

Draft chapter. Please do not quote without permission!

EUROSCEPTICISM IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Petra Guasti

petra.guasti@soc.cas.cz

with the research assistance of Jessie Hronešová and Alžběta Bernardyová

Institute of Sociology Czech Academy of Sciences

Introduction - Mapping the National Political Arena

Since accession to the EU, the government's activities have adapted to, and are strongly influenced by, the EU's legislative framework. In fact, most EU legislation was implemented before accession in May 2004. There were some derogation from specific provisions of the *acquis communautaire*, and this is particularly evident in the case of the Czech Republic's bureaucracy. In the period from the accession till the failed Czech EU presidency the impact of the EU in promoting domestic reforms was weakened by domestic political struggles. The adoption and implementation of new legislation emanating from Brussels is thus rather slow and meets further discursive as well as practical opposition from several political parties.

A crucial step in adapting to supranational EU structures was the decision of the November 3, 2009 decision of the Czech Constitutional court on the compliance of the Lisbon Treaty with the Czech Constitution. The Constitutional Court had been considering a case brought by 17 Eurosceptic senators who said the treaty would create a super-state, and as such would infringe Czech sovereignty. Their contestation covers the arguments against the 'deepening' of the EU as described by Lindberg and Scheingold (1970 as cited in Trenz and de Wilde 2009: 5) as well as targeting the institutional and constitutional design of the European polity.

By November 2009 the Czech Republic was the only EU member state not to ratify the Lisbon Treaty, and the Constitutional court's decision removed the final hurdle to the treaty's ratification. In its elaborate decision, the Constitutional Court addressed both above described types of contestation, and stated that the Treaty is fully in accord with the Czech Constitution and does not present any danger to the democratic order of the Czech Republic. The Constitutional Court also ruled that this is to be the final decision on the Lisbon Treaty. The decision of the Constitutional Court represents the highest form of justification of the institutional and constitutional setup of the European polity vis-à-vis the democratic order of the Czech Republic.

This was the second judgment of the Czech Constitutional Court on the matter, the preceding Ruling the Constitutional Court (Pl. US 19/08) resulted in a deepening tension between the President and the Constitutional Court. In his address to the Constitutional Court, the President argued that the Lisbon Treaty was incompatible with the Czech Constitution as it undermined the right for national sovereignty. In its judgment of 26 November 2008, the Constitutional Court ruled that the Treaty of Lisbon does not change the fundamental nature of the European integration. Moreover, the court concluded that even after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the Union would remain a unique organization under international law. The Constitutional Court addressed specific issues queried by the Senate and the President. Of central concern was the manner in which the Treaty of Lisbon is to be approved, that is, whether ratification should be undertaken

through a popular referendum or by the Parliament. The Court judged that this question is not subject to judicial review under Article 87 paragraph 2 of the Czech Constitution. None of the Supreme Court justices filed a dissenting opinion regarding the verdict or its justification.

After the second decision of the Constitutional Court, Václav Klaus the Czech President, who have used all constitutional options to stop the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty agreed not to oppose it any further and signed the Treaty into law without further delay.

However, the President continues to be the most vocal, and visible opponent to the European Project, being able to voice his critical views to any and every aspect of the European politics, spanning from institutional to policy issues. Václav Klaus is very responsive in his surge to dejustify and delegitimize the European Project. Most recently, the President added new dimension to his discursive and argumentative strategies - turning not only against the project, but also against the European political leaders (Václav Klaus was particularly vocal in his critique of handling the EU help to Greece, targeting in particular the German Chancellor Angela Merkel). In the eyes of Václav Klaus, the current economic perils of the Eurozone are the proof that the European project is a big mistake, and that his solemn and profound contestation is gaining momentum. For the Czech President the worsening economic and political situation constitutes justification for his views.

Czech EU Presidency – the turning point in terms of attitudes to Europe

When evaluating the Czech EU presidency, it is important to note, that the Czech EU presidency took place during a difficult period in the run up to elections to the European Parliament, a Commission president seeking a renewed mandate, and an escalating global economic crisis on top of institutional turbulence within the EU. Furthermore, during the Czech presidency the Topolánek government lost office and was replaced by a technical – so called ‘caretaker’ interim administration led by Jan Fischer who became the head of the European Council for the remainder of the Czech presidency of the EU.

With regard to concrete results of the Czech presidency it seems reasonable to conclude that they were partially successful. The Eastern Partnership (a Swedish/Polish initiative focusing on Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus) which was launched in May 2009 may be seen as the product of work undertaken by the Czech government over many years. One of the main priorities of the Czech presidency was stable energy supplies in Europe. In January 2009 with the launch of the Czech presidency there was the natural gas crisis. The issue was well managed as the Czech presidency was able to maintain a united front within the EU. Other successes in the field of energy were the adoption of the ‘third energy liberalization package’ and progress made on the Nabucco gas pipeline. The latter project was viewed as an important step towards diversifying EU energy supplies (Topolánek 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, Braun 2009).

