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Czech debate on the EU membership perspectives of Turkey and Ukraine

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Introduction

The question of further EU enlargement is an issue that remained very much on the table even after the May 2004 “Big Bang” expansion of the Union. While in the ten countries that recently acceded all the efforts thus far have been focusing on the rules and conditions of entering the exclusive club, not much space in the public debate remained for discussing the issue as to what are the further steps in EU enlargement, which countries should be considered for joining and what are the stakes of the new member states, including the Czech Republic, in the whole process.

This paper will look into examining the Czech attitudes towards the EU membership perspectives of two countries: Turkey and Ukraine. It will deal with the attitudes of the political representation, including the political parties, government and diplomatic service (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and other governmental stakeholders. Further, it will try to give an account of how the issue was treated in the media, especially in the major opinion shaping newspapers. Thirdly, it will try to assess what are the other stakeholders in the process, especially within the ranks of the civil society and how they are likely to shape the public debate.

In terms of methodology, the paper builds on several major sources of information. The first one are various governmental and non-governmental documents, dealing with or relevant to the issue of further enlargement general, and in relation to Turkey and Ukraine in particular. Along with these, public statements and interviews of

various stakeholders, published in the major media (press, TV, radio) were accounted for and analysed. Secondly, face-to-face interviews with those who were identified as crucial stakeholders in the process were undertaken. Thirdly, an important source of information was the media coverage of the issue, especially in the major opinion shaping newspapers and magazines.

General account of Czech attitudes towards EU enlargement

In general, it can be argued that the Czech political representation (as well as public opinion) is in favour of further enlargement of the EU. And in this respect, there is a consensus between the current centre-left government, composed of Social Democrats (CSSD) and two smaller parties – Christian Democrats (KDU-CSL) and Freedom Union (US, liberals) and opposition, composed of conservative Civic Democrats (ODS) and Communists (KSCM). This is due to several factors.

Firstly, the Czech Republic is a newcomer to the EU. Until recently, the country was only in a position to knock on the EU door. Now, once inside, it feels it has not been inside long enough to be able to tell the fellow inhabitants that the door should remain closed for the others who want to come in. Generally, there is still a bit of an idealistic feeling (especially in the current government) that the driving force behind the EU integration project is the European reunification, starting with the Franco-German reconciliation after WWII but continuing after the end of Cold War with bringing the ex-Communist countries into the EU. There is a feeling of solidarity with countries outside the EU aspiring to join the club, who should be given the right to prosperity and well-being as well.

The incentive of EU membership is also seen as crucial for the stability of the neighbourhood of the EU. The deep-rooted feeling of Central Europe as being the buffer zone is still present. But as the Czech Republic is bordering only on EU member states, the problems of the EU neighbourhood seem a bit more distant from Prague than from Warsaw or Riga.

Another motive stems from the own transformation experience. It is generally acknowledged that it was the vision of EU membership that helped to undertake many internal reforms in the country at a much quicker pace than would have been the case otherwise. The “carrot and stick” soft power of the EU used to drive the reform process in the neighbouring countries is recognized as an extremely powerful tool for creating a friendly neighbourhood for the EU and changing the countries to be more like the members of the club. However, at this point there is already far less consensus. While on one hand this argument is accepted by the current centre-left government, the dominant opposition party (ODS) can be marked as much more “sovereignist”. Although generally in favour of the EU (not least because of its strongly pro-European electorate), especially during the accession negotiations it was accusing the EU of a dictate, domination, unequal treatment of candidate countries, overregulation, trying to impose a red “socialist” tape on countries that are striving in developing in more liberal direction etc. Much of this might, however, do with the fact that ODS was in opposition in the whole course of accession talks (from 1998 onwards). To what extent this sovereignist rhetoric will prevail once ODS gets to power again (likely in 2006) remains to be seen. As far as Communists are concerned, their attitudes towards further enlargement are not known very well, as they are hardly ever publicly articulated. From some statements of prominent party

members it can be assumed that the EU is viewed the very opposite way than by the ODS – i.e. as a capitalist project, serving as a channel through which the globalisation forces will eventually “swallow up” Europe.

It is also worth examining the motives of the major parties for supporting further enlargement of the EU.

For the Social Democrats (and to a large extent also Christian Democrats), the argumentation goes along with the mainstream argumentation of the European social democratic attitudes: it remains associated mainly with the above described idealistic goals of European reunification, spreading stability and prosperity across the continent, and thus creating a safe home for everyone (Robert Kagan would probably refer to the Kantian idea of an eternal peace). But there is one potential concern there as well: as the Czech Social Democracy is quite concerned with further deepening of European integration and pushing it in the political direction as well, there is a risk that further enlargement might imperil the political integration, because it will be more difficult to keep the pace with more countries on board. This idea has already been transposed into the Concept Paper of Czech priorities in the EU (internal document of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) which says that the Czech Republic supports further enlargement of the EU, on condition that it does not imperil further progress in European integration. This issue is becoming particularly relevant with recent developments leading to a failure to referenda on the Constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands, and there is a certain nervousness that it will be actually the first time that the EU failed to enlarge and deepen simultaneously. So the enthusiasm of CSSD for further enlargement might diminish if there is an enduring internal crisis in the EU.

