

We are ashamed of our president, Czech students say in their declaration on the Velvet Revolution anniversary

Czech students wrote a declaration on the 20th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution. They worry about the future of Czech democracy and discuss recent problems of the Czech Republic and its position in the world.

„As students, we can only be ashamed of the current image of the Czech Republic abroad. We have a president who thinks he can indulge himself in the most bizarre opinions on the European Union, on climate change, on the universe and its surroundings – and all that in our name. Yet we have no one else who presents such a high profile: our politicians behave in such a confused and inscrutable way that hardly anyone abroad can take us seriously.“ This is yet another quote from the Czech students' declaration. The role of the Czech Republic in the world, however, is just one of its topics. A reflection on the Communist past, education and fragility of the twenty-year-old democracy, these are the next three topics regarded by the Czech students as the most important for the future of their country. Therefore, they are included in their 17th November 2009 declaration called Democracy Czech-Up; the students are quite sharp in expressing their opinions: *„With whom do we in this country really want to have an alliance? With Europe, with the United States – or with Putin's Russia? And what does our country actually want? The integration of the EU, the break-up of the EU – or do we just want to go on being a nuisance?“*

"Twenty years after the Velvet Revolution, there's a new generation. We don't want to be simply contented that the totalitarian regime has been removed. We do not only want to live in democracy; we ask for self-confident, cultivated and well-built democracy", Silvie Mitlenerova says. Silvie studies at Charles University and is one of the authors of the declaration. According to her, the declaration is not a call for revolution. "The Czech Republic exhausts itself with problems of bribery and low political culture; the Czech society also does not pay enough attention to education and culture. Still, in most EU countries there are solutions for many of these problems – and it is also well-known which of them do not work. We want these problems to be eventually solved, and we want them to be solved responsibly, sensibly and without repeating previous mistakes", Silvie adds.

The whole declaration was written in an unusual way – at several workshops open to public. During the spring semester, students from Prague met at the Faculty of Arts to complete the main theses. The final versions of the text were then written by a smaller group of students and they were open to comments via the Internet. The whole job was guaranteed by the student initiative Democracy Czech-Up. "We wanted to involve as many students as possible, in order to publish a declaration which really tells the present-day opinions of our generation", Lukas Toth, one of the organizers from Charles University, explains.

Czech students' initiative Democracy Czech-Up was founded already a year ago to celebrate the anniversary of the Velvet Revolution. However, students decided not only to celebrate but also to take a critical view of what is going on in their country. The declaration is just one of the results of this effort. In addition to it, the Czech students pointed out four specific legislative problems, prepared specific suggestions to mend them and tried to convince politicians about the necessity of the change. Their effort will end up on the 17th November at Wenceslas Square, where students are organizing the concluding public happening and a students' march.

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