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ELECTORAL AND CITIZEN'S VIEW ON EUROSCEPTICISM IN TRANSITIONAL SOCIETY: THE CASE OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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Abstract: *The present study draws upon Eurosceptic sentiment in the present-day Czech Republic from the perspective of the political and party segment, and at the public level. Given the total of nine manifestations of Euroscepticism (Riishøj), we distinguish two types of party Euroscepticism: Hard and Soft Euroscepticism (Szczerbiak, Taggart). Czech party Euroscepticism is contemplated in terms of party behavior towards the processes of European integration (Kopecky and Mudde), the period of accession to the EU (Rovny) and the post-accession period of European adaptation (Marek, Baun). Two parties, such as KSCM (Hard Euroscepticism) and ODS (Soft Euroscepticism) parties enjoyed considerable electoral support (Chamber of Deputies), being backed by a Eurosceptically oriented electorate. Throughout accession and adaptation to the EU (2002–2010), the Chamber of Deputies rotation comprised around 50%. Since 2013, the Tomio Okamura political projects (Hard Euroscepticism) have joined Eurosceptic parties. In the 1990s, Czech society was mentally prepared for the EU accession, since the number of Democrats (Euro-optimists) was set at 65–77% (1994–1998) (Haerpfer). Following the EU accession, Eurosceptic sentiment in the Czech society constantly fluctuated, with the largest number of hard Eurosceptics in 2004–2010 (Eurobarometer). Simultaneously, elections to the European Parliament remain the least important issue for the Czech electorate (turnout of 28%), with political interests dominated by those of the national. The Czechs consider it best to maintain the EU membership, yet with the prevalence of national interests.*

Keywords: party Euroscepticism; public Euroscepticism; Soft Euroscepticism; Hard Euroscepticism; Chamber of Deputies Parliament of the Czech Republic.

Introduction

For a while, post-socialist countries measured the overall success of democratic transformation by the achievements and benefits of the European integration processes.

Acquisition of the EU membership attested to the proximity of the post-socialist country to the regime of consolidated democracy, marking the completion of the country's modernization to bring it institutionally closer to Western European democracies. Reforms, strategically initiated by new democratic governments in the 1990s and completed in the mid-2000s, were continuing in the "European Union" format. At present, the Czech Republic, having avoided the fate of either becoming a "democracy with adjectives" (Collier–Levitsky, 1997) or returning to an authoritarian model, belongs to the group of countries that demonstrated considerable success in the course of European integration.

Concurrently, in the course of the European integration policy implementation and upon the accession to the European Union, the Czech party system began to manifest signs of Euroscepticism. Generally, the nature of Eurosceptic sentiment in the party environment resulted from anticipating actual benefits from the European membership acquisition in 2004. Although, the Czech version of party Euroscepticism is still a broad concept, dating back to the period of defederalization in the early 1990s. As early as 2004, the Czech Republic entered a phase of adjustment to a new reality, which, any adaptation process likewise, could not but affected the level of Euroscepticism spread. The political rhetoric of Euroscepticism, having deeply anchored in election campaigns and parliamentary activities, established a stable electorate over 2002–2017. Low interest in the elections to the European Parliament not only puts the national electoral processes at the foreground but also lays foundations for the EU apathy of Czech voters. The wave of right-wing populist forces in the 2010s, continuously winning ever-greater electoral support in different EU countries (parliamentary parties in Germany, Austria, Hungary, Greece, France), are Eurosceptic by nature of their programmatic material. The urgent need to elaborate and pursue deliberate migration policy within the entire European Union only contributes to the spread of right-wing populism. One should also mention the socio-economic fragmentation of the Czech Republic, which often contributes to electoral differentiation into pro-European and Euro-sceptic wings.

At the public level and through the lens of the perception of the Czech Republic's perspectives in the European formats, we distinguish several society groups, namely "Europhobes" and "Europhiles". Moreover, the predominant sentiment among the population is a crucial factor in determining the country's European perspective, for national referendums on European integration are key instruments for government decision-making.

The present-day European Union also faces numerous challenges, which, beyond doubt, are sure to reflect in Eurosceptic sentiment in Czech society, as well as its political community. Even upon the Czech Republic's accession to the European Union in 2004, the draft Constitution of the European Union was effectively overthrown by a group of countries that put in doubt the very idea of the European Union rapprochement. The Czech Republic ended up among the latter, being the last to ratify the Lisbon Treaty in late 2009. Brexit, proceeding since 2016, is also contributing to the abovementioned factors, hence consolidating the idea of Euroscepticism.

Post-communist Czech Republic and euroscepticism

Eurointegration processes on the post-socialist arena took various ambiguous trajectories, including those of growing Euroscepticism. Among the decisive reasons for exploring the phenomenon of Euroscepticism, we would point out the following: a) poor implementation of the “permissive consensus” phenomenon as a Eurointegration-focused policy (in particular, dramatic contradictions and problems in some Western European countries, arising out of the Maastricht Treaty ratification in 1992, as well as and the 2004 Constitutional Treaty, b) all-national referendums, addressing the most urgent issues for the development of the European Union (leading to legal establishment of growing Eurosceptic sentiments) c) a targeted policy for the enlargement of the European Union, implemented in a short span of time (obvious differences in methods of discussing and decision-making between the old and new members) (Taggart–Szczerbiak, 2008, p.3).

