

Second World War and Czechoslovak antifascist movement from the public opinion viewpoint

Jan Červenka

This year sixty years have passed since the end of the Second World War and since the liberation of our country from German occupation. In connection with this anniversary, number of events, articles, television and radio programmes commemorated and discussed the war events, key military operations, antifascist movement, etc. How does the Czech public see this difficult period of history (which so significantly affected, apart from other things, the development of the second half of the 20th century in our country and elsewhere) six decades later? What do people know about it? The results of a survey executed by the Centre of Public Opinion Research (CVVM) of the Sociological Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic in November 2004¹ within a regular continuous survey, which included questions dealing with the Second World War and the Czechoslovak antifascist movement, can give us at least a partial answer.

The introductory question of the whole thematic block dedicated to the Second World War and the antifascist movement inquired whether people find it necessary to remember the events of the Second World War.

Table 1: Is it necessary to remember the events of the Second World War? (%)

	April 1995	April 2000	November 2004
Yes	73	80	76
No	13	8	15
Doesn't know	14	12	9

Source: IVVM/CVVM

Note: Percentage in columns.

Approximately three quarters of the questioned (see Table 1) found it necessary to remember the Second World War and the events of its course; 15 % expressed a contrary opinion. The need to maintain or support historical awareness of the biggest military conflict in our history remains very strong (at least on a declarative level) even sixty years after its end. In comparison with the April 2000 survey, when the same question appeared for the last time, the number of respondents who don't find it necessary to remember the events of the Second World War slightly increased. The most recent results, however, don't differ that much from the distribution of opinions from a survey carried out five years earlier in April.

Detailed analysis of the results showed that significant factors affecting perspective on the above-mentioned question are age, and to a lesser degree also respondents' education. The need to remember the Second World War grows stronger with increasing age. Whereas in the group of the youngest respondents between 15 and 19 years of age the number of those who answered

¹ The survey was carried out between 8 and 15 November 2004 on a representative group of 1027 respondents corresponding (from the point of view of age, sex, education, size of place of residence and region) with the structure of the Czech population over the age of 15.

“Yes” was slightly over one half and the number of those who answered “No” reached over one quarter, among the respondents who have already reached the age of sixty, nine out of ten find it necessary to remember the Second World War. Total distribution of opinions according to age is recorded in Table 2. As far as education is concerned, respondents with university education find it more important to remember the events of the Second World War. From the viewpoint of political parties, KSČM and KDU-ČSL supporters more frequently stress the need to remember the Second World War. However, this is also affected by age, since both of these parties have above-average support among seniors.

Table 2: The need to remember the events of the Second World War according to age (%)

	Necessary	Unnecessary	Doesn't know
15 to 19 years	55	26	19
20 to 29 years	66	18	16
30 to 44 years	77	16	7
45 to 59 years	82	11	7
60 years or more	90	9	1

Source: CVVM, Naše společnost 2004 (Our Society 2004) survey, 04-11

Note: Percentage in line.

The survey further inquired whether we remember nowadays the events of the Second World War enough, sufficiently or too much.

Table 3: How do we remember the events of the Second World War? (%)

	All	15-19 years	20-29 years	30-44 years	45-59 years	60 years and more
Little	43	23	35	40	46	59
Sufficiently	42	53	46	45	43	32
Too much	6	8	8	5	5	4
Doesn't know	9	16	11	10	6	5

Source: CVVM, Naše společnost 2004 (Our Society 2004) survey, 04-11

Note: Percentage in column.

According to the results (see Table 3), a little over two fifths of respondents believe that the events of the Second World War are not remembered sufficiently nowadays. The same number of people finds it sufficient and 6 % of the questioned stated, that the events of the Second World War are mentioned too much. Those who were born at the time of the Second World War (59 % of respondents at the age of 60 and more) much more frequently think that it is not mentioned sufficiently. On the contrary, those under the age of thirty and especially teenagers expressed the same opinion much more rarely.

Other part of the survey focused on the importance attached to the domestic and foreign resistance movement in the liberation of Czechoslovakia.²

² Question: “How important do you find the Czechoslovak domestic, Eastern and Western resistance movement in the liberation of Czechoslovakia?”