Another key priority of the Czech Republic during its presidency of the EU was the economy. In the programme ‘Europe without Barriers’ the Czech presidency sought to promote a more competitive EU. However, with the imminent global economic recession, this became problematic. The Czech approach to the economic crisis was focused largely on respecting the rules of the Single Market and the Growth and Stability Pact. Consequently, the Czech government was reluctant to support any major financial injections into the economy. This position was viewed with some suspicion by some of the leading EU

member states, i.e. the ‘old member states’ with the exception of the UK (Topolánek 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, Braun 2009).

Perhaps the main failure of the Czech presidency was the Czech Republic’s handling of the Lisbon Treaty. The Czech Republic’s failure itself to ratify the treaty itself before the beginning of its presidency caused concerns among the other Member States and EU institutions. Failure to ratify the Lisbon Treaty before holding the EU presidency caused additional problems in the planning of the six month presidency. The main difficulty for the Czech Republic in relation to the Lisbon Treaty was that failure to ratify the treaty generated negative international publicity for the country. Moreover, it gave the Czech President Václav Klaus the opportunity to get more exposure for his views opposing not only the Treaty, but the European Project as such. In general, as far as the visibility of the Czech Republic is concerned, the Czech EU presidency may best be described as a missed opportunity (Topolánek 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, Braun 2009).

In regard to the government replacement during the 2009 Czech Presidency of the European Council, the failure of Czech political elite to keep the government in office for the duration of the Presidency is a grand failure of Czech domestic politics. The Social Democratic Party which had initiated numerous votes of confidence did not expect to topple the Topolánek government in March 2009. In fact, most of the media reported that the Social Democrats were “sentenced to victory”, describing the victory as bitter sweet. However, it was the two Eurosceptic MPs of the ruling party, close to the President Václav Klaus, whose defection to the opposition led to the failure of Topolánek’s government.

Domestically, the presidency contributed toward the development of a pragmatic view of Europe within the Civic Democratic Party’s leadership. In long run, it is likely that the ODS will become even more pragmatic, and thus more in tune with the ODS voters, who tend to be pro-EU in orientation. And so, in terms of discursive practices, the Czech EU Presidency constituted turning point in what is regarded as the “Euroscepticism” of the Civic Democratic Party. The major discursive shift as presented by then Chairman of the ODS and Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek split ODS in two parts. The pragmatic wing around the PM understood the necessity of the small export-dependent country in the middle of the global economic crisis and shifted to more pro-European positions. The loyalties of the ‘Eurosceptic’ wing closed to the President and represented by Prague’s mayor Pavel Bém, the wise-chairman of ODS, was put to test. The failure of Topolánek’s government was the direct outcome of this discursive shift, as the two defecting ODS MPs justified their decision to let the government fall, by the need to protect the country from the prime Minister who, in their eyes was on the European issues defecting from the party manifesto and was failing the national interest of the country.

This paper presents an outline of the Czech Euroscepticism with the stress on actors, their positions and relationship to the RECON models. Based on Trenz and de Wilde, we define Euroscepticism as a discursive formation in the public sphere (Trenz and de Wilde 2009). First, an overview of literature will be provided, second the Czech Eurosceptic think tanks and organization will be addressed, and thirdly our attention will be turned to the political arena, where we will try to provide explanation as to how the discursive elements present in the recent Czech debates of the European polity (as highlighted in the Constitutional debate as well as during the Czech EU presidency).

1. Overview of the literature

Assessing the media coverage of the European Union in the Czech Republic over the recent years, it seems as though the voice of the Czech President, Václav Klaus, drowned out all others. The Czech President has become the poster child of the Eurosceptics across the European Union. Apart from his active participation in political as well as public debates, the Czech President wrote an endorsing foreword to the pamphlet *Say Yes or No to the European Constitution* (Coughlan and Klaus 2005).¹

