



Summary

Euroscepticism and the perception of the European integration process in the Czech Republic between 2004 and 2010

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In the present publication the authors offer an account of the transformation of the Czech public sphere and Czech politics in the context of the preparation of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe and the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty and the subsequent elections to the European Parliament in 2009. The period of preparation and ratification of the Lisbon Treaty (2004-2009) is considered to be highly scientifically relevant because it witnessed an important shift in the mainstream political discourse in the Czech Republic on issues of the European Union. This shift toward a political consensus on the Lisbon Treaty and (limited) acceptance of the European project was accompanied with the 'Europeisation' of the Czech domestic political conflict. The Lisbon Treaty became a symbol of the power struggles between the government and the opposition, both politically and ideologically.

Political contestation of the European integration process at the national and European levels has changed considerably in the last decade. Issues such as the legitimacy of European governance are no longer issues for theoretical discussion but largely structure political debates and conflicts around European integration (Trenz et al. 2011, Michailidou et al. 2012). During the preparation and ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, the intensity of these conflicts increased significantly, and we have also seen political mobilization of citizens (not only in countries with unsuccessful referenda – Spain, Ireland, France, and the Netherlands). European public space has become more conflicted but also more open; in addition to the

traditional political actors (governments and parties), we are increasingly seeing the involvement of interest groups, social and civil society movements and individual citizens.

In the context of the integration process, political contest is conceptualised in literature with an emphasis on structure and impact (Hooghe and Marks 2008). The Czech Republic is, however, largely a paradox: while the integration process has been highly politicised by political actors, political elites are labelled as Eurosceptic, citizens endorse the integration project (Braun 2009, Eurobarometr 2009). What is the relationship between the already mentioned polarization and political contest in the Czech Republic? For the sake of brevity, let us say it is primarily dynamic. In the period before the accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union, the issue of European integration (understood primarily as the accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union) was not polarizing. On the contrary, there was a consensus both among citizens and political actors.

In the period under study, however, the European integration discourse underwent a complete transformation; we have seen a shift from enlargement toward deepening of the integration process, from accepting new member states to strengthening and reinforcing the institutional architecture of the EU. On these issues, however, consensus did not exist in the EU during the ratification process, and nothing has changed about this fact until today. On the contrary, in recent years (2011–2012) we are seeing deepening and sharpening of differences between the advocates and opponents of further integration in a number of areas (e.g., fiscal policy). In this sense, the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom occupy an extreme pole in their attitudes toward the integration process: both countries refuse further integration and also demand that restrictions be imposed on some of the existing competencies of the EU and that the role of nation states be strengthened.

Is the integration process disputed in the Czech Republic, is the Czech Republic an Eurosceptic country? This publication offers a new angle on the role the integration process has played in the domestic politics of Member States. To study the Czech political discourse the most appropriate analytical model appears to be that suggested by Kopecký and Mudde, which makes it possible to distinguish between constructive criticism of the integration process and its complete rejection (2002).

In line with Kopecký and Mudde (2002) we will strive to reduce the complexity of Euroscepticism in this publication by employing Kopecký and Mudde's two dimensional typology of party attitudes toward the European Union and the integration process. We shall add to this typology a third dimension which is the attitude toward the Lisbon Treaty (and its predecessor, the Constitutional Treaty). While, according to Taggart and Szczerbiak, the Czech Republic may rank high on the scale of Euroscepticism, we should not overlook the polarized nature of the Czech domestic policy, which is also reflected in the relationship between the advocates and opponents of the EU Constitution. Our goal is to argue that the Constitutional Treaty not only creates a third dimension but that this third dimension cuts across the other two, thereby creating a three-dimensional analytical space which is the only one that allows a

truly accurate depiction of the attitudes of various actors toward the European integration process.

Conceptually, the book builds on three models of democracy for the future of the European Union, developed within the RECON project. The proposed theoretical models (Eriksen and Fossum 2007) variously deal with the dilemma between saving democracy on the level of nation states and transfer of democracy to the European level (at the cost of losing the quality of national democracies) which dominates the European debate on the democratic deficit of the EU. The text will briefly outline these individual models and will focus on their reflection in the parliamentary debates in the Czech Republic.

The first model links democracy in the EU exclusively with the nation state. Legitimacy may then derive purely from democratic institutions of Member States. In this model, the European Union is conceptualized as a functional tool which has been created to resolve problems beyond the capacity of individual Member States. From this it follows that EU institutions in this system take a purely intergovernmental form.

