

1969-1989: DO WE LACK A CONCEPT,  
OR RATHER THE WILL TO UNDERSTAND?

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The author is convinced that neither the term “totalitarian” nor the adjective “authoritarian” sufficiently describe Czechoslovakia after 1969. That Czech society did not know for certain how to classify the regime of “normalization” is interpreted not only as constituting a problem for the culture of recollection, but also as the cause for many wrong decisions having been made concerning the future orientation of the transformation policy in the 1990s, with exponents of the thesis of a totalitarian regime supposing that the socialist state had been excessively strong, and demanding that the scope of governmental action be considerably restricted, and with representatives of the concept that following the “Prague Spring” there had been a rather authoritarian regime in Czechoslovakia underestimating, on the other hand, the degree to which societal structures had been destroyed. Both sides advocated economic transformation to be carried out as quickly as possible, with considerations of properly establishing the rule of law being neglected. That the rule of law was not put into practice made it possible for actors of the “gray” and black markets to maintain control of their capital into the post-turnover time. They were even able to juridically safeguard their money, often even to augment it, which resulted in the trust of society in the new democracy being considerably damaged.