The attitude of Civic Democrats (ODS) towards enlargement is very much similar to the attitude of British Conservatives. They view enlargement as a way of watering down the project of European integration. Thus, what might potentially diminish the enthusiasm of CSSD for enlargement is exactly why ODS is supporting it so vigorously. For ODS, with more countries on board, especially with big and relatively poor countries such as Turkey or Ukraine, the political integration will become impossible, and the EU will have to remain merely an economic union, perhaps in a much loser form than it is these days, or at least find more flexibility with groups of countries integrating in different policy areas (“cirques concentriques” in the EU integration theory).

Last but not least, an account should also be made of the attitude of Václav Klaus, the current President of the Czech Republic. Although he has very little to no leverage in influencing the Czech governmental position on further EU enlargement, his impact on public opinion cannot be underestimated. He remains the politician that the Czechs tend to trust most, with 74% public support in July 2005. He is extremely skilful in provoking the public debate on many issues in a very controversial manner. He did so also with the enlargement, having stated that the European Union should encompass countries such as Morocco or Kazakhstan. His opinion on enlargement is of course very much in line with ODS thinking (Klaus is still a honorary chairman of ODS, although he does not interfere in party business any more). Klaus’s ideas, derived from the Thatcherite discourse, would be to turn Europe into area without internal borders but also without supranational regulatory and institutional framework.

The positions of CSSD, KDU-CSL and ODS are likely to determine any future “official” Czech position on further EU enlargement. The attitudes of the two other parliamentary parties – Freedom Union (US) and Communists (KSCM) - are more difficult to predict because they are generally not articulated. But according to the current polls, the Freedom Union will not even get into the parliament in June 2006 elections¹, and it is not sure whether it will survive on the Czech political scene at all. As for the Communists, they are in permanent isolation and it is highly unlikely they will join any further government. Moreover, according to recent polls they seem to be on decline, with Social Democrats luring some of their voters².

To summarize, the attitude of the Czech political representation towards EU enlargement seems to be what can be marked as “fragile consensus”. The major political players support enlargement, but with very different motives, which stems from the fact that they see the EU and its “finalité politique” through completely different optics. Depending on the internal developments in the EU, the current consensus on further enlargement might break up very easily.

One matter that should also be acknowledged is that concept of EU enlargement is geographically prioritised in the Czech case. As there is a general political will to enlarge, the strategy of enlargement is driven mainly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For the Czech diplomacy, priority is the membership of Western Balkan countries, namely Croatia (whose membership is most “on the table”), but potentially all the others (Serbia and Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Albania). Czech Republic did not take such a strong stance on the opening of accession negotiations with Croatia as Slovakia, Hungary or Austria but this was based on the conviction that Croatia is actually not co-operating fully with the Hague Tribunal, and demonstrates that idealism is still a strong element in the Czech diplomacy (as can be seen in other issues, such as Cuba). The interest in Western Balkans stems from several factors: historical and cultural links to Southern Slavs (which are much stronger than links to Ukraine or to Turkey), historical reminiscences of “Little Entente”³, tourism (Croatia is by far the most popular summer destination for the Czechs)⁴, but also the activity of Czech diplomacy for which the Western Balkans has been a traditional playground⁵. Thus on the issue of enlargement, a very close co-operation can be expected with countries who have similar geographic priorities, i.e. Slovakia, Hungary, Austria and Slovenia. Both Turkey and Ukraine, which are the subject matter of this paper, are less important in terms of enlargement, but ultimately Ukraine is more of a priority for the Czech diplomacy than Turkey.

The limiting factor for a stronger involvement of the Czech diplomacy vis-à-vis Ukraine stems from several factors. First is the relative Polish strength on the issue which makes the Czech Republic rather reluctant to pull along automatically, as it is

¹ STEM: Party preference, July 2005 – the support for Freedom Union at 1%.

http://www.stem.cz/index.php?anotace_nah=1&id=951&tisk=1&url=source_clanky/951/index.php

² Ibid. The poll shows the support for CSSD at 20.9%, while for the Communist party only at 16.6%. This is the first time since October 2004 when CSSD marked higher support than Communists.