Euroscepticism origins can be traced back to the times of founding and gradual expansion of the European Union, the process being reflected in the theory of “permissive consensus”. This is a kind of agreement between political elites, facilitating the European integration processes and the general public, envisaging increasing delegation of governmental powers to the interstate level of the European Union however on condition of specific dividends (benefits) for the population of the country. As the matter stands, the enlargement of the European Union owing to the post-socialist countries of the Visegrad Group and the Baltic States caused yet another wave of Eurosceptic sentiments, especially in regard of population attitudes towards libertarian values. Traditional values were regarded as a priority, with new agreements between the public and political elites further taking the form of constraining dissensus (Gillespie, 2017). The evolution of a variety of approaches to the Eurointegration strategy, namely the transition from “permissive

consensus” to “constraining dissensus”, has proved that the public sentiment took over the government policy. As a result, the current model of European integration is characterized by three variables: a) politicization of European integration during election campaigns resulting in nationwide referendums, b) domination of national parties and public sentiments in defining the foundations of European integration policy, c) national identity as the dominant vector, creating additional constraints for the Eurointegration of a certain country (Hooghe–Marks, 2009).

The global changes of the end of the first decade of the 2000s also posed challenges for the institutional strength of the European Union. Among the main reasons for maintaining a high level of Euroscepticism one should mention the following: a) Eurocrisis resulting from the 2008 economic crisis (demonstrating the heterogeneity of economic development in the south of the European Union – Greece, Spain, Portugal), b) migration policy crisis resulting from increasing influxes of migrants to the EU countries over 2015–2016, c) Brexit, d) the Hungarian model of party populism, exemplified by FIDESZ, as well as conservative governments in Poland (Hooghe–Marks, 2019). The present-day European Union is facing two crises, e.g. a general European crisis of the so-called “European Union identity” and the Schengen crisis. These crisis phenomena have led to politicization of Eurointegration processes in Central and Eastern Europe. Right-wing populist parties have emerged, accumulating and spreading Eurosceptic sentiments in society in order to uphold national identity (Börzel–Risse, 2018, p.101–102).

Prior to its EU accession the Czech Republic was among the most Eurosceptic post-socialist countries, due to the Eurosceptic rhetoric of the two Czech parties, namely ODS and KSČM. Simultaneously, pro-European public opinion held at a high level, which, along with the pro-European government, enabled the country to successfully obtain the European Union membership (Kopecký, 2004). By the late 1990s and early 2000s, several variations of Euroscepticism had emerged in the Czech party environment, associated with three parties, such as: ODS, KSČM and Republicans (SPR-RSČ). Each of these political actors played their own role in intensifying Eurosceptic sentiments, from “Ideology Driven” to “Strategy Driven”. The most critical of the European rapprochement of the Czech Republic was the SPR-RSČ, the ODS displaying a more liberal version of Euroscepticism; whereas for the KSČM, the European Union is, above all, ideologically unacceptable (Rovny, 2004, p.44). The ODS demonstrates that Euroscepticism as a tool of party politics may arise as a result of changing ideological orientations. Since the early 1990s, the ODS had been perceived as a neoliberal force, implementing post-

communist economic reforms. However, since 1997, with the increasing party centralization by its leader Václav Klaus, attended by the need for electoral novelty, the ODS has gradually shifted to moderate Eurosceptic stance (Hanley, 2004, p.548).

Upon the Czech Republic's accession to the European Union, European integration, as a tool to fight the post-communist past, is gradually losing in importance. By and large, the desire to return to the European community and catch up with Western European countries in the socio-economic development is blending with the Eurosceptic sentiment in society. In the course of the negotiations with the European Union, some of the parties received the desired political benefits, whereas some, on the contrary, lost the available political capital. Since 2004 the Czech party space has been largely dominated by the Euroscepticism of a "political" type, with ODS retaining the role of its main driver (Riishøj, 2004). To understand the peculiarities of the Czech Euroscepticism model, apart from the party sphere, it is crucial to take cognisance of public opinion on the perspectives of the European Union itself. In general, in its early years of membership (2004–2009), Czech society displayed a growing confidence in European institutions. At the same time, the overall level of Euroscepticism in the Czech Republic in the first five years of membership was higher than the overall EU indicator, as well as that of other Central European countries (Marek–Baun, 2011, p.33).

Materials and methods

Contemplating the phenomenon of Euroscepticism in a particular country, it is of primary importance to identify the nature of Eurosceptic sentiments. Following the conceptual approaches of Aleks Szczerbiak and Paul Taggart, Søren Riishøj points out nine types (manifestations) of Euroscepticism. These types of Euroscepticism can be further divided into two hypothetical groups:

1) a group of endogenous Eurosceptic factors: a) "Identity-based" – those, based on contradictions between the national identity and "novel" European identity, which is perceived as a potential threat, b) "Cleavage-based" factors are those, triggered by social and economic gaps, as well as relevant pro- and anti-European orientations in society (the wealthy – the poor, the city – the village, inter-denominational religious factors, etc.), c) "Institutional" – those, reiterating a higher level of legitimacy of the EU authorities over the national authorities, which in the future may lead to a potential threat of Euroscepticism d) "Party-based" factors presuppose a traditional

party Euroscepticism, imposed by individual party leaders or the populist ideology of particular political entities (e.g. neoliberal, traditionalist and left-wing or right-wing political orientation) (Riishøj, 2004).

