in the form of new values, norms, attitudes, behaviours, orientations, etc. This has created for society and the forms of its cultural as well as social cohesion a confusing and in many ways risky situation, which, of necessity, activates the need for reflecting these changes, and the position of science in this reflection. The overall culmination of the ideas of the Enlightenment in the form of a “second modernity” should turn to new present-day challenges, this is, primarily to the issue of the risk associated with action and decision-making and imagining their often unwanted side effects. The identification of new social phenomena and thematic fields of this “second modernity”, such as the sweeping individualization of modes of life, is related, in addition, to the fact that in the end only partial solutions are found for universal problems; individualization is at the same time complementary to the creation of a new “world society”. It is the consequence of economic globalization, of the similarities between needs and interests, and of the intensity of communication, all of which supposedly tends towards traditional ideas of the state and nation.



of ideas of economic necessity, the questioning of the superficial delegation of political rights, and the weakening of the centralized execution of political power.

From this new sociological perspective (implicitly focused against reducing politics to power and economics), questions of the relationships between "trust", "expertise" and "risks" come to the forefront. Accompanying this are new demands (1) on creating the epistemological foundations of knowledge in modern society, (2) on analyzing the possibilities and ways for institutionalizing changes and, last but not least, (3) on reconsidering the relationships between political power and professional expertise in the realm of practical activities (Giddens 1992: 18). Therefore, with respect to similar demands, Giddens (along with Beck) speaks about "reflexive modernization" (Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994)<sup>8</sup>, which is a concept that, unfortunately, I cannot address here; I can perhaps only mention that it is the starting point for the thesis on the necessity of *rediscovering politics* as a sphere of rational decision-making, in which aims, means, and risks come into confrontation, and the permanent reflection of similar decisions, in which a new qualitative role must be played by science and its reflection of the "unwanted side effects" of political decision-making and its risks.

### ANO's anti-politics

On first sight, so-called **anti-politics** seem to hold a complementary position to the older **a-politics**. Recently, the former seems to be clearly on the rise, as demonstrated in the Czech Republic by the successful election results of the *Úsvit přímé demokracie* party [Dawn of a Direct Democracy] and the *ANO Movement* [YES Movement].<sup>9</sup> "Anti-politics", however,

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<sup>8</sup> The term "reflexive modernization" was coined by Ulrich Beck and originally referred to an unpreconceived and convincing diagnosis of the present, and later a supposedly "unfinished project of the modernization of modernity" through permanent reflection (Beck, Bonß and Lau 2001). It is based on the idea that today developments, changes, and innovations occur more rapidly than society (and politics) can institutionalize these changes (in the form of laws, norms, and rules) and enable people to clearly gain their bearings and to act without problems. As opposed to *traditional modernity* both of these proponents of "second", "other", or "reflexive" modernity reject pessimistic analyses of the present, stemming from misunderstanding changes, and which proclaim the insignificance or even the end of many sociologically relevant categories (the subject, family, childhood, work, history, class, politics, and nature). Instead of reflecting on the disintegration of original social structures and old ways of life, reflexive modernization attempts to study how modernization occurs, what are its effects, and what are the possibilities of institutionalizing these effects in new forms of social life. In connection to similar reflections on the nature of modernization, "reflexivity" has a special quality of "double" feedback – in the sense that *stakeholders* in change (modern humankind) are also *observers* and analysts (who guide their actions based on the results of reflecting on consequences and attempt to avoid the risks that are related to their actions and decisions). Here, scientific objectivity gains a new position in place of vague ideologies, and professional expertise becomes a necessity.

<sup>9</sup> The rising trust of voters in the potential of technocratic-managerial "anti-politics" for political reform seems to indicate two things: (a) growing scepticism of the ability of partisan politics to resolve corruption scandals and to create an environment aversive to corruption, and (b) distrust in the ability of parties to deal with economic and social problems. For the time being, it remains

is certainly not interchangeable with “apoliticalness” – that is, with disinterest in “affairs political” and public – nor with “non-political politics” as the “pre-political” sphere of civil activity, of cultivating the public, of demands for political literacy and culture, and so on.

Anti-politics feeds off of public and intraparty scandals, the abuse of power, and attempts “to sweep things under the carpet” – in short everything that makes political action and decision-making discreditable and opaque; its means are a simplifying vision of the potential of running the state technocratically or like a business.