The main arguments of the pamphlet, some of which are highly controversial and much contested, can be summarized in ten points: (1) upon ratification of the European Constitution, the EU will become a state with all that it implies; (2) the Member States will become regions or provinces of this supranational entity (i.e. the EU); (3) the Constitution of the EU will take precedence over those of the Member States; (4) the term “constitutional agreement” is vague and will only have a temporary validity – after ratification the document will become a constitution *sui generis*; (5) the current EU paradigm of “shared sovereignty,” in other words, equally shared by all nation states, will be undermined and replaced by a new kind of “pan-European sovereignty,” which will undermine each state’s legislative independence; (6) citizens of the Member States will become citizens of the EU including rights and duties; (7) Member States will only have the authority granted to them by the EU, and not the other way round as was originally envisioned for the EU, or, in other words, the hierarchy of primary and secondary legal acts will have been inverted; (8) with a “joint foreign and security policy,” the EU and not the individual Member States, will be eligible to conclude international agreements; (9) overturning the Nice Agreement, the voting power of the small Member States will decrease; (10) the “flexibility” or “bridging clause” will allow the EU to widen its scope of competences (Coughlan and Klaus 2005).

By these views, Václav Klaus was departing from the mainstream of opinion, both within the political arena of the Czech Republic and the European Union. His vision of Europe is best illustrated by the following quotation:

“We need a ‘New Europe’, a Europe without Europeanism. We need a Europe of economic freedom, a Europe of small and non-expanding governments, a Europe without state paternalism, a Europe without pseudo-moralizing political correctness, a Europe without intellectual snobbery and elitism, a Europe without supra-national, pan-continental ambitions. If someone on the other side of the Atlantic would then like to call this Europe the ‘New Europe’, it would be useful. Nonetheless, I have to stress, that we are still far away from such a ‘New Europe’; in fact, today we are moving in the opposite direction.” (Klaus 2004)

In connection with our detailed examination of the role of the Czech President, the main aim of the analysis is to shed light on the discursive practices of the Czech ‘Euroscepticism’.²

¹ Here it is important to state that in Dr. Anthony’s Coughlan view the title should read “Anthony Coughlan: An Analysis of the EU Constitution; with a preface by President Václav Klaus”; Institute for Economics and Politics, Prague, Czech Republic. However, in 2005 the pamphlet was published under the stated title. Therefore, in the way of a compromise, I include the name of both authors and keep the original title and its English translation.

² In order to highlight on the discursive practice of political opposition to the European project (Trenz and de Wilde 2009) in the Czech Republic we will use the distinction between different discursive practices as outlined by Trenz and de Wilde (ibid. 2009: 5) in the Czech Republic utilizing Kopecky and Mudde’s (Kopecky and Mudde 2002) definition of Euroscepticism as a multi-layered concept in relative rather than

Compared to other new Member States, the Czech Republic tends to rank high on the general Euroscepticism scale (Taggart and Szcerbiak 2004). However, in agreement with Kopecký and Mudde, we will argue that the picture is much more complex (Kopecký and Mudde 2002), and propose a two-dimensional typology of party positions on Europe, distinguishing between support for the European integration and support for the EU. While on average, the Czech Republic might stand high on the Euroscepticism scale according to Taggart and Szcerbiak, one should not overlook the polarized nature of Czech domestic politics which is also reflected in the relationship between supporters and opponents of the EU Constitution. Thus we aim to demonstrate that, in addition to the two dimensions identified by Kopecký and Mudde, the issue of the Constitution creates a third dimension, cutting across these two and establishing a three-dimensional analytical space which alone allows a truly accurate portrait of the various actors' positions on Europe and discursive practices these actors employ in the public sphere.

In a recent analysis examining the Czech national position-formation process during the Constitutional Convention, based on expert interviews Schulz and Chabrečková showed that the Czech political actors (the Government, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Civic Democratic Party and the national Convention) mainly concentrated on substantive topics such as the number of Commissioners, the qualified majority threshold and the regulation of jurisdiction with respect to external policy (Schulz and Chabrečková 2006). Another issue considered important especially by the Czech Government was the Charter of Fundamental Rights. In addition, the Czech Republic along with Austria headed a group of 15 smaller states critical towards the Draft Constitution. However, in the domestic political arena, political conflict during the Convention sessions mainly focused on the ratification method – popular referendum vs. parliamentary ratification (Schulz and Chabrečková 2006).

2. Key actors

In this part, the main actors among the anti-European organizations in the Czech Republic will be introduced. The aim is to summarize their narratives, discursive practices and outline their main arguments as relevant to the RECON three models.

2.1. Overview of the Eurosceptic and anti-European think tanks in the Czech Republic

There are nine major Eurosceptic and anti-European think tanks in the Czech Republic. However, their conspicuousness varies between those known to the mainstream media on the one side (such as the Centre for Politics and Economy *Centrum pro politiku a ekonomii* – CEP or Civic Institute *Občanský institut* – OI) and those working in Internet obscurity (such as Faithful We Remain *Věrní zůstaneme* – VZ).