³ The agreement among Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia concluded after the First World War to face the possible Austro-Hungarian (especially Hungarian) revisionism

⁴ It is estimated that in 2005, about 800,000 Czechs will travel to Croatia during the summer

⁵ Here a brief mention can be made of the appointment of Mr Jiří Dienstbier, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, as UN special envoy for human rights in former Yugoslavia, or the Czech – Greek peace initiative prior to the Kosovo air campaign in 1999

not seen as its “own” initiative. It prefers to create coalitions with small member states with similar geographic preferences, such as Slovakia, Austria, Hungary or Slovenia. Secondly, it might occasionally seem that Poland is not too interested in getting the Visegrád partners on board. Poland was for instance reproached for the fact that President Kwasniewski did not consult with his Visegrád partners his involvement during the electoral crisis in Ukraine (while he apparently did so with some West European leaders). On the other hand, it must be noted that Poland did not receive much support from its Visegrád partners regarding earlier initiatives, including the non-paper for European Neighbourhood Policy (see further in the Ukraine section).

As the issue of further EU enlargement has not been very much part of the Czech discourse yet, all the assessments relating to the public support for further EU enlargement should be examined very cautiously. The thinking about the enlargement is very much driven by the political class. The best source of public opinion on the enlargement across the EU is Eurobarometer⁶. Looking at the two most recent polls (December 2004 and July 2005), we can see that the Czech Republic ranks very high in terms of public support for EU enlargement, with a constant figure of 66%, making it the 6th member state out of EU-25 with the highest support for this phenomenon. Generally, the overall results show that it is mainly the new member states (NMS) which demonstrate the highest support for enlargement – in cases of all the 10 countries that acceded in May 2004, the support is higher than EU average (which in EU-25 fell down from 53% in Dec 2004 to 50% in July 2005). For instance, in case of Croatia, there is a 72% in favour in NMS while only 48% in EU-15, in case of Ukraine 66% in favour in NMS while only 41% in case of EU-15 or in case of Bulgaria 70% in favour in NMS while only 46% in EU-15. Another interesting observation is the fact that Croatia (52%) is enjoying greater support for EU membership than countries that already signed the accession treaties, i.e. Bulgaria (50%) and Romania (45%), and Ukraine is actually at a parity with Romania (both 45% in favour)⁷. The perception of Turkey which is especially relevant for this paper is also worth noting – it remains the least popular candidate for potential EU accession across the EU-25, although the support for its accession in the NMS is again higher (48%) than in the EU-15 (32%). According to this poll, 52% of EU citizens oppose the Turkish accession in contrast to 35% who are in favour.

Thus the cleavage in public opinion between the new member states and EU-15 is evident. In this respect, the Czech Republic is a “classical” new member state but there is a sharp contrast between the support for accession of rich or relatively prosperous countries (such as EEA or Croatia) as opposed to for instance Turkey, Ukraine or Albania. One of the motives for higher public support for further enlargement can probably be explained by the desire of the NMS citizens not to be at the outskirts of the EU, not to have to guard the external borders and not to be exposed to various risks such as trans-border crime, illegal migration, or even military and environmental threats. However, it is also worth noting that these arguments might be less intensive in the Czech case, because the Czech Republic does not have an external border and is surrounded by EU member states only. Furthermore,

⁶ Please refer to Eurobarometer 62 (December 2004) and Eurobarometer 63 (July 2005) as the latest data on the support for enlargement

⁷ The countries considered as potential candidates for accession in this survey included the following: Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, Albania and Turkey

this argument can be two-fold – it can be perceived that the accession of poorer and less well governed countries in the East can further undermine the stability of the current EU, an argument which was apparently present in EU-15 prior (and after) May 2004.

It is also not unreasonable to expect that the attitude will be changing over time, when the potential accession of countries such as Ukraine and Turkey will become closer to reality, and the Czechs will realize that these countries, with even cheaper labour force and underdeveloped regions will become direct competitors with Czechia for jobs and structural transfers from the EU budget. The Czechs one year after accession tend to view the EU rather pragmatically, as bringing tangible economic merits, and if these are gone with even poorer countries joining in, we might see the same kind of debate on “delocalisation” and “labour dumping” as we have recently seen in some old member states in relation to 2004 enlargement. But all these scenarios so far remain at a level of speculation, and it seems that the idealistic arguments about giving the EU neighbours the right to join the club, adapt to its rules and thus reach prosperity and higher living standard will prevail for some time to come.

The Czech Debate on Turkey

General remarks

It is beyond doubt that the debate on Turkey is mainly EU-driven, by the simple fact that Turkey was on the EU agenda soon after the Czech Republic joined in May 2004. The strategic decision to grant a candidate status to Turkey was made in December 1999 at the Helsinki European Council. In Copenhagen in December 2002, the EU leaders decided that the European Council will re-evaluate the progress of Turkey towards meeting the Copenhagen criteria in 2004, and if the avis was to be positive, the accession negotiations should start without unnecessary delay⁸. The Czech government was not represented at any of these two key European Council meetings as the CR was not a member state yet. However, it had to start tackling the issue soon after its accession because it had to take a position on whether the accession talks should be started or not.