2) a group of exogenous factors of Euroscepticism: a) “Policy-based” factors presuppose rejecting not so much a European integration idea as a separate direction of European Union policy (eg, separate issues of public morality), b) “National interest-based” – those arising out of contradictions between preservation of national interests and development prospects of the European Union (for example, the degree of management centralization in the European Union), c) “Experience based” factors are those referring to the asymmetrical perception of the negotiations on the EU accession as opposed to the level of expectations of the country upon gaining membership (i.e., “inaugural talks” hold more promise than benefits in the future), d) “Atlantic-based” factors include the problem of choosing either a pro-American or pro-European foreign policy model by a new EU Member State, e) “Practice-based” factors refer to strategic support for a nation-wide course on deepening European integration, yet interpreting European standards from a pure self-interest perspective (for example, manipulating the idea of joining the European Union by new post-communist national democracies) (Riishøj, 2004).

Discussing the role of external factors that affect the emergence of various Euroscepticism types, in further study we primarily contemplate the internal prerequisites for the spread of Euroscepticism. In regard to party Euroscepticism, the two-type classification proposed by Aleks Szczerbiak and Paul Taggart (2000) is considered classic. In the CEE countries, hard and soft types of Euroscepticism were formed during the European integration period. Hard Euroscepticism concerns party politics aimed at not joining or leaving the European Union. The main motive for opposition to the European structures is their incompatibility with the national interests of the country. Most often, hard Euroscepticism stems from the ideological orientations of the party that are incompatible with pan-European values (for example, left or right populists, traditional communists, etc.). Soft Euroscepticism does not imply either the denial of integration or the EU membership. The Eurosceptic motive is the European Union’s rejection either of a specific direction or issue of the priority of national interests. In party activities, soft Euroscepticism frequently uses anti-European rhetoric as an element of the electoral campaign (Szczerbiak–Taggart, 2008, p.8–9).

The practice of European integration as such forms different vectors of party politics, and it is the issue of the EU membership that plays one of the central roles in the political positioning of parties. Petr Kopecký and Cas Mudde distinguish two groups of types of party behaviour towards European integration: 1) Europhile – a generally positive perception of the European integration processes and the EU membership, 2) Europhobe – a negative attitude to the rapprochement processes with the European Union. At the same time, the EU-optimist group further falls into two types of party behavior: Euro-enthusiasts (unquestioned support for European integration) and Euro-pragmatists (a common Euro-sceptic position, but it explains rapprochement with the European Union as a pragmatic necessity for the national course). Respectively, EU-pessimist group includes Eurosceptics (general support for the idea of European integration, but the denial of the European Union as the implementer of this idea) and Eurorejects (absolute denial of European integration as well as rapprochement with the European Union) (Kopecky–Mudde, 2002, p.303). Based on this typology, the Czech parliamentary political parties before the EU accession (1996–2002) is viewed as a) Euro-enthusiasts: ČSSD, KDU-ČSL, ODA, US, b) Eurosceptics: ODS, c) Eurorejects: KSČM, SPR-RSČ, and d) no party belongs (Kopecký, 2004, p.236).

In his turn, Jan Rovny proposes his own typology of Central European parties by the degree of their post-EU accession Euroscepticism, based on the traditional division into Hard Euroscepticism and Soft Euroscepticism, however with an emphasis on the ideological orientation (stance) of the party. In this typology, the Czech Republic is represented by three Eurosceptic parties, namely Hard Euroscepticism – KSČM (ideological orientation Orthodox Communists) and SPR-RSČ (Populists), whereas ODS (Modern Conservatives) represents Soft Euroscepticism (Rovny, 2004, p.44).

D. Marek and M. Baun (2011) suggest their evaluation of a degree of Euroscepticism in the Czech party space. Upon gaining the European Union membership, the largest parties fall into several groups: a) Pro-EU without reservations/preferences for the federal EU: ČSSD, KDU-ČSL, TOP 09, b) Pro-EU with reservations/preferences for intergovernmentalism – ODS, and c) Reservedly anti-EU – KSČM (Marek–Baun, 2011, p.45).

Considering the development the party level of the Czech Euroscepticism, the three main subjects of anti-European politics should be singled out: ODS (Soft Euroscepticism), as well as SPR-RSČ and KSČM (Hard Euroscepticism). Given the low level of electoral support for the SPR-

RSČ since 1998 and its political opposition of extra-systemic nature, Euroscepticism in ODS and KSČM party activities is of the greatest interest.

Hypothesis 1. Low turnout in the elections to the European Parliament contributes to stable party Euroscepticism in the national parliament (Czech electoral preferences: European, national parliamentary, presidential, regional or local level?).

The low turnout in the European elections testifies to the secondariness of the European politics factor as opposed to that of the national. Some political parties may take advantage of the electorate's low interest in the European elections, hence labeling apolitical voters as Eurosceptics. Conversely, an increase in the turnout in the European elections should reduce the electoral potential of convinced Eurosceptics.

Hypothesis 2. The insignificant rotation of deputies ($\leq 50\%$) in the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic that had determined the strategy of the EU accession (2002–2006), as well as in its subsequent composition (2006–2010), indicates a stable pro-European vector of the country's development.

The Lower Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic (Poslanecká sněmovna Parlamentu České republiky) has enjoyed significant powers in implementing the European integration strategy for accession to the European Union. The composition of the Chamber of Deputies, elected in 2002–2006, provided parliamentary support for the Czech acquisition of membership in the European Union. The next Chamber of Deputies (2006–2010) was to create favorable conditions for the country's adaptation to the institutional environment of the European Union. Therefore, the homogeneity of the pro-European composition of the representative body testifies to the invariability of the European choice of the Czech Republic. In addition, important is the internal rotation of pro-European and Eurosceptic parties.