Centre for Politics and Economy *Centrum pro politiku a ekonomii* – CEP

CEP is a think tank founded in 1998 by Václav Klaus with the aim to promote ideas of liberal society and market economy. CEP is thus closely associated with the Eurosceptic President Klaus as well as with the Eurosceptic wing of the Civic Democratic Party (*Občanská demokratická strana* – ODS). CEP is the most active organization of its kind in the Czech Republic, often in the media, organizes number of workshops and conferences on the topic (often in cooperation with British scholars, politicians and think-tanks) and publishes a number of books (both translations and original Czech volumes such as *Europe in the death-end road* by Michal Petřík /published 2008/, and collected volumes based on

absolute terms thus distinguishing between diffuse and specific support for the European integration in general and for the European Constitution in particular.

conference papers such as *EU and Lisbon Treaty: Even less democracy in the EU* (2008/). One of the most prominent guests and regular collaborators of CEP is Anthony Coughlan who took part in the discussions on the European constitutional process. CEP also cooperates with the Foundation for Economic Education and CATO Institute (US think tanks), and other think tanks in Slovakia, Croatia, the UK and Sweden. The stance of CEP can be summarized as a struggle for a preservation of nation-states and national identities within the EU, whereby the EU is presented as an ineffective regulatory regime and every step towards a further integration is perceived as threat for the existence of a nation-state, considered as the only possible form of democratic order. In terms of discursive practices, the CEP opposes the institutional and constitutional design of the EU, as well as the 'deepening' of the EU in terms of both the scope and the level.

CEVRO

CEVRO is a think tank turned into a private university (fully accredited under the name *Liberal-Conservative Academy*) that is directly associated with the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) by its director and vice-chairman of the ODS Ivan Langer (one of the ODS's Eurosceptic hardliners). Founded in 1999 as a think tank, it organizes workshops, conferences, public gatherings and publishes its own journal – *CEVRO Revue*. Unlike CEP that has rather high academic standards, CEVRO activities and publications are a mere popularization and are directed mostly at non-academic audience unlike in the case of CEP. The Lisbon Treaty was one of the main topics over the last years and was regularly featured in the *CEVRO Revue*. CEVRO cooperates very closely with some ODS deputies such as Nina Škottová, Jan Zahradil, Oldřich Vlasák and Milan Čábrnoch. Worth mentioning from a number of foreign guests at CEVRO conferences and other events are Angela Merkel, Mikuláš Dzurinda, Viktor Orbán, Mart Laar, Juhan Parts, Hans-Gert Pöttering, Jan Maria Rokita, Magda Vašáryová, Ivan Mikloš, Roman Bezsmertnyi, William Cabaniss, Christian Bourgin, Janez Podobnik, Jan Erik Surotchak, Bo Lundgren, Santiago Lanzuela Marina, Daniel Mitchel. CEVRO is also in close cooperation with the International Republican Institute (a US think tank related to the Republican Party), Haus Rissen International Institute for Politics and Economy (a German think tank based in Hamburg) and other conservative and educational organizations and think tanks in Hungary, Spain, Austria and Poland. CEVRO does not hold such a radical stance towards the EU, both intellectually and by its rhetoric. The main thesis is that the EU can be acceptable as a regulatory regime but not in its current form. In terms of discursive practices, the CEVRO is continually shifting between the more pragmatic Euro-critical views of Topolánek's wing of the ODS and the overall discarding views on Europe of the Czech President.

Civic Institute (Občanský institut – OI)

OI is a cultural-educational conservative think tank aimed at enhancement and promotion of conservative ideas and values. OI is not linked to any particular political party, organizes public lectures, workshops and discussions. One of its recent workshops held in Vienna was *The Future of Freedom in Europe* (April 2004). Like CEP, OI is more academically orientated, but has a much less high profile than CEP. However, OI is quite often visible in the press, particularly in weeklies designed for a more educated audience. Again, the only option for the future of the EU is in the OI's view a functional regulatory regime, thus RECON model one. In terms of discursive practices, the OI represents critical, yet constructive views of the European project.

Further organizations include:

Conservative Club (*Konzervativní klub – KK*), which is a moderate Eurosceptic think tank without links to political parties, with only regional partners (Slovakian Conservative Institute of M.R. Štefánik).

Young Civic Platform (*Mladá občanská platform – MOP*) is a youth organization associated with ODS that operates nation-wide and is active in discussing the Lisbon Treaty in numerous gatherings such as in the discussion forum *Lisbon Treaty – What to Expect, What to Fear*. The MOP represents critical, yet pragmatic views on Europe in line with the views of Topolánek's wing of the ODS.