The second model is federal, but one which does not necessarily demand an absolute dissolution of national identities and the formation of a pan-European identity. In this model the European Union requires direct legitimacy. In consequence, this demands a certain degree of a common sense of solidarity and community based on constitutional and not ethnic principles. This model also presupposes the will toward creating strong European institutions which will contribute to building the European welfare-state. A major difference between the two models clearly lies in the allocation of legitimacy on the national or European level.

The third model can be called cosmopolitan. It is based on the assumption that democracy is possible without the existence of the State. Sources of legitimacy are distributed among the European, national and supranational levels. The model presumes mutual influence and interactions among the EU and international and trans-national non-state institutions. In the context of the Czech Republic it must be mentioned that the first President of the Czech Republic Václav Havel was a proponent of this third model. However, he did not enter the Czech debate visibly during the ratification process. He considered the Lisbon Treaty to be a compromise; the proposal of the Constitution, in his opinion, did not go far enough especially as concerns strengthening democratic aspects of European governance (Rakušanová 2009, cf. Havel 2006).

On the general level Czechs are usually considered to be Eurosceptic, and this does not concern only citizens but also elites. This can be demonstrated with the results of various empirical studies and debates surrounding the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. The Czech political discourse, however, also shows strong tendencies toward 'Europeisation' of domestic political conflict. This can be demonstrated using the example of the Lisbon Treaty which in the past became a symbol of power struggles between the government and the opposition on both the political and ideological levels. While the former government headed by Mirek Topolánek showed growing pro-European tendencies and played a key role in adopting the

Lisbon Treaty in both chambers of the Czech Parliament, Social Democrats sacrificed their position toward the EU and support for the Lisbon Treaty for a short-term political victory on the home turf. Similarly to the debates surrounding the Constitutional Treaty, the Lisbon Treaty was framed and presented as another and necessary step on the path toward the integration of the EU. The relationship between the accession of the Czech Republic to the EU and the ratification of the Treaty often came to the fore.

The debates can be summarised as (1.) relatively general, with only few actors able to translate (or even show an interest in) more complex and profound analysis of principal constitutional topics, which left many of their claims without any argument; (2.) a polarised conflict on several levels, including the level of the former ruling coalition and the opposition, and (3) personalization in the persons of Prime Minister Topolánek and President Klaus as personal adversaries. The high degree of polarisation and politicization of the Czech debate explains the crucial role of political elites in the debate to the detriment of other actors such as members of civic society and citizens.

Key actors in the debates employed two major discursive elements: (1) The Lisbon Treaty is depicted as the logical continuation of the EU integration and is linked to the accession of the Czech Republic to the EU and (2) the Lisbon Treaty, just as the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, is perceived as the main formative document determining the ideological nature of the European Union. The first discourse concerning the nature of the European integration was used by both the contending parties in the debate. In both cases we can also see an urgent need of institutional reforms of the European Union.

While proponents of the Lisbon Treaty stress the need for further European integration, its opponents claim that the Treaty would change the conditions under which the Czech Republic entered the EU, and emphasize shortcomings of the documents in terms of meritorious as well as procedural issues. The second discursive branch is ideologically highly loaded and the main line of argument is the clash between the perception of the Treaty as something establishing a reformed European welfare model (which is seen negatively by opponents of the Constitution such as President Václav Klaus, CEP, CEVRO and other Eurosceptic think tanks), or something dangerously strengthening liberalism in Europe (which is the opinion of opponents to the Constitution on the left).

Based on our findings we can support the typology of party positions in Europe developed by Kopecký and Mudde (Kopecký and Mudde 2002). Our analyses show that Czech political elites distinguish between support for membership of the country in the EU¹ and support-critique of the European Constitution/Lisbon Treaty. We can therefore confirm the original presupposition that in addition to support for the European integration (both retrospective in relation to the actors' own country and prospective in relation to further European enlargement) and support for the EU in general (which is rather diffuse), the support towards the Treaty is an equally important third dimension of this model and constitutes a useful

¹ Kopecký and Mudde talk about support for the European integration (Kopecký and Mudde 2002).

expansion on Kopecký and Mudde's typology. This distinguishing line between advocates and opponents is rather a demonstration of a more general pattern of transnational political conflicts among competing models of the European civic order.