Hypothesis 3. At least half of the democratically-oriented public ($\geq 50\%$) is sufficient for public support for the Czech European integration reforms in the 1990s.

It can be argued that for post-communist countries, the success of democratic transit is determined, *inter alia*, by the European integration gains, even in the context of a fragmented party system (Meka, 2016, p.188–189). Therefore, the higher the level of the democratically oriented electorate, the higher the European integration potential of the country. According to the applied sociological monitoring of transitional countries “New Democracies Barometer” by Christian Haerpfer (Haerpfer, 2001)¹, in the 1990s the total number of “democrats” and “non-democrats” in the country is determined. Based on the proportion of pro-democratic and anti-democratic groups in the Czech transitional society, it seems expedient to discuss the real level of public support for the European integration strategy.

Hypothesis 4. The future format of the Czech-EU relations presupposes prioritising national interests over the Pan-European but with simultaneous preservation of the EU membership.

In order to determine public sentiment towards the future within the European Union, we consider the findings of the public opinion polls by the European Commission via the Eurobarometer (In the near future..., 2019) program. The monitoring covered the period of membership of the Czech Republic from 2004 (the Czech Republic joined the EU) and up to mid-2019.

Results and discussion

Electoral preferences of Czech voters

In the post-communist period, parties ideologically close to Euroscepticism have always been noticeable political actors. The seven electoral cycles to the Chamber of Deputies of the

¹ The methodology of the “New Democracies Barometer” program lies in identifying a democratically oriented part of the public in transitive societies. The transition from a non-democratic to a democratic society is the main precondition of sociological monitoring, i.e., a vast majority of the post-communist countries, including the Czech Republic, have undergone a thorough analysis. Having evaluated the prospects for a new democracy and the possibility of returning to the communist regime (nine issues in total), two large groups of the public have been outlined, e.g. “democrats” and “non-democrats”. We consider the 1994, 1996, and 1998 survey findings. Over the given period more than 3,000 respondents in the Czech Republic participated in the survey: 1167 (1994), 978 (1996), and 1017 (1998).

Parliament of the Czech Republic resulted in Eurosceptic parties winning a permanent electoral support quota of 1/3 (38.2%) with a minimum of 29.4% in 2013 and a maximum of 48.1% in 2006. Ironically enough, in the first post-communist parliamentary elections, following the start of the independent period, Eurosceptics obtained almost half of the seats (47.9%), which contrasts with a nationwide course on deepening European integration to strengthen a new democracy. The first elections after the EU accession proved by far the greatest success of Czech Eurosceptics (48.1%). Although, in the next parliamentary elections, the level of parliamentary Euroscepticism has gradually declined, dropping below 30% of electoral support.

Undoubtedly, the party spectrum of Czech Eurosceptics is quite variegated, including both moderate (ODS) and outspoken political populists (Rally for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia). For instance, “republican” populists do not currently produce a major impact on Czech electoral preferences. It is, however, worth mentioning that moderate Eurosceptics ODS would often play a central role in the formation of government cabinets².

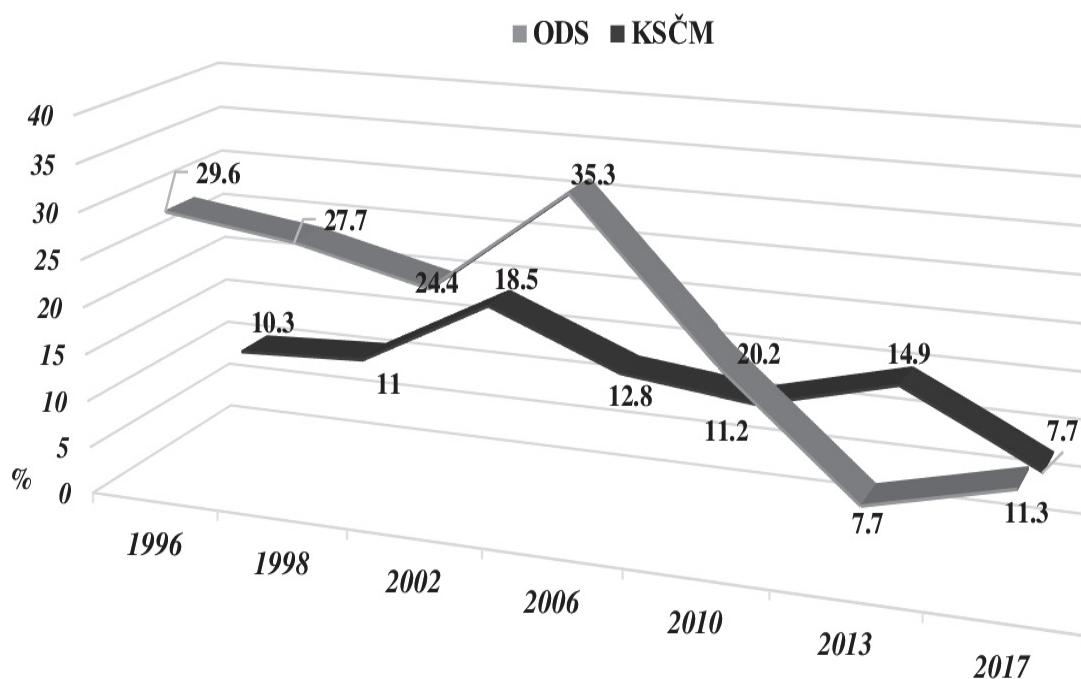
In the two recent parliamentary election campaigns, the new political projects by Tomio Okamura³ have made a statement, stamping themselves as a third Eurosceptic force. The overall scores of the dynamics of electoral support for Eurosceptic parties at the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic are based upon the election results of Soft Eurosceptic ODS and Hard Eurosceptic KSČM⁴ (see Figure 1).