The Young Right (*Mladá pravice – MP*) is another youth organization and a follower of the Prague Club of the Young Conservatives (since 2004). It depicts itself as a 'defender of the national interests' and is linked with the Eurosceptic wing of the Civic Democratic Party. MP also publishes mainly press releases and in the past has organized several high-profile workshops concerning the future of the European constitutional process where some well-known Czech Members of the European Parliament participated (Vladimír Železný, Libor Rouček and Jan Zahradil). MP cooperates with US republican-related think tanks and regionally within the Central European countries (Slovakia, Poland). In terms of discursive practices the MP, has an overall negative view of the European project and its views are close to the 'Eurosceptic' hardliners within the ODS and to the views of the Czech President.

Civic Conservative Club (*Občanský konzervativní klub – OKK*)

OKK is a civic group promotes conservative and liberal ideas. It is ideologically linked with ODS and puts emphasis on the Euro-Atlantic links. OKK could be considered a mixture between RECON models 1 and 3 and Euro-critical rather than Eurosceptic.

Faithful We Remain (*Věrní Zůstaneme – VZ*)

VZ is a small association that strives for promoting values such as nation, national interest and state sovereignty. It draws a rather small audience, mainly people with interest in history, and critical towards the role of Germany in the EU. The name is a reminder of an anti-Fascist resistance group during the initial years of the Protectorate era (1939-1942) that was active under the same name. In terms of RECON models VZ adheres to model one, and in discursive terms opposes the European Project both in terms of institutional and constitutional setup and in principal terms to the European integration as such.

2.2. Political actors

As highlighted in the introduction to this paper, in the last two years, the political situation in the Czech Republic has been marked by continuous struggle between a weak coalition centre-right government and a strengthening opposition, as well as growing internal divisions within the major political parties. The two major cleavages of both inter-party struggle and internal divisions within parties represent the political context within which economic reforms such as pension and health care reforms and also the views on the depth of the European integration process have been undertaken. This political development has been accompanied by an ever-growing disenchantment among the citizens with political parties and the government performance.

Regarding the EU membership, the Lisbon Treaty was in the centre of focus in a struggle between the extremely vocal Eurosceptic President, and a progressively pro-European government. Two events signaled discursive shift towards a more pro-EU orientation in the

Czech Republic. In the first place, it was the above described ruling of the Czech Constitutional Court published in December 2008 which stated, that the Lisbon Treaty is in accordance with the national Constitution, and as such does not pose any threat to the sovereignty of the Czech Republic. The second key event was the emergence of a more strident pro-European wing within the Civic Democratic Party led by its former chairman and the former Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek.

In the intraparty attempt to call the vote of ‘non confidence’ to Mirek Topolánek as a party Chairman, Topolánek succeeded in November 2008 in a party leadership and defeated a Eurosceptic rival the Prague’s mayor Pavel Bém, who was strongly associated with President Klaus. The victory of the pro-European wing led the President, and the founder of the Civic Democratic Party, to publicly renounce his position of the Honorary Chairman, and announce his plan to support the emergence of new “political subjects” (i.e. of a new political party that would be similar to Libertas, the Irish Eurosceptic party). However, in the end it was the Eurosceptic wing of ODS, which succeeded in facilitating the fall of government during the Czech Presidency.

However, after the failure of the Government, in the middle of country’s EU presidency and global economic country, the President did not succeed in postponing the formation of the caretaker government, which would allow him to officially represent the Czech Republic and become the official voice of the EU. With this perspective in full sight, all major democratic political parties were able to put their differences (and in the case of ejected Topolánek also ego), and agreed in rapid speed on caretaker government with limited political agenda and wide support in the Parliament led by Jan Fischer.

2.2.1. Political Parties

The European integration represents an important dividing line between Czech political parties. The Civic Democrats struggled for a long time to adopt a clear position on Europe. However, more recently this party has adopted a more pro-European public stance thereby adopting a position more consonant with that of its voters. It should be noted that it is the most pro-European segment of the electorate. However, there is an important faction within the Civic Democrat Party that is still ideologically close to the President Václav Klaus. As a result of the poor performance of the Civic Democrats in the 2008 regional and Senate elections and the Lisbon Treaty debate, two new Eurosceptic political parties emerged prior to the European election. The first is the Party of Free Citizens connected with the executive director of the CEP Petr Mach; the second is Libertas.cz of the MEP and former media tycoon Vladimír Železný. However, after the recent discursive shift in the Czech Political arena, none of the parties is serious contended in the eminent May 2010 elections.