Table 4a: Importance attached to the Czechoslovak domestic resistance movement in the liberation of Czechoslovakia

	April 1995	April 2000	November 2004
Very important	28	29	21
Important	39	38	47
Not very important	14	12	15
Not important	2	3	2
Doesn't know	17	18	15

Source: IVVM/CVVM

Table 4b: Importance attached to the Czechoslovak Eastern resistance movement in the liberation of Czechoslovakia

	April 1995	April 2000	November 2004
Very important	26	26	23
Important	41	39	47
Not very important	12	11	11
Not important	1	3	1
Doesn't know	20	21	18

Source: IVVM/CVVM

Table 4c: Importance attached to the Czechoslovak Western resistance movement in the liberation of Czechoslovakia

	April 1995	April 2000	November 2004
Very important	27	29	25
Important	43	41	46
Not very important	10	8	9
Not important	1	2	2
Doesn't know	19	20	18

Source: IVVM/CVVM

Note: In Tables 4a to 4c percentage is indicated in column.

From the results indicated in Tables 4a to 4c it is obvious that the role of the Czechoslovak resistance (whether domestic or foreign, in the West or in the East) in the liberation of Czechoslovakia is mostly regarded as important. On the whole, 71 % of respondents attach the answers "very important" or "important" to the Western foreign resistance, 70 % to the resistance on the East front and 68 % to the domestic resistance. The comparison with previous surveys shows that these overall numbers haven't changed too much, even though there has been a certain statistically relevant shift of answers from category "very important" to category "important". As far as the Czechoslovak resistance in the East is concerned, the number of answers "important" increased at the expense of other answers (not just "very important") in comparison with previous surveys. The total number of respondents who attach some importance to the resistance in the liberation of Czechoslovakia has therefore slightly increased.

Table 5a: Importance attached to the Czechoslovak domestic resistance movement according to age

	15-19 years	20-29 years	30-44 years	45-59 years	60 years and more
Very important	12	17	18	27	26
Important	41	44	47	50	49
Not very important	8	15	17	12	19
Not important	2	1	1	3	2
Doesn't know	37	23	17	8	4

Source: CVVM, Naše společnost 2004 (Our Society 2004) survey, 04-11

Table 5b: Importance attached to the Czechoslovak Eastern resistance movement in the liberation of Czechoslovakia according to age

	15-19 years	20-29 years	30-44 years	45-59 years	60 years and more
Very important	11	18	19	28	32
Important	40	39	44	52	52
Not very important	8	13	15	8	10
Not important	2	1	1	1	1
Doesn't know	39	29	21	11	5

Source: CVVM, Naše společnost 2004 (Our Society 2004) survey, 04-11

Table 5c: Importance attached to the Czechoslovak Western resistance movement in the liberation of Czechoslovakia according to age

	15-19 years	20-29 years	30-44 years	45-59 years	60 years and more
Very important	16	20	24	29	31
Important	38	41	44	50	51
Not very important	5	8	10	9	10
Not important	1	1	1	1	3
Doesn't know	40	30	21	11	5

Source: CVVM, Naše společnost 2004 (Our Society 2004) survey, 04-11

Note: In Tables 5a to 5c percentage is indicated in column.

If we divide the survey's results according to age (see Tables 5a to 5c), we can see, that in case of all three components of the Czechoslovak resistance, the answer "doesn't know" grows rapidly with decreasing age. Among the youngest respondents between 15 and 19 years of age the answer always oscillated between 37 and 40 %. Besides the indecisive answers, there appeared no statistically significant differences among the individual age groups of respondents as far as domestic and Western Czechoslovak resistance is concerned. The importance attached to the Eastern resistance was relatively higher among older respondents over 45 years of age.

After surveying the importance attached to the individual components of the Czechoslovak resistance in the liberation of Czechoslovakia, the research further surveyed the opinions on the share of individual armies of the main Allies of the anti-Hitler coalition (the Soviet Union, the United States, the Great Britain and the Army of Free France) in the liberation of Europe.