² Following the formation of the Czech Republic, the ODS delegated two prime ministers – Václav Klaus (07.1992 – 07.1996, and 07.1996 – 01.1998) and Petr Nečas (07.2010 – 07.2013), and Mirek Topolánek (09.2006 – 01.2007, and 01.2007 – 05.2009) (Členové vlády, 2019).

³ In 2013, a newly created right-wing populist party “Dawn of Direct Democracy” (ÚSVIT) obtains 6,8%. Already in 2017 the party “Freedom and Direct Democracy” (Svoboda a přímá demokracie), based on ÚSVIT and conforming to the same Eurosceptic stance, improves its previous result and obtains 10,6% support.

⁴ Along with the so-called Czech “Eurosceptic forces”, we observe yet another party that falls under the category of Hard Eurosceptic parties, i.e. Party of Free Citizens (“Svobodní”). The electoral peculiarity of the party is that it failed the elections at the parliamentary level, at the same time delegating its leader, Petr Mach, to the European Parliament in 2014. The party received a low, but a sufficient number of votes (5.24%) in the 2014 European Parliament elections. (Cabada, 2008, p.25). According to Ladislav Cabada, due to a low voter turnout (18.2%) the party managed to get one European mandate (Cabada, 2008, p.25). Interestingly, in the next elections to the European Parliament in 2019, the Party of Free Citizens failed to overcome the electoral barrier.

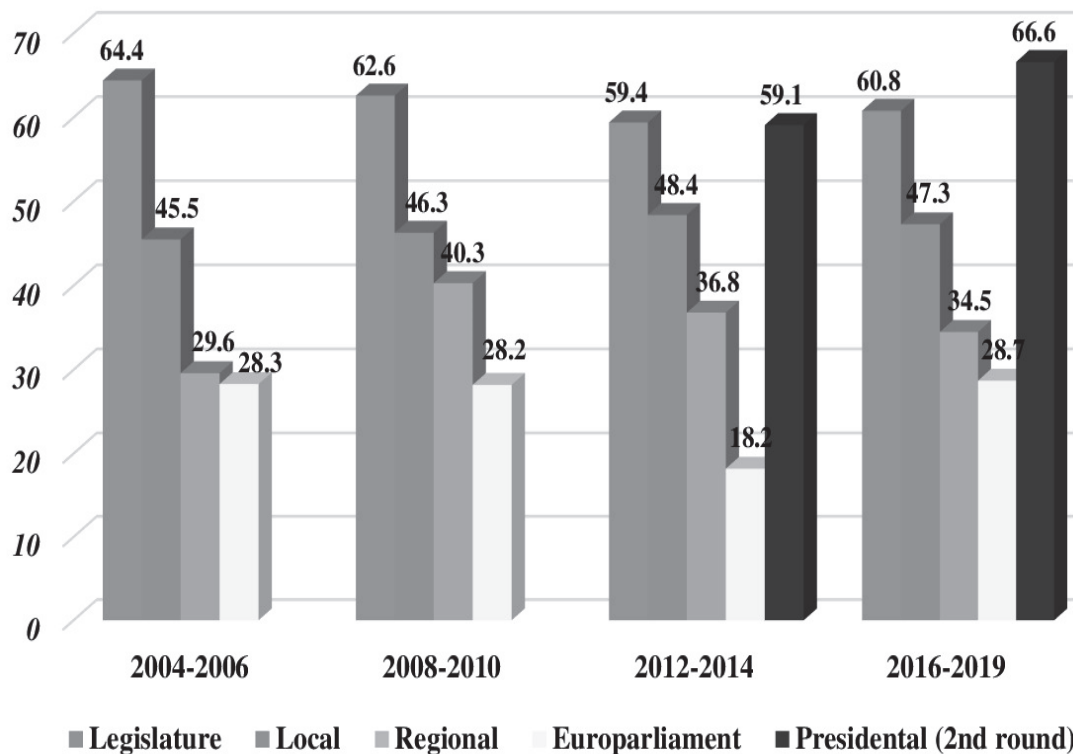
Figure 1: Dynamics of electoral support for Hard Eurosceptics and Soft Eurosceptics in the elections to the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic (1996–2017)



Source: own calculations according to the Czech Statistical Office data (Volby.cz).

In May 2004, following its EU accession, the Czech Republic was almost immediately involved in European electoral processes. A month later, in June, the Czech parties participated in the elections to the European Parliament for the first time. Recently, four European Parliament election campaigns have taken place in the Czech Republic, simultaneously with the elections to the representative bodies of national and regional governments, as well as the presidential elections. The Czech electorate decided on their electoral preferences, prioritizing the national policy level over that of Europe (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: The level of electoral participation of the Czech voters, in % (2004–2019)



Source: own calculations according to the Czech Statistical Office data (Volby.cz).

According to the voter turnout statistics, the Czech electorate has prioritized elections to the lower chamber of Parliament. The inter-party ideological struggle is associated with the opposition in the parliamentary arena. On the other hand, Czech voters express a high level of electoral interest in the personalized level of politics, with the highest voter turnout in the 2013 and 2018 presidential elections. This is particularly exhibitive in the light of the supremacy of parliamentary institutions in the Czech political system. Given the populist activities of the twice-elected president Miloš Zeman, it is worth discussing the dominance of Eurosceptic sentiment in the Czech presidential institutions.

