

Disaster politics

Democratic governments long ago perfected the art of gradualism - the policy of gradual reform - to implement changes that might be regarded as tyrannical if done quickly. With 9/11 and the financial crisis, gradualism went out the window and was replaced by disaster-driven policymaking that expands government authority with blinding speed and puts most of the burden of change on the population. The latest disaster is the state of national budgets, and drastic measures are being taken in the name of averting catastrophe. The new Czech coalition plans to impose a 50% tax on construction-savings subsidies, as a way to save a few billion crowns. This is worrisome, but not because a subsidy is being cut. Rather, because it shows that the government is prepared to undertake, without much warning, a harsh measure that can fundamentally affect the lives of many people, when gradual reform would be more effective and fairer. This overreaction makes one wonder how the government will respond if a true disaster arrives.

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