Table 6a: Importance attached to the significance of the American Army in the liberation of Europe

	April 1995	April 2000	November 2004
Very important	38	39	34
Important	45	42	49
Not very important	6	8	7
Not important	1	1	1
Doesn't know	10	10	9

Source: IVVM/CVVM

Table 6b: Importance attached to the significance of the British Army in the liberation of Europe

	April 1995	April 2000	November 2004
Very important	21	26	22
Important	49	42	50
Not very important	14	14	14
Not important	2	4	2
Doesn't know	14	14	12

Source: IVVM/CVVM

Table 6c: Importance attached to the significance of the French Army in the liberation of Europe

	April 1995	April 2000	November 2004
Very important	13	14	11
Important	36	33	38
Not very important	29	28	30
Not important	5	7	6
Doesn't know	17	18	15

Source: IVVM/CVVM

Table 6d: Importance attached to the significance of the Soviet Army in the liberation of Europe

	April 1995	April 2000	November 2004
Very important	57	56	51
Important	30	32	36
Not very important	2	2	3
Not important	1	1	1
Doesn't know	10	9	9

Source: IVVM/CVVM

Note: In Tables 6a to 6d percentage is indicated in column.

Results of the survey revealed (see Tables 6a to 6d) that Czech citizens attach the highest importance in the liberation of Europe to the Soviet Army, which is followed with a certain distance by the United States Army and Great Britain (Still, the share of both of these armies in the liberation of Europe was regarded mainly as "important"). The share of the French units in the liberation of Europe was regarded as "very important" or "important" by less than half of the questioned.

Table 7a: Importance attached to the significance of the American Army in the liberation of Europe according to age

	15-19 years	20-29 years	30-44 years	45-59 years	60 years and more
Very important	34	30	32	37	35
Important	37	51	53	49	51
Not very important	2	6	7	8	9
Not important	2	1	0	1	1
Doesn't know	25	12	8	5	4

Source: CVVM, Naše společnost 2004 (Our Society 2004) survey, 04-11

Table 7b: Importance attached to the significance of the British Army in the liberation of Europe according to age

	15-19 years	20-29 years	30-44 years	45-59 years	60 years and more
Very important	20	17	18	27	26
Important	41	48	55	50	49
Not very important	7	16	13	14	16
Not important	2	3	3	1	2
Doesn't know	30	16	11	8	7

Source: CVVM, Naše společnost 2004 (Our Society 2004) survey, 04-11

Table 7c: Importance attached to the significance of the French Army in the liberation of Europe according to age

	15-19 years	20-29 years	30-44 years	45-59 years	60 years and more
Very important	7	9	10	14	11
Important	33	37	40	37	39
Not very important	20	27	31	32	34
Not important	5	8	6	6	6
Doesn't know	35	19	13	11	10

Source: CVVM, Naše společnost 2004 (Our Society 2004) survey, 04-11

Table 7d: Importance attached to the significance of the Soviet Army in the liberation of Europe according to age

	15-19 years	20-29 years	30-44 years	45-59 years	60 years and more
Very important	33	40	51	56	63
Important	38	42	37	36	30
Not very important	5	3	4	3	3
Not important	1	3	0	0	0
Doesn't know	23	12	8	5	4

Source: CVVM, Naše společnost 2004 (Our Society 2004) survey, 04-11

Note: In Tables 7a to 7d percentage is indicated in column.

In the evaluation of the share of individual Allied troops (see Tables 7a to 7d), similarly to the evaluation of the Czechoslovak resistance in the liberation of Czechoslovakia, there was a high number of indecisive answers among young

people. Otherwise, age differentiated only opinions concerning the share of the Soviet army in the liberation of Europe. People over 60 years of age found it "very important" much more frequently. The assessment of the share of Soviet, American and to a lesser degree also British Army differed also according to political orientation of the respondents. Whereas ODS supporters indicated the role of American and British Army in the liberation of Europe as "very important" more frequently and KSČM supporters relatively rarely, the assessment of the share of the Soviet Army was the other way round.

In the next part, the survey returned to the Czechoslovak antifascist movement. It studied to what extent people know battles, operations or events, in which our resistance fighters were involved³, and whether they know any particular personalities of the Czechoslovak resistance movement.⁴ The respondents were asked two open questions to which they could state up to three answers.