At a local level, the main competition arises on the one hand between pro-European and Eurosceptic parties, and with independent candidates, on the other. At a regional level, the turnout is slightly lower, comprising about 30% of voters who elect delegates to higher self-governing bodies in 14 Regions, including the capital of Prague.

Czech voters appear to be the least interested in elections to the European Parliament. In the Czech Republic, European elections turnout has remained approximately 28% (18% in 2014). However, the Czech Republic has typically delegated Eurosceptics to the European Parliament, with ODS and KSČM respectively delegating one and four deputies in the 2019 elections (21 deputies from the Czech Republic in total) (Volby.cz). Euroscepticism in the elections to the European Parliament has two main peculiarities: a) according to the 2019 election, the turnout in the Czech Republic was among the lowest of all 28 Member States (The Czech Republic overtook only Slovakia, where the turnout was 22.74%) (Turnout - 2019), b) Eurosceptic voters are rather versatile, represented by the apolitical electorate that ignores the European elections and simultaneously votes at national elections, and the active electorate, voting for either Soft or Hard Eurosceptics in both the European and national elections.

Rotation of the pro-Eurointegration composition of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic

The strategic role of the parliament in the political support of Eurointegration processes is hard to deny. The more ideologically polar the composition of the parliament, the harder it is to secure the country's institutional rapprochement in the European Union. It is due to the steady political course on deepening European integration both before and during the Czech accession to the European Union, as well as following it. Based on a comparative analysis of the Chamber of Deputies in 2002 and 2006, the rotation dynamics make up exactly 50% (see Table 1), proved by the fact that 100 deputies of the previous Lower house composition (2002–2006) were elected to the next Parliament (2006–2010). These figures illustrate that the composition of the parliament had hardly changed, and consequently, the pro-European course of the Czech Republic continued onwards, especially in the course of adaptation to the EU requirements.

Table 1: Dynamics of the pro-Eurointegration membership rotation of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic (2002–2010)

<i>Parliamentary rotation indicator (2002 elections; 2006 elections)</i>			
50% (100 deputies out of 200)			
<i>Party rotation indicator (2002 elections; 2006 elections)</i>			
ODS	ČSSD	KSČM	KDU-ČSL
30%	49%	44%	68%

Source: own calculations based on the Czech Statistical Office data (Volby.cz).

More dynamic is the rotation rate of MPs from different political forces. First and foremost, the overall balance of political forces in the Lower house was preserved, since only SZ with the result of 6.2% (Volby.cz) joined the usual cohort of parliamentary parties (ČSSD, ODS, KSČM, parties under the umbrella of KDU-ČSL) in 2006. The difference was that the Eurosceptics ODS in 2006 obtained the highest electoral support, with the pro-European ČSSDs running up.

Intra-party rotation of deputies also has several peculiarities: a) the biggest rotation is typical of pro-European parties, for example, the Social Democrats of ČSSD changed their parliamentary composition by 49%, whereas Christian Democrats of KDU-ČSL by 68%, b) Eurosceptics demonstrated a significantly lower rotation rate: the Communists of KSČM changed parliamentary composition by 44%, with the Conservatives of ODS only by 30%.

Another electoral trend of the Lower House composition rotation over 2002–2010 is a high level of conservatism remaining in voting districts. According to the electoral sustainability criterion, the following tendencies arise:

a) ODS preserved the election rate of deputies in each district (14 out of 14), with Central Bohemian region (Středočeský Kraj) and the capital of Prague having delegated the largest number of MPs (6 MPs each);

b) ČSSD – the MPs were elected in 12 voting districts out of 14, with Moravian-Silesian region (Moravskoslezský Kraj) proving the most represented (6 MPs);

c) KSČM – Communists were elected in 13 regions out of 14, and 2 regions proved to be electorally favorable, represented by 3 deputies each (Central Bohemian region (Středočeský Kraj) and South Moravian region (Jihomoravský Kraj));

d) KDU-ČSL – MPs were re-elected in the smallest number of voting districts (10 out of 14), with no electorally favorable regions for this political force as well as no more than 1 MP re-elected in either of them.

One way or another, throughout accession and initial adaptation of the Czech Republic to the European Union, the issue of European integration remained the main political discourse in the Lower House. A traditional post-communist Eurosceptic sentiment, to a large extent, manifested itself in the early 2010s, strongly polarizing the Czech party space.

Democratic and Non-democratic Sentiments in the Czech Society in Transit

Democratic sentiments in a post-communist society form a favorable social foundation for Eurointegration processes. Respectively, the non-democratic slant of the public facilitates the spread and support of Euroscepticism. Based on Christian Haerpfer’s sociological monitoring methodology under the “New Democracies Barometer”, we can identify the correlation between the democratic/nondemocratic public sentiment and Eurooptimists/Eurosceptics (see Table 2).