In the period under study we can see strong ideological crystallization and cleavage. The space between the two poles—rejection of and support for European integration—remains vacant; building a compromise becomes significantly more difficult. In the period under study the then Prime Minister and ODS chairman Mirek Topolánek tried to shift from the Eurosceptic pole toward a more neutral view of the European integration process, one that is more in line with voters' attitudes. Although Prime Minister Topolánek managed to push the Lisbon Treaty through both chambers of the Parliament, his position weakened inside his party. The depth of the cleavage within the ODS can be documented with the fact that part of the Eurosceptic wing of the party was willing to support the opposition (Czech Social Democratic Party) in its successful attempt to vote no confidence during the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU. The politicization of issues of European integration highlights the fact that political actors and political discourses dominate the public sphere. Unlike other European countries (such as France) the issue of European integration did not have a mobilising effect in the period under study.

At the same time, the tight control of the public debate by political actors contributes to civil society not getting space in the media. Representation of Czech civil society in the media is generally low; in the period under study and on the topic in question civil society was represented in the media only sporadically. If it appeared at all, the appearance took the form of their members presented by the media as experts on a certain issue. However, there was no wider public debate on the issue of furthering the European integration process. The ratification of the Lisbon Treaty which had a certain potential to act as a catalyst of the debate and could contribute to the mobilization of citizens and to increasing civil and political participation, remained a missed opportunity in the Czech Republic.

In the context of the involvement of civil society in the public debate on the European integration process, we can see the problem of funding during the period under study. In the period after the accession of the Czech Republic to the EU, funding for pro-European groupings which largely depended on funding from the European Union and the State decreased significantly. Eurosceptic groups did not face this problem (or not to such an extent) because their sources and structure of funding differ in important ways and do not depend on European and state funding.

As for Czech Euroscepticism our analysis paints a highly complex picture. While on a general level the Czech Republic ranks high on the Eurosceptic scale, closer analyses show that this is a result of a deeply polarized party and political conflict between proponents of the Treaty (Social Democrats, Christian Democrats and since November 2008 also some Civic Democrats) and its opponents (the President, Communists and some newly established political parties). The high degree of polarization and a shift of the Civic Democrats to the pro-European and pro-Lisbon camp left the right-wing Eurosceptic space vacant. New

political parties such as the Party of Free Citizens and Libertas.cz tried to fill this space. Another factor which further threatened the ratification of the Treaty and strengthened the camp of Eurosceptic was the politicization of the entire process with a relatively small number of non-political actors participating in the discussions.

The overall political format of the debate on the Constitution is further supported by the argument that strong Europeisation of Czech politics occurred in the period before the accession to the EU and that political parties played an important role in this process. Thanks to the communication and international cooperation with other European political parties Czech political elites shaped preferences of voters in relation to the Constitution and European topics in general (Baun et al. 2006). Political parties therefore continue to play a leading role in Czech debates on European topics and mediate and shape processes of Europeisation in the Czech Republic. However, as this analysis shows, the culture of the debate (especially the personification of the entire conflict) clearly continues. In this situation the role of the Constitutional Court as the protector of democratic values needs to be stressed.

Czech political elites and especially Czech MPs are more sceptical toward the European integration than their counterparts in other EU Member States, both old and new. These differences came to the fore during the negotiation of the Lisbon Treaty. Its ratification proved to be a complicated process which reflected the clashes and tensions on the domestic political scene and the weak support of the government in the Parliament. Media attention to these clashes probably attracted more attention of citizens toward the Lisbon Treaty than the governmental campaign.

Examining Parliamentary debates at the time, we mostly see support for the first “intergovernmental” model. The federal model appears marginally but with negative connotations as some MPs for the ODS argued against developments toward this model. The cosmopolitan model was completely absent. In the debates MPs did not address at all the potential international and trans-national dimensions. In addition to the intergovernmental model, the concept of the EU as a polycentric, multi-level system without a clear hierarchy also appeared in the debates, with more sources of legitimacy without a vertical order which would include all institutions and community policies. This model, however, cannot be labelled as federal because it lacks the federal institutional structure, nor cosmopolitan because it sees only national and European institutions as sources of legitimacy; this model is one of shared sovereignty of sorts.