As far as specific activities of the Czechoslovak resistance movement are concerned, 26 % of the questioned do not remember anything. Others mentioned most frequently the operation Carpathians-Dukla. Among three possibilities it was mentioned by 47 % of respondents. It was followed by battle of England (23 %), defence of Sokolovo (17 %), assassination of Heydrich (14 %), May 1945 Uprising (10 %), Slovak National Uprising and the participation of Czechoslovak pilots up in the landing of Allies in Normandy (9 %), battles in North Africa, especially Tobruk (5 %), participation of our pilots in RAF generally and their share in other operations. These include the already mentioned Battle of England or air support in the landing of Allies in Normandy (5 %), fighting on the East front in general or specific operations in the liberation of the Ukraine, such as for example Kiev or Bílá Cerkev (5 %), Ostrava operation (3 %), establishment of the independent Czechoslovak unit in Buzuluk (3 %), service of Czechoslovak army in the West, especially in the siege of the Dunkerque fortress (2 %), partisan movement on the occupied territory (2 %), landing of the forces on the occupied territory, intelligence and other illegal activities, etc.

Table 8: Frequency of mentioning some operations of the Czechoslovak resistance movement according to age (%)

	15-19 years	20-29 years	30-44 years	45-59 years	60 years and more
Dukla	28	35	49	50	58
Battle of England	19	21	23	23	27
Sokolovo	7	11	15	24	21
Assassination of Heydrich	15	12	14	14	15
May Uprising	6	4	10	14	10
Landing of Allies in Normandy	9	9	8	8	10
Slovak National Uprising	7	5	8	8	17
Tobruk, North Africa	2	3	5	6	5
Doesn't know any operation	39	38	27	22	15

Source: CVVM, Naše společnost 2004 (Our Society 2004) survey, 04-11

³ Question: "Do you remember any specific battle, event or operation connected with Czechoslovak antifascist movement or Czechoslovak soldiers, in which they participated?"

⁴ Question: "Do you remember any personality of the Czechoslovak domestic or foreign antifascist movement?"

Table 9: Frequency of mentioning some operations of the Czechoslovak resistance movement according to political orientation (%)

	KSCM	ČSSD	KDU-ČSL	ODS
Dukla	63	55	42	42
Battle of England	16	25	14	31
Sokolovo	29	17	19	13
Assassination of Heydrich	15	10	16	17
May Uprising	13	11	12	9
Landing of Allies in Normandy	12	10	8	11
Slovak National Uprising	15	11	6	9
Tobruk, North Africa	3	8	4	4
Doesn't know any operation	15	26	30	25

Source: CVVM, Naše společnost 2004 (Our Society 2004) survey, 04-11

It is obvious from Table 8, which presents numbers of the questioned, who mentioned among the three possible answers the given operation or battle, and which is divided according to age, that in case of events connected with East front (operation Carpathians-Dukla, defence of Sokolovo) the effect of age is much more significant than in case of operations related with West front (Battle of England, landing of allies in Normandy). This is probably connected with the fact, that after 1989, unlike in the previous decades, the media and artists paid more attention to the events on the West front than to the events in the East, as far as the Second World War and Czechoslovak foreign resistance movement was concerned. That is the reason why younger generation doesn't differ that much in these cases from older generation, even though their awareness of the Second World War and Czechoslovak resistance is otherwise significantly lower. It is likewise with the assassination of Heydrich, to which more attention has been paid lately. As to the Slovak National Uprising, which was mentioned more frequently by people over 60 years of age, it can be affected by the lack of interest of the media after the division of Czechoslovakia or by closer emotional attachment of older people to the formal federation. From Table 8 it also follows that the number of those who didn't mention any operation, battle or event of the Second World War noticeably grows with decreasing age. It reaches its peak among people up to 30 years of age.

In case of Dukla and Sokolovo on one side and the Battle of England on the other, we note division in importance attached to Eastern and Western resistance also from the point of view of political preferences (see Table 9). Operations on the East front were mentioned relatively frequently only by KSCM supporters, whereas ODS supporters mentioned more frequently the Battle of Britain.