As well as in the old member states, in the Czech case there is a broader debate (both among politicians and in the public/civil society) whether Turkey actually is eligible to join the EU, for various reasons – whether it is European in geographical sense, whether it complies with European values, whether it is part of European culture and civilisation etc. This debate of course came somewhat later and became an issue only after the accession. The issue of Turkey being an Islamic country also plays a role, but is perhaps less intensive than in the EU-15 due to several factors: namely, there is no Turkish minority in the Czech Republic (which plays a role e.g. in Germany, Austria or the Netherlands), there is no (negative) experience with political Islam in the Czech Republic, including its radical forms, and the influence of the Catholic church is very limited.

Position of the political representation

⁸ Presidency Conclusions, December 2002, Copenhagen

The issue of opening the accession negotiations with Turkey is undoubtedly a matter of political choice relating to the realm of foreign policy, which according to the Czech constitutional system is a responsibility of the government (vláda). From the logic of the electoral system of proportional representation (to the Chamber of Deputies to which the government is answerable), the governments are normally coalitions (except for 1998-2002 period when there was a minority government), which makes the cabinet decision-making a matter of bargaining and compromising.

The issue of opening of accession negotiations, and ultimately the issue of Turkish membership in the EU as such, is one of the points on which it was not possible to reach an automatic consensus, given the composition of the current Czech coalition government. For this reason, we have to examine carefully the positions of the parties composing the government and the formation of their arguments.

There is another phenomenon worth mentioning which might be relevant in this respect. After the EU accession, there seems to be a trend of shifting more co-ordinating powers regarding the EU-related issues directly to the Prime Minister, or to the so-called Cabinet office, which is directly subordinated to him. Because the issue of Turkish membership in the EU is also a matter of EU policy, a stronger involvement of Prime Minister could be expected than if this was just any other issue of foreign policy which is not of a vital interest to the government (which in case of Turkey is not). As the prime minister and foreign minister often come from different coalition parties in the Czech system, a potential clash could appear, which has been demonstrated on several occasions recently (mostly on Iraq) but to some extent on Turkey as well.

The Czech government adopted the position for the December 2004 Brussels European Council on 10 November 2004, stating that the Czech government supports the opening of accession negotiations with Turkey. However, the governmental position was a result of intra-governmental negotiations and a compromise. It was this very issue where the stances of the two bigger coalition partners – Social Democrats and Christian Democrats - were diverging. The government therefore officially supported the launch of accession negotiations, but with some reservations, arguing that this is going to be an open-ended process and that the negotiations will not guarantee automatically an outcome in the form of full membership.

Positions of the political parties

ČSSD (Česká strana sociálně- demokratická, Czech Social Democratic Party)

Social Democrats as the dominant coalition party obviously the strongest say and negotiating position in shaping the position of the Czech government.

The position of CSSD seems to be to a large extent determined by the position of the fellow Social Democratic parties in the EU, especially in the big member states, notably in Germany. The German SPD is clearly in favour of Turkey joining EU. The main arguments entail the necessity to embrace Turkey and ensure that it becomes a democratic country, respecting human rights and the rule of law. The image of

Turkey as a potential bridge to the Middle East and to the Islamic world in general is also often articulated. The potential pitfalls of the Turkish accession relate to the fact that the process of European integration, especially a political one, might become increasingly difficult with a huge, largely agricultural country on board – it is thus a question of the absorption capacity of the EU, and this might be further exacerbated if the EU fails to ratify the Constitutional Treaty which is viewed as means of deepening further European integration and pre-condition for any further enlargement. Some concerns have also been voiced out with the image of Turkey being the largest member state by or very soon after its accession, which would probably radically change the balance of power in the EU.

First prominent figure to speak in favour of Turkish accession and the launch of accession negotiations was Prime Minister Vladimír Špidla. Worth noting is his official visit to Turkey in October 2003, which was the first official visit of any Czech PM to the country and that took place before the Czech accession to the EU. Although the visit was focused – perhaps primarily – on fostering the economic ties between the two countries, the issue of the Czech position on Turkey came up as well. Špidla articulated clearly that the Czech Republic supports the Turkish bid, however, refused to speculate about the date of possible Turkish accession. Another argument articulated by Špidla at a later stage was the fear of “orientalisation” of Turkey, meaning that by not opening the accession negotiations there is a risk that the country might turn towards radical Islamism and leave the pro-European course started by Kemal Mustafa in 1920’s. Špidla’s impact on the Czech debate, and indeed debate within ČSSD, however, seems to be rather marginal after his departure for Brussels as the Commissioner for employment, social affairs and equal opportunities in the Barroso Commission. He took a very low profile on Turkey in the Commission, and even when he was questioned on the issue of women’s rights in Turkey in the European Parliament, his response was somewhat blurry.