A “democracy of legitimacy”, in which political expression is permitted only for “legitimately elected parties” (German president Richard von Weizsäcker in this regard criticized “party democracy” as limiting public initiatives), and which in the Czech Republic Václav Klaus quite unilaterally advocated, should take into consideration only the interests and needs of the victorious party, its members, clients, and perhaps even its voters. It got stuck up on the things it was trying not to see: corruption scandals, growing from blindness and ignorance as well as from the incapability of rationally analyzing and predicting “unwanted” and generally long-term “side effects”, which were the results of one-dimensional, inconsistent, and not uncommonly often personal interests and decisions (which are nonetheless strongly imposed through power and not brought up for discussion with the opposition). Self-confident and arrogant ways of ruling can elicit antipathy even when they bring success in economics and foreign policy, as recent developments in Poland attest.

Reactions may be “conservative” or “national” utopias (as in Poland and Hungary), or “anti-politics”, which seems to be an analogous development in the Czech Republic. The fundamental performative paradox of “anti-politics” (when in the end it is necessary to do something different than that which is said) consists in the fact that it rejects politics in its current form, but at the same time it self-consciously works within its existing structures and with its mechanisms. “Anti-politics” takes a critical, even disapproving, stance towards existing forms of politics, towards the ways in which the interests of voters are represented, and towards the mechanisms for delegating their power, but at the same time takes advantage of and works with them. It questions the existing separation of powers as well as the political legitimacy and, particularly, the abilities of established and “privatized” parties; nonetheless, it is forced to negotiate with them as if it was one of them.

In practice, “anti-politics” is marked by an emphasis on professional competence in running ministries, objectivity in negotiations, and pressure to increase the role of experts in running the state, as well a new intensity in advocating purely economic aspects of state management, which are based on instrumentally rational decision-making, the consequences of which in many cases can be socially and liberally problematic.

In general, three versions of “anti-politics” can be distinguished: (a) intellectual humanist, (b) populist, and (c) managerial-technocratic. All three work in a similar way, although not resignedly so, as is the case with “apolitics”, with the idea of elected politicians having

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undecided, and in a longer-term perspective uncertain, whether “anti-politics” will revitalize or bury parliamentarism, democratic rule, and the liberal culture of rules. Much depends on ANO itself (as well as Úsvit), but much also depends on whether its own voters manage to say “no” to the anti-politics of the ANO movement in time.

minimal *competences*, with criticism of the low *effectiveness* and *partisanship* of advocated *interests*, and with pointing out *corruption* in decision-making as well as the overall *ideological* and *manipulative* character of political thinking. The principle of discussing and negotiating interests politically is replaced by a calculating, instrumental rationality, and political problems are removed rather than dealt with; in some cases representative democracy in general is called into question.

An example of (a) "intellectual anti-politics", mostly drawing from criticisms of civilization and culture and from "apolitics", as it was described, can be found in the writings of the interesting Hungarian writer, essayist, and cultural critic Gyorgy Konrad. Here, its individualistic base rests on the conservative conception of individual autonomy in the supposedly general situation of civilization involving the historical-social tension between the *power of the spirit* and the *power of the state*. In this sense questions of the possibilities and meaning of intellectual distance from politics are posed in every totalitarian or authoritarian social system, most intensively in culturally and politically divided post-World War II Europe.

The heart of Konrad's anti-politics was the search for radically different possibilities for action and decision-making, ones that would not accept the official (that is, "real socialist") politics and artistic program of the ruling party, but which would at the same time not succumb to political resignation. Konrad's anti-politics therefore had to be in principle radically personal and private and was – as Konrad repeatedly emphasizes – "the viewpoint of a victim" (Konrad 1987: 17), an individual's search for possibilities in a situation that he or she did not cause. Konrad did not want to formulate programs without attempting to lead or "socialize"; for him anti-politics was a personal attitude and therefore impossible in any group form, as it did not involve the *polis*, but just the individual and his or her freedom and independence, his or her protection from political restrictions and mass serfdom. Its means were "self-protection through civil society, nonviolent resistance, insistence on personal dignity and freedom, opposition against the hypertrophy of the state as well as against the military and police apparatus, and resistance to revolutionary rhetoric, a means for constantly supporting central power. Therefore, a (political) vanguard could not be recruited" (Konrad 1985: 8) from anti-politics, nor could an artistic avant-garde. Instead it was more the basis for creating a cultural network of groups of friends and free associations. It was focused against standardized elements of language used in expressing the power of the socialist regime. For anti-politics "the independent use of basic terms and a refined solidarity with those who were pointed in the same direction" (Konrad 1987: 19) were important. According to Konrad, only on such grounds could a "non-pandering culture and creative independence emerge" (Konrad 1985: 202). All adherents of anti-politics are of course dissidents, since for them what is at stake is self-protection of the civil bourgeoisie individual against the all-powerful state; he emphasizes however that this individual always "thinks differently than other dissidents", for "he is no representative but just a guardian of the power of the spirit" (Konrad 1985: 209).