Table 2: Correlations between democratic orientations versus European aspirations of the public

Eurooptimists	Eurosceptics
A negative evaluation of the communist regime	A neutral or positive evaluation of the communist regime
A positive attitude towards the new democracy	A neutral or negative attitude towards the new democracy
Inability to dissolve a new parliament and ban political parties	Supporting the dissolution of parliament and the ban on political parties
The unwanted dissolution of a new parliament and ban on political parties over the next few years	It is desirable to dissolve parliament and ban political parties over the next few years
The rejection of an authoritarian leader as an alternative to democracy	Rejection of parliament and elections, as well as transition to a one-man dictatorship

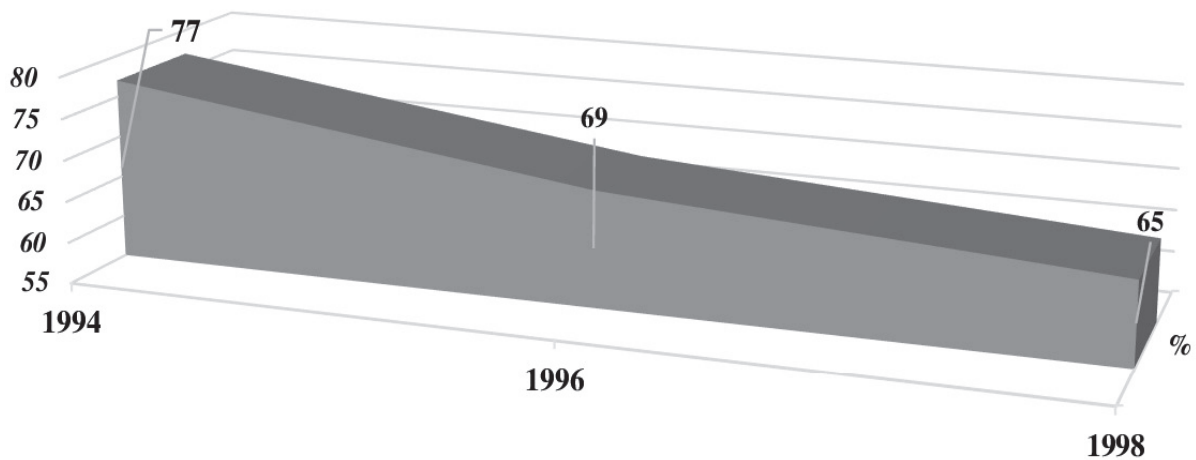
The rejection of military dictatorship as an alternative to democracy	Positive perception of the army in ruling the country
Denial of prospects for a monarchy	A positive attitude towards the return of the monarchy (in case there was such state experience)
A return to the communist past is a mistake	The desire to return to the communist past
The progress of the current democratic regime over five years	The regress of the current democratic regime over five years

Source: own calculations on the basis of “New Democracies Barometer” (Haerpfer, 2001, p.128–130).

The aforementioned findings serve as evidence that the main factors of non-democracy are the mental desire to return to the previous communist regime, as well as the lack of real prospects for the development of the existing type of political regime in terms of democratic principles. Therefore, these factors are relevant to the system of coordinates of modern hard Euroscepticism. In turn, free elections and a competitive party system, forming the basis of parliamentary democracy, are viewed as indispensable elements of Euro-optimism. Such defining political institutions of democracy are classified as those related to modern Euro-optimism.

Throughout the 1990s, the Czech Republic created favorable conditions for a positive perception of the country’s European integration course at the public level. Eventually, the total number of democratically-oriented public (Euro-optimists) significantly outweighs undemocratic groups (potential Euro-skeptics) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: **The Number of Democrats (Eurooptimists) in the Transitional Czech Republic (according to “New Democracies Barometer” program)**



Source: based on “New Democracies Barometer” (Haerpfer, 2001, p.130).

In the 1990s, the Czech Republic formed a favorable background for the European integration at the public level. The Czechs proved to express the highest level of confidence in the new national democracy no sooner than the independent parliamentary republic had been established (over two-thirds of the public). Onwards the level of democracy in the country was gradually falling, comprising around 70%. Such a declining trend was facilitating a strong public foundation for Euroscepticism. On the other hand, the Czech Republic has demonstrated the best democracy indicator among the 15 post-communist countries surveyed. At any rate, the Czech Republic had striven for systemic Eurointegration since the 1990s, aiming for institutional consolidation with the European Union in the early 2000s.

Potential relationships between the Czech Republic and the European Union as perceived by the Czech population

The public opinion of the priority of national versus Pan-European interests is an important indicator to measure the Euroscepticism level in a country. It is the public preferences that determine the dominance of national (mostly conservative) values, or, on the contrary, those leaning towards the EU philosophy. A moderate combination of both seems the best possible state of affairs, yet a slight dominance of either national or European factors is preferable.

A traditional annual public opinion monitoring “Eurobarometer” conducted by the European Commission for the EU Member States (In the near future..., 2019) offers a dynamic vision of the European future. There are several trends relevant to the Czech Republic:

a) traditionally, post-communist countries that have recently joined the EU express a minimal level of Eurooptimism that ranges from 1 to 3%. No doubt, the Czech population can hardly be expected to illustrate a higher level since such a choice would seemingly misrepresent national interests for rather “obscure” pan-European prospects;

b) yet another purely Eurooptimistic option, i.e. the domination of European values maintaining the national ones, was met with a positive attitude on the part of the Czech population. In this case, observable is a high rate of positive perception (nearly 10%) the year following the accession to the European Union, although later on the level of support systematically fell to 3% (2010). Since that time the figures never went back to the highest positions;

c) another type of public opinion can be classified into Eurosceptic and further subdivided into 2 groups: 1) Hard Euroscepticism (“Nationality only”), and 2) Soft Euroscepticism (“Nationality and European”). These two indicators account for about 90% of all public preferences in the Czech Republic from 2004 to 2019. Hard Euroscepticism dominates in this ideological confrontation, reaching its peak of 59% in 2010. The highest Soft Euroscepticism rate of 58% came close to that in 2018.