Prime Minister Stanislav Gross, who succeeded Špidla in this capacity, took similarly a rather positive approach on Turkey joining the EU. He articulated it very clearly soon after his appointment in August 2004 at a regular meeting of ambassadors in Prague, where he repeatedly underlined the necessity for recognizing the “European future” of Turkey which is in the interest of the Czech Republic, and wish for “more interconnection or perhaps anchoring of Turkey in Europe” (quote). The role of Stanislav Gross was also instrumental in brokering the final governmental position for the December 2004 European Council, especially in making a compromise with the foreign minister Svoboda (KDU-ČSL) who expressed some stronger reservations (see further). Gross argued that the governmental position should follow the recommendation of the European Commission, published on 6 October 2004, and which was favourable in respect to opening of accession negotiations. However, the impact of Gross on the Czech debate on the Turkish accession is likely to follow the same scenario as in case of Špidla – after the government crisis of spring 2005, Gross resigned as a Prime Minister (although he nominally remains the party leader) and he interferes very little with party business since then. It is very likely that he will not get re-elected at the next party Congress, expected in spring 2006.

Thus the next prominent figure entering into the debate is the current PM, Jiří Paroubek. He has not made any public or media statements regarding the issue of Turkey. However, there is no evidence to suggest that there should be a U-turn in the

position. The issue will probably come up with the official launch of the accession negotiations, envisaged for October 2005. Understandably, the primary pre-occupation of Mr Paroubek is to restore the trust in CSSD whose preferences dropped down drastically (and it seems he was quite successful in this), tackle the issue of the EU constitutional crisis and send clear signals of the Czech position on the 2007-2013 budgetary negotiations. Thus, the issue of Turkey is very much not on the top of his agenda, but this will probably come up again in the autumn of 2005.

As for the other figures likely to interfere in the debate on part of CSSD, worth mentioning are at least these: the two Czech MEPs for CSSD – Mr Falbr and Mr Rouček. Both social democratic MEPs voted in favour of opening of the accession negotiations in the European Parliament. Their views towards Turkey are not too outspoken. Only Mr Falbr commented on Turkish PM Erdogan's remarks that nothing but a full membership is an acceptable option for Turkey, calling these remarks "unfortunate". On the Czech political scene, worth mentioning are especially Mr Zaorálek, Chairman of the Chamber of Deputies and one of the foreign policy specialists in CSSD and Mr Laštůvka, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber of Deputies.

KDU-ČSL (Křesťansko-demokratická unie – Československá strana lidová/Christian-democratic Union – Czechoslovak Peoples' Party)

The Christian Democrats are probably the most outspoken critics of the Turkish accession to the EU, although their approach is rather a "reservation" than "opposition". KDU-CSL is a smaller coalition partner, and this somewhat decreases its bargaining power in the government. On the other hand, it has quite a stable electorate, and recently it even did better in some elections (e.g. in the European Parliament or in the Senate) than the senior coalition partner - CSSD.

The position of the party is also influenced or inspired by Christian Democratic parties in EU, especially by the position of CDU/CSU in Germany. The confession-based parties in Europe are generally opposed to Turkish accession. KDU-CSL recognizes the importance of Turkey for Europe (strategically, militarily, as energy hub and bridge to the Middle East etc.), but would prefer an arrangement different from full membership, which is seen rather incompatible with the foundations of the EU. In the KDU-CSL position, not many innovative arguments can be found. The existing ones can be summoned as follows:

- Turkey is not European in a cultural and civilisation sense – European identity is based on Judeo-Christian heritage, Roman law, Greek philosophy and the Age of Enlightenment, which is something that ultimately does not fit with the Turkish case
- Turkey would be the only Muslim country in the EU⁹, which might change the identity of the EU as a club based on Christian roots, especially as by or soon after the accession it will be the most populous member state

⁹ It is necessary to underline that in this case the argument is factually ill-founded – there are European countries which are predominantly Muslim, such as Bosnia or Albania. Still, their eligibility to aspire for EU membership has not been disputed even by KDU-CSL

- Turkey still does not comply with the Copenhagen criteria, especially it is not still fully democratic in a sense EU views democracy – there is no clear separation of powers (argument relating especially to the exercise of power by the army), and the track record in human rights, especially the right of women and religious minorities (Christian Churches) is often criticised.
- Turkey would become by far too powerful by the time it joined the EU, because it would be the biggest member state in terms of voting power. This might change the current fragile balance in the EU.