As concerns specific actors of antifascist resistance, 29 % of respondents couldn't recall any of them. Among many personalities, the most frequently mentioned was general Ludvík Svoboda (45 %), followed by Dr. Edvard Beneš (16 %), General František Fajtl (11 %), Julius Fučík (7 %), Captain Otakar Jaroš, Josef Gabčík and Jan Šverma (identically 6 %), Jan Masaryk and Jan Kubiš (4 %), General Karel Klapálek, Captain Ján Nálepka and General Heliodor Píka (3 %), etc. On the whole, more than a hundred of personalities participating in domestic or foreign resistance and Czechoslovak soldiers fighting on the West or East front occurred in the respondents' answers.

Table 10: Frequency of mentioning personalities of the Czechoslovak resistance movement according to age (%)

	15-19 years	20-29 years	30-44 years	45-59 years	60 years and more
Ludvík Svoboda	27	38	45	49	56
Edvard Beneš	16	10	19	14	19
František Fajtl	6	6	11	13	13
Julius Fučík	4	4	5	10	11
Otakar Jaroš	2	5	7	5	7
Josef Gabčík	7	3	4	7	11
Jan Šverma	2	2	3	8	10
Doesn't know anyone	45	45	29	27	14

Source: CVVM, Naše společnost 2004 (Our Society 2004) survey, 04-11

Table 11: Frequency of mentioning personalities of the Czechoslovak resistance movement according to political orientation (%)

	KSČM	ČSSD	KDU-ČSL	ODS
Ludvík Svoboda	62	49	42	39
Edvard Beneš	6	19	17	18
František Fajtl	8	12	13	13
Julius Fučík	15	9	2	6
Otakar Jaroš	7	8	2	6
Josef Gabčík	9	7	6	8
Jan Šverma	13	7	10	3
Doesn't know anyone	15	28	30	32

Source: CVVM, Naše společnost 2004 (Our Society 2004) survey, 04-11

We can note relatively lower awareness of the Second World War among younger people also in the question concerning personalities of the Czechoslovak resistance (see Table 10). The number of those who didn't know anybody or didn't mention anybody was significantly higher among people up to thirty years of age. From the point of view of political orientation the differences appeared especially in the case of personalities of communist resistance and/or East front. They were mentioned more frequently by KSČM supporters. On the contrary, they mentioned less frequently personalities of non-communist or western resistance, for example Edvard Beneš or General František Fajtl.

Table 12: Number of representatives of eastern or communist resistance in the respondents' answers - on the whole and according to age (%)

	Total	15-19 years	20-29 years	30-44 years	45-59 years	60 years and more
None	43	62	56	43	39	32
One	36	31	34	39	36	36
Two	16	5	9	16	19	22
Three	5	2	1	2	6	10

Source: CVVM, Naše společnost 2004 (Our Society 2004) survey, 04-11

Table 13: Number of representatives of western or non-communist resistance in the respondents' answers - on the whole and according to age (%)

	Total	15-19 years	20-29 years	30-44 years	45-59 years	60 years and more
None	62	68	74	58	63	51
One	24	19	17	29	24	29
Two	12	11	8	11	10	16
Three	2	2	1	2	3	4

Source: CVVM, Naše společnost 2004 (Our Society 2004) survey, 04-11

Table 14: Number of representatives of eastern or communist resistance in the respondents' answers according to political orientation (%)

	KSČM	ČSSD	KDU-ČSL	ODS
None	24	40	48	51
One	39	34	35	33
Two	22	22	15	13
Three	15	4	2	3

Source: CVVM, Naše společnost 2004 (Our Society 2004) survey, 04-11

Table 15: Number of representatives of western or non-communist resistance in the respondents' answers according to political orientation (%)

	KSČM	ČSSD	KDU-ČSL	ODS
None	71	55	57	58
One	21	33	29	24
Two	6	9	13	14
Three	2	3	1	4

Source: CVVM, Naše společnost 2004 (Our Society 2004) survey, 04-11

Note: In Tables 12 to 15, percentage is indicated in column.

Political and age differences are even more apparent in Tables 12 to 15, which indicated number of representatives of eastern, communist or western, non-communist resistance mentioned by the respondents according to their age and political orientation. In case of eastern or communist resistance (see Table 12) there are significant differences between different age categories. With decreasing age, the frequency of names of Czechoslovak soldiers fighting on East front or representatives of communist resistance mentioned drops down significantly. In case of Western, or non-communist resistance (see Table 13) the same trend is significantly weaker. This is due to the previously mentioned fact that during the past years attention paid to the Second World War and Czechoslovak antifascist movement usually stressed action on the West front and in the non-communist resistance.