Here politics was fundamentally and clearly subjected to culture, in both the broadest sense and as a means for cultivating individual and public space.

(b) Tomio Okamura's *Úsvit přímé demokracie* is an example of "populist anti-politics", unreadable in its interests and intentions, undifferentiating in its means (direct democracy being an end in itself), featuring a populist distrust of formal and informal institutions. In

restitution schemes that have grown old and simplified, Úsvit is questioning the as-of-yet fully settled institute of the political system. With its one-sided calls for introducing referendums, this movement is attempting to change the constitution instead of finding political solutions to specific problems. The idea that the greatest sum total of public opinion will lead us to effective and responsible governance is perhaps just as absurd as claiming that maximizing information will make us wiser. A side-effect of “populist anti-politics” is the tendency towards the “implosion of institutions”, towards their internal destabilization as a result of battles over power, careers, and prestige, a problem that I cannot focus on here. It is indicative of things that this movement was recently affected by a similar “implosion”.

The populist worship of the referendum and the mere opportunistic expression of problems is a long-term distraction for Úsvit politicians, which affects their role in finding political solutions to specific problems and social conflicts. If they truly wanted to enhance the culture of direct democracy, they would focus primarily on increasing funding for education and make a stand for improving the quality of public broadcasting and of public supervision of the media in general.

(c) Although the illusion of the all-powerful referendum will continue to attract a certain segment of voters, the influence and functioning of Andrej Babiš’s technocratic-managerial “anti-political” movement ANO will probably be much more important. This movement self-consciously challenges existing politics and its system and actively questions it.

This movement is in many ways just as unreadable as Okamura’s Úsvit, in terms of power ambitions and organization, as well as in the nature of the interests it wishes to advocate, and even in the personal qualities of its representatives. In many respects both movements can possibly be seen as similar in their marginalization of democracy as a search for public interest, which is considered to be given and invariable. They also share in common a distrust of the traditional organization of political life and checks on politics, which is presented as an institutional innovation reviving democracy. In the case of ANO it is compensated for with the illusion of the power of technocratic solutions and the productivity of managerialism.

But in the case of ANO, the managerial conception of politics does bring some small benefits to how ministries are run. That which – besides the above-mentioned general characteristics – may connect this approach to practice is on the one hand improving professional competences in running ministries, conspicuous objectivity, and the directness of action, as well as the potentially growing role of experts. Today purely economic aspects of state management are being promoted stronger than ever. They are founded on ends-based, rational decision-making, all of which may have many socially problematic effects. We may also consider it important that the turbo-speed rise of ANO has stimulated a public debate about the differences between the managerial approach to running companies and the democratic management of interests and governing society, and that it has helped the Czech public see more clearly how and why it is necessary to clearly differentiate between politics and managerialism.

The unclear internal organization of ANO results in a vagueness to the structure and distribution of power within the movement, to the diversification of competences, as well as uncertainty of the principles that bind its positions together; concrete responsibilities and

checks on the automatic interweaving of the influence and success of its functionaries are also unclear. For the time being, these act as independent, punctual energies of varying output, which may or may not lead to activities that lead in different directions or refute each other, and subsequently to a loss of support, to the disintegration of the movement, or even to the demise of the coalition. The danger of sliding into more populist approaches, which in traditional parties is weakened by their more transparent structure, may for the time being be prevented in ANO by its repeated emphasis on professionalism and competence, even though this emphasis too has been put into practice with varying levels of convincingsness and intensity in appointing people to various positions.

We might be curious how long and to what effect members of ANO who hold high political office can claim to be separate from politics and even repeat that they are not actually politicians but managers. It would be in the interest of democracy if they instead focused their endeavours on strengthening faith in politics rather than on building up their own credibility as an opposing force to politics. Just as with other terms (for example "lobbying"), we cannot expect a cleaning up of political activities without actually rehabilitating the term itself. In other words, the preconceived stigmatization of politics significantly complicates the cleaning up of real politics.

To briefly summarize the above, it is clear that we cannot really speak about a "disappearance of politics". Rather, it is necessary to thematize the asymmetry between the objective growth of the significance of politics in the context of changes in today's historical-political constellation (the new global distribution of influence and power and the related weakening role of "nation states", the demographic crisis and migration, post-modern and multicultural relativization of values, etc.) and between the unsatisfactory practices of political actors, unrealistic expectations of their recipients, and particularly the enduring inability to reflect the change in the political environment at all levels, on which up until now politics has relatively uniformly and monolithically imposed itself.

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