It is interesting to note that the arguments relating to Turkey being a relatively poor country whose accession to the EU would become an unbearable burden for some EU policies, such as agricultural or regional policy, generally do not appear in the KDU-CSL discourse. Also the fact that the majority of EU population is opposed to the Turkish accession is not raised by the prominent Christian Democrats.

The most prominent figure to express the opinions on Turkey is the minister of foreign affairs Cyril Svoboda. Although his position in the government has to be distinguished from his rank in the party (he is not a party leader). For this reason, the arguments are more moderate, because he has to come to terms with the position of CSSD. In communicating the governmental position towards opening the negotiations with Turkey, Svoboda repeatedly underlined that the process is open, the outcome cannot be guaranteed beforehand and that it does not necessarily have to lead to full membership. Another interesting point made by Cyril Svoboda was the connection between Turkey and Iraq. As there were quite strong pressures in the government in course of 2004 to pull out of Iraq¹⁰, Svoboda argued that if the EU starts the accession negotiations and the Czech Republic gives a green light to this, it cannot pull out of Iraq, because the security and stability in Iraq is indispensable for the EU, as it might – due to the Turkish accession – become a neighbouring country (this position is very much supported by the opposition ODS). Also Svoboda lobbied very strongly for a strong involvement of Czechia in Iraq during the military strike (which at the end was turned down by the government) and was instrumental in putting Iraq among the priority countries for the Czech diplomacy.

Other prominent KDU-CSL figures commenting on the feasibility of Turkey joining the EU encompass namely two Czech MEPs – Jan Březina and Zuzana Roithová, who both voted against the opening of accession talks in the European Parliament. Březina articulated his views namely in the article published in *Hospodářské noviny* on 5 October 2004. He argues that the decision to grant the candidate status to Turkey in Helsinki in December 1999 was premature and taken under emotional circumstances. He is also critical of the Turkish political representation and diplomacy which is very skilful in lobbying the EU governments and playing down the state of democracy and human rights in Turkey. He then argues that the state of human rights in Turkey is the main reason why the negotiations should not be launched, and is making parallels with Slovakia which during the Mečiar's regime was unable to move forward in fostering links with the EU and starting the accession talks.

¹⁰ The Czech presence in Iraq entails the police unit training the local Iraqi police and some experts working mainly on the infrastructure reconstruction. There are no military troops.

Zuzana Roithová, member of the EP Committee for Women's Rights and Gender Equality, published an extensive article in which it criticises the European Council Decision to open the negotiations in 2005. The main message of the article points to incompatibility between the Turkish and European politics (allegedly based on the opinion of Belgian Islamist Urbain Vermeulen), the state of democracy and human rights in Turkey as well as the fact that Turkey is an Asian and Muslim country. She also supports the idea of a "strategic partnership" with Turkey (very close to Angela Merkel's visions) which might be more suitable for both the EU and Turkey, arguing that the decision of the EU is not sincere (the EU leaders actually do not want Turkey but are afraid to say no) and that if the negotiations proceed badly, there might be a negative slash back on the Turkish society.

The party leader Miroslav Kalousek hardly ever pronounces on the matters of foreign policy, however, on Turkey he commented¹¹ in a sense that KDU-CSL would prefer a partnership with Turkey in the European Economic Area, i.e. an arrangement similar to the one of Norway or Iceland. Recently, the KDU-ČSL chairman surprised many political stakeholders by a statement in which he called for the Czech Republic to hold a referendum on the Turkish accession. No matter how unrealistic this proposal was, given the general absence of a framework law on referenda (each referendum thus far has to be passed as a Constitutional Act by the Parliament) and the fact that two major parties (CSSD and ODS) are likely to oppose this, it indicates in which respect the position of KDU-ČSL might evolve in the upcoming years.

US (Unie Svobody, Freedom Union)

The smallest coalition party, Freedom Union, has never made a public statement on the desirability of the Turkish membership in the EU. The references in the Czech press say that the position of the party has not been shaped yet¹². Although the party leader Pavel Němec (currently Minister of Justice) claimed to be in favour of opening the accession negotiations, the party spokesman Patrik Nacher said the party leadership would have to discuss the issue further. But it can be assumed that the party will rather align itself with the senior coalition partner CSSD. The party takes on a liberal profile following the liberal stream of EU politics (although US is not represented in the European Parliament), thus will probably be in favour of eventual accession. Karel Kühnl (Minister of Defence), holding the only "heavyweight" portfolio for US, which might have a stake in Turkish accession, has never pronounced himself publicly on the issue either.

ODS (Občanská demokratická strana, Civic Democratic Party)

The Civic Democratic Party is in many ways the most vociferous proponent of the Turkish accession to the EU. Its position has to be taken very seriously, as it is likely to be at the heart of any future government for some years after 2006, i.e. in the period which will be in many ways crucial for the negotiations with Turkey. Also, it seems to be the party with most internal cohesion on this issue.