The withdrawal of Václav Klaus from the ODS in November 2008 was accompanied by his call for political party which would represent Eurosceptic ideas. In January 2009, Václav Klaus stated his support to any Eurosceptic party. In response, several days later, Petr Mach, the executive director of CEP formed the *Party of Free Citizens* (Strana svobodných občanů – SSO). Initially, the SSO was flirting with Ganleys’ Libertas but due to a dispute about the candidate selection this idea was rejected. However, in February 2009 a Czech version of Libertas – Libertas.cz was formed by Vladimír Železný. The ‘brand’ of Libertas could count among its supporters the former MEP Jana Bobošíková, and two ex-ODS deputies, both of whom voted against the Lisbon Treaty in the Chamber of Deputies, Vlastimil Tlustý and Jan Schwippel. On the ballot of Libertas.cz Vladimír Železný also listed members of his other party *The Independent democrats* (Nezavislí demokraté – ND).

In the June 2009 EP elections, both Libertas.cz and Party of Free Democrats competed with each other on the grounds of hard Euroscepticism and rejection of the Lisbon Treaty. Hence, both can be seen as going beyond the RECON model one and aiming at dismantling the EU as a regulatory regime, which they view as ineffective and dangerous to the Czech national interests. Both parties had vital international links to other Eurosceptic parties in the EU. However, in the end, both failed to attract voters – Party of Free Citizens received only 0.06% of the vote and Libertas.cz 0.94% of the vote. In the overall low voter turnout (28.2%) this meant that both of the new parties attracted together less than 24 000 citizens. After the electoral fiasco, the public profile of both parties ceased to maintain the pre-electoral exposure and the parties find themselves in obscurity both in terms of public support and media attention.

Moving to the key political actors involved in the most recent constitutional debate it is important to briefly introduce their position and transnational links.

Christian democrats (KDU-ČSL): strong orientation towards the German CDU; their programme documents seem to be little more than translations of those of CDU, in favour of the Lisbon Treaty;

TOP 09 (Tradition, Responsibility and Prosperity): party formed in the summer of 2009 by partial secession from the Christian Democrats, shares the Christian democratic views on Europe;

Civic democrats (ODS): strong links to the British Conservative Party, often adopting similar argumentative strategies, in 2008 after an internal party struggle explained above shifted its discursive practices towards a more pro-European position and became the main supporter of the Lisbon Treaty during its ratification in both chambers of the Czech Parliament;³

Communists (KSČM): strong but vague orientation towards the East (meaning both Eastern enlargement and cultural-political orientation towards Russia), strongly opposed to the EU and Lisbon Treaty, stable Eurosceptic party representing the “losers” of the EU accession process, contesting the European Project on the grounds of its institutional and constitutional setup as well as democratic performance;

Social Democrats (ČSSD): party with the strongest European orientation; it often adverts to other European socialist parties in general without being limited to one country only, strong supporters of the Lisbon Treaty but its success in the vote of no confidence during the country’s EU Presidency endangered the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty and Social Democrats were openly criticized by their European allies.

The Greens: pro-European party, supported the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty.

Overall, the main actors in the debates on the Lisbon Treaty were primarily at the national level and from the side of domestic politicians and policy makers. The dominant role of President Václav Klaus was unprecedented, and followed with a huge margin by former Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek and the chairman of the Social Democrats Jiří Paroubek. In terms of discursive practices, while Václav Klaus goes clearly beyond any constructive

³ However, it must be noted that the position of ODS slightly changed after the fall of their coalition government and thus the end of their EU Presidency. On May 30, 2009 Mirek Topolánek even stated that the Lisbon Treaty was a dead document as the EU will have to intensify its contemplations over the future legal form of the organization. (Lidovky.com, 30.05. 2009, access at: http://www.lidovky.cz/topolanek-lisabonska-smlouva-je-mrtva-dho-/ln_domov.asp?c=A090530_172141_ln_domov_ter)

critique of the European project, the supporters of the EU integration process seem to lack arguments in defense of the project both in terms of justifications and performance. Furthermore, the 2009 Presidency accelerated discursive shift in ODS and established certain level of general consensus among major political actors on the European Project. However, the consensus does not spill over to agreement on important policy arenas – foreign policy continues to form an important battle ground between the Civic and Social democrats– Civic democrats strongly support the EU Transatlantic relations whereas the Social democrats are prone to endorse a closer alliance of the EU and Russia.

Also a number of other domestic politicians from the previously governing coalition and the former opposition took part in the debate – ministers, deputies and high-ranking party members in the case of the deputies such as well as MEPs. Until the fall of the government in March 2009, the governing coalition's voice was dominated by former Prime Minister Topolánek who was often challenged within his own party – by the Eurosceptic wing and by President Klaus. This critique which was often targeting not only the policy decisions of the Prime Minister, but also his capabilities, and political as well as personal integrity attested to the low level of culture in the Czech political arena.