An analysis of plenary parliamentary debates on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe and the Lisbon Treaty in the Czech Republic confirmed strong polarization of the Czech political spectrum on issues related to the European Union and its future direction. Thematically, Czech MPs and Senators often concentrated primarily on discussing the reforms of national and European institutions while the changing Community policies on various issues remained on the margin of their interest. The analysis of the parliamentary debates very clearly shows that legislators perceive the European Union as a purely bipolar political environment, bounded by the intergovernmental principle and the concept of

federalism which, though it may be recognized as a theoretical option, is refused as a fitting model for a future political arrangement of the European Union.

Results of our analyses also confirm that the two main factors which influence the attitudes of parties toward the institutional reform of the European Union include an ideology along the left-right axis and the TAN-GAL² cleavage and, in the end, also participation in the government. In the total sample of studied countries, the main proponents of institutional changes of the EU were social democratic and liberal parties while conservative and radical left parties formed the most common opposition to these changes. A similar picture can be seen in the Czech Republic where ODS and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia were the main actors of opposition vetoing a large majority of institutional reforms. The opposite camp included the Czech Social Democratic Party, Christian Democratic Party, the Green Party and the Union of Freedom. Representatives of the last three parties, however, were not very active in the Parliamentary debates, probably also because of the small number of their seats. A certain exception to this pattern on the Czech political scene is the Christian Democratic Party as a conservative party which nonetheless supports the development foreseen in the Lisbon Treaty. This can be explained by the specific, traditionally strong pro-European orientation of the party. A trend was thus confirmed in the Czech Republic which we can also see in other European countries, which is that the opposition to continued European integration is shifting toward the middle of the political spectrum and classical European conservative and Christian Democratic parties, which formerly supported integration, are now located next to radical left parties (Maatsch 2010). In the Czech Republic this is not a shift that has occurred in recent years, though; rather, this is a permanent state given by the development of European politics of individual parties. On the other hand, with Mirek Topolánek a pro-European trend in the ODS strengthened to some extent.

As concerns the three models of European governance we can state that Czech Eurosceptic actors are 1.) against further European integration, especially on the political level; 2.) against further enlargement of the EU. In the Czech Republic we can therefore find an efficient political consensus only for the first model, the EU as a conglomerate of sovereign nation states. This does not mean, of course, that there are no other voices, especially among intellectuals, for the model of the EU as a cosmopolitan community but the voices of actors who hold these opinions are not heard in the very loud debate and argumentation by national interests.

Czech Euroscepticism is also documented by the media analysis performed. Its results show that a much more complex issue is at stake. We can see reflected here to a large degree domestic political clashes and a high degree of personification of these clashes. Still, as the results of the media discursive analysis show, it is not possible to consider the Czech constitutional debate to be a 'one man show'. Although President Václav Klaus was

² TAN-GAL is a type of cleavage which appears in Western democracies since the 1970s. The TAN pole expresses traditionalism, authority and nationalism, and the GAL pole represents orientation toward "green" politics, alternative approaches and libertarianism (see for example Hooghe et al. 2002:966).

indisputably a key actor who largely shaped the Czech constitutional debate and contributed greatly to this debate and its trans-nationalisation, he was clearly not the only one.

The last type of analysis which authors of the publication performed focused on new media and their reflection of the issue at hand. The analysis underscores the role of the Internet public sphere for political communication in the Czech Republic, with a case study of the election campaign for the 2009 European Parliament through content analysis of online articles and commentaries. During the European Elections in spring 2008 online media played an important role. Political debates moved to the homes of Czech citizens who could participate in them and get more information on the topic. The results of this analysis also confirm that European topics were overshadowed by domestic political brannigans which played a crucial role during the election campaigns. The most discussed European topic was the Lisbon Treaty and the meaning of the existence of the European Parliament, of which Czech citizens had a fully negative opinion. A key argument of EU critics was the lack of EU's democratic principles while many readers agreed on the necessity of membership due to security and economic prosperity. It must also be stated that the negative perception of the EU turned out to be, in many cases, a consequence of a lack of information about the functioning of the EU, a consequence of an information deficit. Electronic forums were an important tool for exchanging opinions, and acted as a platform of public mobilization, whether through Facebook or as a source of fast information.

These conclusions cannot do justice to the complexity of the issue but they suggest further directions of research in this changing and complicated moment of European integration. They also confirm the suitability of using various, in many cases complementary methods. The present book thus sheds light on Europeanization of domestic politics in new member states of the European Union, but also represents an important contribution to the study of European integration on conceptual and methodological level.