From the point of view of political orientation, in the distribution of eastern or communist resistance on one side and western or non-communist on the other, there is a significant difference between KSČM voters and voters of other political parties, which are represented (as far as number of their voters is concerned) in the group of respondents frequently enough to be relevantly statistically analysed (see Tables 14 and 15). KSČM supporters mentioned much more frequently than others the personalities from the communist resistance or soldiers fighting on the East front. In case of the non-communist resistance and

the West front it was the other way round, even though the difference was slightly smaller. Overall, the KSČM supporters more frequently mentioned some specific personalities of the resistance, which is partly due to the fact, that the average age of the KSČM voters is higher and therefore they are much closer to the topic of the Second World War than the supporters of other parties.

From the above mentioned survey results and analyses we can deduce some more general conclusions. First, it is obvious that with the time distance the public interest and inner need to maintain awareness of the Second World War and the Czechoslovak antifascist movement grows weaker. The importance the respondents attach to the remembering of the Second World War hasn't changed significantly between the years 1995 and 2004, but it increased between the years 1995 and 2000. The differences between the generations are in this case quite noticeable. They are even more significant in the question inquiring whether we remember Second World War sufficiently and especially in the questions about specific public awareness of the Czechoslovak antifascist movement and its activities. The differences exist among all age groups. However, the turning point can be found on the level of thirty years of age (this is most obvious in the number of respondents who didn't know any personality of Czechoslovak resistance or who didn't remember any event of the resistance). This is a dividing line, which more or less separates young people, who completed their high school or even basic school education only after the revolution of 1989. This is most probably not a coincidence.

Especially during the first years after the fall of communist regime the Second World War was regarded as a highly profaned theme: its interpretation, just like the interpretation of modern history and notably the 20th century history, was in the previous decades subjected to the ideology and political needs of the Communist party and the politicians in power. Because it was politically sensitive to interpret modern history, history lessons in the years after 1989 either didn't mention this part of history at all or just browsed through it very quickly. The attitude of the political elite towards the Second World War in the first years after the revolution oscillated between absolute indifference and demonstrative effort to delimit oneself in any case and at whatever cost against the former regime.⁵ It is quite probable that the atmosphere of that time affected the 1995 survey results, in which the number of people attaching importance to remembering the events of the Second World War was relatively lower than five years later, when ČSSD won the elections and the attitude of the political elites towards the Second World War and the antifascist movement significantly changed.

After the change of regime in 1989 the interpretation of the Second World War radically changed. Attention was focused on issues that were previously hushed-up or distorted by the official interpretation. In the conditions of pluralistic democracy and freedom of expression there appeared "plural", mutually contradictory interpretations connected with the Second World War, the antifascist movement and the post-war arrangement. From the analyses of the survey results it is obvious that the attention shifted to the previously ignored (because politically troublesome) Czechoslovak pilots and other soldiers active on

⁵ The attitude of politicians towards the Second World War can be illustrated by the fact, that during the nineties, politicians lead by president Havel haven't attended the anniversary ceremony at the occasion of the destruction of Lidice, let alone the neglected and devastated state in which the Lidice memorial and the world-known rose garden found itself throughout the nineties. Another illustrative example is the double repainting of the tank on Smíchov memorial of Prague liberation at the beginning of the nineties.

the West front (to the members of the non-communist resistance, who were persecuted after the war and after the arrival of Communists at power). On the other hand, it turned out that other participants of the antifascist movement, namely soldiers fighting on the East front, are now ignored.

The results of the survey and their analyses also reveal that the view on the Second World War and the Czechoslovak antifascist movement is politically differentiated. This was most obvious in the evaluation of the share of individual Allied Armies in the liberation of Europe. It was also apparent in the answers to open questions concerning activities and personalities of the Czechoslovak antifascist movement. It is obvious that a major part of the public adopts or creates (and that certainly holds true not only for the Second World War or Czechoslovak antifascist movement) certain politically biased stereotypes that suit their current political beliefs and world perspective. This tendency is not limited only to one specific political doctrine, but it has a general character.