It should be noted that the President is often on the verge of populist statements. However, such phrasing might be the reason why the general public accepts and understands President's views as they are expressed in a very comprehensible manner.⁴ Even so, the arguments the President uses are not necessarily unsophisticated and straightforward. On the contrary, he has an ability to capture the core of the key issues and translate them into generally understandable terms without losing their essence.

Another important point to note is that the power dimension of the entire problem cannot be left out in the analysis. Power, and more precisely the power struggle in the domestic arena, accounts for the differences in the reception of different claims made by different actors – based on the analysis of additional resources (Klaus 2002, Klaus 2005), it must be agreed that Václav Klaus speaks differently as a president than say a citizen or member of a think tank. Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jiří Dienstbier, has pointed out that the President is first a president and then a citizen; therefore, his statements weigh much more in the domestic arena and at the international level (Dienstbier 2005). Interestingly and revealingly, the Centre for Economy and Politics (CEP) presents Václav Klaus as a citizen and a honourable chairman rather than as the Czech President, thus trying to underplay the power dimension at work in his pronouncements. As the former Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs put it:

“The current international and domestic exchange arises from the fact that the citizen K. does not understand – or chooses not to understand – the difference between these two roles [i.e. of a citizen and a president]. Any citizen has the right to express his or her opinions regardless of what they are like. However, the head of state has accepted the responsibility for all citizens and his public actions influence perception of the Czech Republic in Europe.” (Dienstbier 2005)

⁴ This argument is supported by public opinion polls on the levels of trust felt by the general public for institutions and politicians.

2.2.2. Interaction and Relations Between the Actors

Given the polarized nature of the Czech domestic politics, the dominant type of relationship between actors is competitive and characterized by a conflict. On the other hand, as far as relations between domestic and international actors are concerned, more positive types prevail such as sympathy, alliance, coalition and co-operation – this is incidentally also true of relations between domestic parties and their ideological allies at the European level which could be characterized by the coalition building. This is demonstrated by the attempts of domestic actors to further strengthen their arguments by reference to key European actors.

At the domestic level, references to the relationship between the political elite and citizens in the publications under survey are mostly highlighted by the Eurosceptic actors. Even so, the citizens are treated as passive actors (the Treaty ratification is basically happening to them and in their name). In terms of horizontal relationships among Member States the hierarchy is depicted mainly in terms of old and new as well as small and large countries. The role of newer and smaller Member States is viewed as limited and evaluated negatively from a democratic perspective.

Conclusion

To summarize the preliminary findings presented in this paper we can note, that the period of ratification of the Lisbon Treaty presented major shift in the mainstream Czech political discourse. The shift towards political consensus on Europe among major political actors and the (pragmatic) acceptance of the European Project is however accompanied by ‘Europeanization’ of the domestic political conflicts. In the past, the Lisbon Treaty has become a symbol of the power-struggle between the government and the opposition, in both political and ideological terms. While the former government of Mirek Topolánek manifested increasingly pro-European attitudes and played crucial role in the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty in both chambers of the Czech Parliament, Social Democrats sacrificed their stance towards the EU and support for the Lisbon Treaty for a short-term domestic political gain (Topolánek 2009a, 2009b, 2009c).

Similarly to the debate on the Constitutional Treaty, the Lisbon Treaty was framed and presented as a further and necessary step in the direction of the EU integration. The link between the Czech Republic’s accession to the EU and the Treaty ratification was often brought to the forefront.

The discussions can be summarized as (1.) rather general with very few actors capable of (or indeed interested in) a more complex and in-depth analysis of the substantive constitutional topics, leaving many of their claims unjustified; (2.) a polarized conflict on several levels, including that of the former governmental coalition and opposition, and (3) personalization, with the Prime Minister Topolánek and President Klaus as the personal adversaries. The high polarization and politization of the Czech debate accounts for the dominant role of the political elite in the debate at the expense of other actors such as members of the civil society and the citizenry.

Two major discourse elements can be identified among the key actors in the debates: (1) the Lisbon Treaty is portrayed as the logical continuation of the EU integration and is linked to the country’s accession to the EU, and (2) the Treaty, like the Constitution is seen as the main formative document determining the ideological character of the European Union. The first discourse to the merits has been used by both opposing sides in the debate. Also, an

urgent need for the institutional reform of the European Union can be observed in both cases.