¹¹ Hokovský, Radko: „Czechia and Slovakia in the debate on the Turkish membership in the EU“

¹² Hospodářské noviny, 26 October 2004: „The Czech Politicians Say a Lukewarm Yes to the Turks“

The strong support for the Turkish accession to the EU stems from several broader arguments, some of which relates to the desirability of EU enlargement in general and some to the Turkish case in particular. They are the following:

- ODS, as a party very much opposed to the deepening of European integration, sees the enlargement as a way of watering down this process, because with more countries in it is more difficult to proceed with integration at the same pace. ODS would welcome much more flexibility in the integration process, giving the member states the right to choose in which policy areas they want to integrate and in which they want to keep more national power. As it was put by the prominent ODS figure on EU issues, Jan Zahradil (MEP for ODS): "...the enlargement brings in certain flexibility and the unification template, i.e. the desire to squeeze all the European countries into one format, gets weaker with enlargement..."¹³.
- Turkey, in its current form, i.e. a large, populous, and relatively poor country, is seen as "inabsorbable" by the EU, also in its current form. ODS perceives this as an advantage, and tends to view accession negotiations with Turkey as potentially precipitating reforms on both sides. While further efforts will be certainly needed on the Turkish part to meet the EU standards, this process would also force some internal reforms in the EU, especially in relation to its most costly policies – i.e. agricultural policy and regional/structural policy (and ODS hopes that this process was already started by the 2004 enlargement). This idea was expressed especially by Miroslav Ouzký, Vice-President of the European Parliament.¹⁴
- Turkey is largely seen as an Atlanticist country, due to its strong role in NATO (the biggest number of troops in the European pillar of NATO). It is also very much in focus of US foreign policy, and George Bush or other prominent administration figures spoke clearly in favour of Turkish accession, which is important for ODS. As ODS is a very Atlanticist¹⁵ party, it believes that Turkey, as a big and important player in defence, will strengthen the Atlanticist bloc in the EU.
- In relation to Turkey being a Muslim country, ODS (namely Jan Zahradil) argues against the perception of Europe as being based on Christian values only, but underlines an important role of Islam in European history and culture (the Balkans, Spain, Italy)¹⁶. At the same time, ODS refuses to perceive the EU as a Christian club, but argues for its greater engagement in the Muslim world, as a natural neighbourhood for Europe, and Turkey is seen as the first step.
- Some idealistic arguments, present in the CSSD discourse, can be found also in ODS thinking. ODS believes that EU should remain an open club, with those who fulfil the rules of the club allowed to join, naturally with some

¹³ Interview at BBC Czech

¹⁴ "Reformed EU does not have to be afraid". Article in Lidové noviny, 13 October 2004

¹⁵ By referring to Atlanticism hereby I mean the tendency to act in line with the United States rather than adopt a different policy

¹⁶ Stýkání a potýkání (Touching and clashing). Article in Euro magazine, 7 March 2003

reasonable geographical limits. The positive incentive of the EU membership or economic aid and close engagement in general is seen as a much more useful tool in tackling things such as illegal migration, organised crime or terrorism, and this should apply especially to countries in the near European abroad¹⁷.

This is, however, not to give an impression that the ODS support for Turkey is unconditional. ODS leading figures were very careful in underlining that Turkey must obviously continue on the reform track to meet the EU-set criteria. Also it was voiced out mainly by Jan Zahradil that the Turkish accession brings in certain risks, however, it was not clearly articulated what these risks are.

What can be recently observed is a certain internal division within ODS on foreign policy issues, and on EU-related issues in particular. In relation to Turkey, this division can play a role as well. It was confirmed by a high-ranking foreign policy party expert that Jan Zahradil's enthusiasm about Turkey joining the EU does not reflect the mainstream attitude of ODS, and he suggested that if in government, ODS would rather take a more cautious approach, based on strict EU conditionality when assessing the progress towards the accession.

However, it seems that the general attitude of ODS on foreign policy, and EU-related issues in particular, within ODS is outspoken by several leading experts, or more precisely, one dominant figure which is Jan Zahradil. He is an ex-member of the Convention, currently and MEP and the leader of ODS group in the European Parliament, but he is also a shadow minister of foreign affairs. It is quite possible that if ODS wins the elections in 2006, he would come back to take up this post. The other party personalities intervene or speak on the foreign policy issues very rarely, or not at all, apart from the party leader, Mirek Topolánek (but he has not made any statements on Turkey). In case of Turkey, a more active stance was taken by Miroslav Ouzký, and this is perhaps due to the fact that he was elected Vice-President of the European Parliament. But Zahradil's activism in case of Turkey goes beyond that. He was appointed a member of EU-Turkey association committee. Together with the assistance of Turkish Embassy in Prague, he launched a project called "Turkey and the EU" whose aim is to open up the debate on the Turkish accession. The crucial part of this project was a competition for university students (namely political scientists and economists) on the best essay on the impacts of full integration of Turkey into the EU, evaluating political, economic and social aspects and striving to suggest alternative solutions in case that the full membership proves not to be viable. The project was evaluated by a joint Czech-Turkish commission. Altogether, 44 students participated in the contest. The best papers (about 20-24) should be published on the internet in September 2005.