Soft Euroscepticism is characterized by a three-level trajectory: 1) the bottom-up trajectory (2004–2005) illustrated that the number of soft Eurosceptics almost doubled (+ 29%) during a year after the country joined the EU, 2) the top-down trajectory (2005–2010) demonstrated a decline in the number of soft Eurosceptics by 12%, and 3) the largest upward trajectory (2010–2019) led to a gradual increase in a critical mass of soft Eurosceptics, with their lowest rate of 38% (2010), as opposed to the highest of 57% (2019).

Hard Euroscepticism trajectory proved to be less dynamic, undergoing two main phases: 1) ascending phase (2004–2010), marked by a sharp increase in hard Eurosceptics from 29% in 2004 up to 59% in 2010, and 2) descending phase (2010–2019) that illustrated the lowest level of Hard Euroscepticism in 2018 (34%).

In general, the Czechs identify themselves as a European nation, respectively viewing the Czech Republic as a part of the EU. Simultaneously, preservation of the national interests remains a priority, which is a sign of a substantial Euroscepticism level. Interestingly, the lowest recorded

level of Hard Euroscepticism was 29% in 2004 (the time of the country's accession to the EU) yet the Czech population could no longer go back to this indicator. Similarly, Soft Euroscepticism comprised 19% in 2004, which can be explained not only by a problematic institutional adaptation of the Czech Republic to the European Union and mental adaptation of the population to European ideas. A growing Euroscepticism in the "post-accession period" is attributed to the fact that some parties (primarily ODS), as well as politicians (for example, President Miloš Zeman, so far having no alternative), took advantage of the negative sentiments in Czech society to mobilize the electorate.

Conclusions

1. Euroscepticism has deeply rooted in the party environment of the post-communist Czech Republic. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, two major groups of Czech party Euroscepticism had already emerged: Soft Euroscepticism (ODS) and Hard Euroscepticism (KSČM). Both political forces received a significant level of electoral support in each election to the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic (the highest ODS statistics were 35.3%, KSČM – 18.5%). Worth mentioning is another Eurosceptic party Rally for the Republic – the Republican Party of Czechoslovakia, which had firmly established itself as parliamentary opposition from 1992 to 1998. Since the 2013 elections, Tomio Okamura's political projects, classified as Hard Euroscepticism on an anti-immigrant basis, joined the Czech Eurosceptic camp. The overall share of Eurosceptic parties in the current Chamber of Deputies (2017–2021) is relatively insignificant, amounting to some 31% (ODS + KSČM + FDD). However, the electorate maintains a considerable level of Euroscepticism, for instance, elections to the European Parliament posed little to no interest to Czech voters.

2. Throughout the 1990s, the legitimacy level of the Eurointegration course in the Czech Republic was the highest among other post-communist countries, with a democratically-oriented public ranging from 65% to 77%. Intended to bring the country more in line with European political and economic structures, the reforms in the country have contributed to its successful democratic transit. The sustainable pro-European stance of the Czech electorate is noticeable regarding an inconsiderable rotation level in the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic (2002–2010), being exactly 50% of the MPs. It was this composition of the Lower Chamber that

was to support the Czech Republic's accession to the European Union and facilitate its adaptation in the European community.

3. It is necessary to point out certain predicted patterns of the Euroscepticism dynamics and the deployment of forces in the political and party space in the Czech Republic. The biggest growth of Euroscepticism was recorded in 2010 (59%), coinciding with the incumbency of the conservative Mirek Topolánek Government (2006–2009). Paradoxically, the conservative composition of the Government simultaneously led to a decrease in Hard Euroscepticism. Under the conservative Petr Nečas Government (ODS), the total number of hard Eurosceptics significantly dropped. This resulted in an equal total number of hard and soft Eurosceptics in 2013 (45% each). The major reason for a decreasing number of hard Eurosceptics is the rupture of the government coalition led by the ODS, followed by a government corruption scandal and early parliamentary elections in 2013. The Social-democratic Bohuslav Sobotka Government was characterised by steady numbers of both soft and hard Eurosceptics (45%) throughout 2014–2017. The recent 2017 elections to the Lower House evidenced a positive tendency for soft Eurosceptics, accompanied by a simultaneous decrease in hard Euroscepticism. As of 2019, the gap between them amounted to 18%. Ever since the Government of Andrej Babiš (ANO 2011) has been contributing to a fall of Euroscepticism among the Czech population.

In light of our study, another trend deserves attention. The COVID-19 pandemic that began in Europe in early 2020 has led to limiting Europeans' well-established civil rights and freedoms. A vast majority of countries have introduced severe quarantine restrictions and unpopular social measures to reduce the risk of infection. According to Freedom House experts, European governments need to be very careful about restrictive measures, since citizens may lose trust in institutions and mechanisms of government in the process of restricting citizens' freedoms (Funk–Linzer, 2020). Hence, we can assume that a forced restriction of civil rights during and after the pandemic will inevitably lead to political speculations on the part of Eurosceptic parties. Specifically, the new circumstances will cultivate the issue of strengthening national sovereignty (as opposed to EU cosmopolitanism), criticizing Schengen principles, reduced labor migration, and a revision of the government's fiscal policy. Finally, the level of growth or decline of Eurosceptic sentiment in Czech society will continue in the forthcoming 2020–2021.

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