While exponents of the Lisbon Treaty stress the need for a deepening of the European integration, its opponents claim that the Treaty changes the conditions under which the Czech Republic joined the EU, stressing the shortcomings of the documents in both substantial and procedural terms. The second discourse strand is ideologically highly loaded and its main point at issue is the clash between a perception of the Treaty as establishing a reformed European social model (evaluated negatively by constitutional opponents, such as President Václav Klaus, CEP, CEVRO and other Eurosceptic think tanks), or as dangerously entrenching liberalism in Europe (which is the view of constitutional opponents from the left).

The overall political character of the constitutional debate further supports the argument that a strong Europeanization of the Czech politics took place in the pre-accession periods, and that political parties played an important role in this process. By communicating and internationally cooperating with other European political parties, Czech political parties shaped voters' preferences with regard to the Constitution and the European issues in general (Baun et al. 2006). Thus political parties continue to play the leading role in the Czech debates on European issues and mediate and shape the processes of Europeanization in the Czech Republic. However, as shown in this analysis, a culture of debate (mainly a personalization of the conflict) apparently prevails. In this situation the positive role of the Constitutional Court, whose rulings in 2008 and 2009 dejustify major parts of discursive practices of the President needs to be stressed.

References:

- Baldwin, R.E. 2006. "Trail to Failure: History of the Constitutional Treaty's Rejection and Implications for the Future". *CEPS Policy Brief No. 104*.
- Baun, M., Durr, J., Marek, D., Šaradín, P. 2006. „The Europeanization of Czech Politics“ The Political Parties and the EU Referendum“. *Journal of Common Market Studies*. Vol. 44.No. 2, pp.249-80.
- Braun, M. 2009. "Czech EU Presidency – A missed Opportunity", available online <http://www.boell.cz/web/52-804.html>, last visited 7.5.2009
- Delanty, G. and Rumford, Ch. 2005. *Rethinking Europe. Social Theory and the Implications of Europeanization*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Dienstbier, J. 2005. "Občan K. a hlava státu". *Právo*, 26.4.2005.
- Klaus, V. 2002. *Občan a obrana jeho státu*. Praha: Centrum pro ekonomiku a politiku.
- Klaus, V. 2004. „Evropa své problémy neřeší“. *MFD*, 11.12.2004.
- Coughlan, A. and Klaus, V. 2005. *Řekněme ano nebo ne Evropské Ústavě*. Praha: Centrum pro ekonomiku a politiku.
- Kopecký, P. and Mudde, C. 2002. "The Two Sides of Euroscepticism: Party Positions on European Integration in East Central Europe", *European Union Politics*, 3(3), 2002, pp.297-326.
- Pausch, M. et al. 2006. "The Referenda on the European Constitution: A Crucial Moment for the Development of a European Public Sphere?", Final report Salzburg: EI - Institute für europäische Integrationsforschung, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- Příbáň, J. 2005. "European Union Constitution-Making, Political Identity and Central European Reflections." *European Law Journal* Vol. 11, No. 5 pp. 135-153.

- Schneider, J. 2003. *Think-tanky ve Visegradských zemích: Analýza politiky a obhajoba zájmů*. Brno: MPU MU.
- Schulz, T., Chrobáková, M. 2006. „The Czech Republic: Sitting on the Fence“ in König, T. Hug, S. *Policy-making Processes and the European Constitution: A Comparative Study of Member States and Accession Countries*. London: Routledge.
- Sifft, S., Bruggemann, M., Kleinen-v.Konigslow, K., Peters, B., Wimmel, A. 2006. “Segmented Europeanization: Exploring the ‘communication lag’ in the European Union”. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, forthcoming.
- Taggart, P. and Szczerbiak, A. 2004. “Contemporary Euroscepticism in the party systems of the European Union candidate states of Central and Eastern Europe,” *European Journal of Political Research*, 43: 1-27.
- Topolánek, M. 2009a. “Presidency in the Heart of Europe” 14.1.2009, speech in the European Parliament.
- Topolánek, M. 2009b. Address in the European Parliament, 17.2.2009
- Topolánek, M. 2009c. Prime Minister’s Address on the Current EU Development, 20.2.2009.
- Trenz, H.-J. 2004. “‘Quo vadis Europe?’ Quality Newspapers Struggling for European Unity”, paper presented at the workshop *One EU-Many Publics*, Stirling 5-6 February 2004.
- Trenz, H.-J., Conrad, M., Rosen, G. 2006. “The Interpretative Moment of European Journalism: The Impact of Media Voice in the Ratification Process”. Paper at the conference *Constitutional Ratification Crisis: Exploring the European Public Sphere*, Fiesole 19-20 May 2006.
- Trenz, H.-J., de Wilde, P. 2009. “Denouncing European Integration: Euroscepticism as Polity Contestation“. *ARENA Working Paper No. 14, September 2009. Oslo: ARENA*.