

November 17th, a little differently than we expected.

Looking back at the legacy of November 17, 1989 today, it evokes conflicting feelings.

It's great that we can travel the world, start businesses, that we have formal democracy, freedom of speech, and that elections are genuinely a choice among multiple options, though influenced by party filters in candidate nominations.

However, our expectations were still "a little" different from today's reality.

First and foremost, we have never truly come to terms with the past. When Václav Havel accepted Marián Čalfa's offer for a peaceful transfer of power from the communists to the Civic Forum, many of us saw it only as a tactical concession to prevent violence and bloodshed. It never even crossed our minds that he might have promised complete immunity, not only to all communist party officials but also to those who ignored even the communist constitution and laws. We never imagined that those who arrested, harassed, imprisoned, tortured during interrogations, or forced people into exile for allegedly violating socialist order would never be held accountable.

Every crime should be punished if we don't want it to negatively affect society's morals, and that's exactly what happened here after November 1989, unfortunately. There was no "Nuremberg trial," and the vast majority of these crimes remained unpunished because the perpetrators either died or these crimes have been barred by the statute of limitations.

Many of the prominent figures of the former regime exploited their connections and knowledge from the past, plundering or selling off a large part of the nation's wealth in industrial enterprises, technologies, and agricultural land, profiting from it. Not only are many people disappointed by this development, with victims feeling frustrated, but some people are still afraid because the tentacles of the communist hydra still reach into politics, state prosecution offices, courts, the military, and the police. Instead of the campaign for "clean hands" declared by Miloš Zeman, we have a persistent system of corruption, with ties between the underworld and the government, regional, and local executives, governed by the motto "one hand washes the other." Former conscious communists have open doors even to the highest positions, as if we had lost our historical memory.

But the most capable individuals still face greater difficulty in accessing responsible positions in the economy, politics, and public administration because loyalty to political parties and superiors is valued more than moral grounding, education, competence, and ability.

We never imagined that the fourth democratically elected president of the Czech Republic would be a soldier, a general who voluntarily and eagerly prepared himself with his studies for the profession of a professional intelligence officer (spy) against American imperialism and German revisionism, and was ready to be deployed to the West to work and gather information in favor of the USSR and its satellites.

We also didn't foresee the enormous influence money would have on election campaigns and election results. We didn't expect that free competition between political parties (guaranteed by the Constitution) would be limited by purpose-driven coalitions of parties, tolerated by the Constitutional Court.

We never imagined that discussions, as the foundation of democracy, would be violently limited in Parliament, and in some local councils, citizens would be allowed to speak only once on an agenda item – a practice that was unheard of even under communism.

We never imagined that healthcare would "function" in such a way that a million people wouldn't have a general practitioner, while over a thousand of our doctors would be working in Germany and Austria.

We also didn't anticipate that the toxic air near roads in some municipalities would be 70% worse than it was in 1989.

The fact that sexual minorities would loudly showcase their differences, and the leadership of Prague would support their promotional marches through the city was also not part of our vision.

We didn't want our nation to start dying out and for the number of foreigners to increase uncontrollably.

We never imagined that a rich swindler would be able, with the help of loopholes in new laws or good lawyers, to reduce his punishment or even completely free himself.

We never expected that, with the entry into the EU, foreigners from the EU would be able to buy our agricultural land, with no positive connection to our countryside or landscape.

We didn't want the liquidation of our industrial "family silver" by selling it below market value to Western competition, or for our banks, insurance companies, and savings banks to fall into foreign hands, with money flowing abroad, nor did we want the ongoing destruction of our landscape and nature.

Open borders for illegal migrants were definitely not our wish.

Perhaps we mostly imagined a socialism with a human face, rather than ruthless capitalism.

We certainly didn't risk our involvement in demonstrations, anniversaries of the founding of Czechoslovakia, or during the Palach Weeks, or in November 1989 for all of this.

We wanted to be rid of communist dictatorship and cease to be a colony of the USSR ("We'd rather eat dry bread, as long as the communists and Russians leave!"). We certainly didn't want the division of Czechoslovakia or the separation of Slovakia. We wanted truth and tolerance.

Unfortunately, the Velvet Revolution was ruthlessly exploited by some individuals for economic and political purposes. We were too generous and too soft.

The question is whether, through upbringing or personal experience, any restorative processes will still take place in society, and whether the situation will eventually improve. It depends on those who will raise the next generations. On parents, teachers, sports coaches, leaders of interest groups, the quality of elected representatives, and public servants in the executive branch, on the new prosecutors, judges, and those free from past distortions. Let's hope this hope is realized!

Despite all the ensuing problems, the positives far outweigh them. And that's why we would do it all over again!

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