Other political stakeholders

The rest of the political stakeholders on the Turkish issue are included in one joint section. This is because their position in the Czech political process is considered as less important for the official position of the country. However, they can still play a

¹⁷ Ibid

role in directing the public debate on this issue, including their activism in the major media.

The first one to mention is the Communist party – KSČM (Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy, The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia). Communist party (largely unreformed) still enjoys a considerable support among the Czech electorate, ranging between 15 and 20%. However, its coalition potential is next to none, and it is unlikely to be included in any future government. The Communist party keeps a rather low profile on the issues of foreign policy in general, except that it clearly articulated its opposition to the NATO and EU accessions. In relation to Turkey, it never made public statements. However, certain attitudes could be deduced from the fact that all the Communist MEPs voted in favour of opening the accession negotiations. Also in the Czech press it was reported that the Communist party is in favour of Turkish accession¹⁸. It is, however, more difficult to judge the motives for this stance as they were never explained.

The other stakeholder who can have a substantive impact on public opinion and debate (less so on the official position) is the president Václav Klaus. His general attitudes towards enlargement were already mentioned - they go very much in line with the ODS argument about preventing deeper integration. In relation to Turkey he argues that its request is legitimate, because it is a result of a long-term process of rapprochement which took 40 years. It will be up to the EU to evaluate the preparedness of Turkey in terms of political freedoms, socio-economic principles, independent justice etc. At the same time he points out that Turkey is still considerably different from “standard” EU countries and the process will still take quite a long time¹⁹.

Also the attitude of ex-president Václav Havel should be mentioned. Havel has been known as a proponent of both NATO and EU enlargements, arguing for the necessity of making both organisations as open as possible to countries that fulfil certain standards and respect certain values. In case of Turkey he makes some interesting and original arguments²⁰. Firstly, he argues that it would be hypocritical having accepted Turkey to NATO (during the Cold War period) but not accepting it in the EU just on basis of civilisation or value arguments, because he views both NATO and EU as a community of values in the first place. Secondly, he evaluates positively the progress that Turkey has achieved to adjust to Western traditions and values, and that is why the EU membership should be a natural culmination of this process. Interestingly enough, Havel as a big proponent of human rights and democracy does not seem to have made any comments relating to Turkey in this respect. It is necessary to underline that these statements were made in the official capacity as a head of state. After he stepped down from the office (end of January 2003), his presence in the public debate has been very limited, and it is uncertain whether and to what extent this might change in the future.

The last two political stakeholders that deserve some attention in relation to Turkey are two MEPs, elected for a new platform ED-SNK (Evropští demokraté – Sdružení nezávislých kandidátů, European Democrats – Association of Independent

¹⁸ For instance *Hospodářské noviny*, 26 October 2004

¹⁹ Interview with the *Týden* weekly magazine, 7 December 2004

²⁰ Interview with *Respekt* weekly magazine, 13 January 2003

Candidates). This relatively new party emerged shortly before the European Parliament elections as a pro-European centre-right force (supposed to create an alternative to ODS) and did very well, having defeated all the government parties.

The number one elected for ED is Josef Zieleniec, ex-minister of foreign affairs and ex-member of the Convention. His attitude is worth noting because he is perhaps the most outspoken critic of the Turkish accession on the Czech political scene. His main argument is that Turkey is very different from the rest of the EU, and that its inclusion would further imperil progress in European integration (in which he is quite influenced by European federalist circles, especially Alain Lamassoure) but also the common European identity on which he sees the EU based. In his opinion it is hypocritical to make false promises to Turkey, at the stage when majority of EU population is opposed to Turkish membership. He sees there is actually no political will to accept Turkey nor enough courage to say no to Turkey, and this is the reason why the decision is being postponed, or actually to put the burden of the decision on citizens²¹ (apparently referring to intended referenda on Turkish accession in France and Austria).

Jana Hybášková, number two elected for ED and chairwoman of EU-Israel joint parliamentary committee is an interesting case. Originally Arabist and Orientalist, she became well known for her outspoken criticism of the Czech government during the Iraqi crisis when she was the Czech ambassador to Kuwait (after which she was dismissed). Her attitude towards Turkey is very much the opposite of Zieleniec. She argues that Turkey is ultimately connected to Europe, by virtue of history. The inclusion of Turkey is indispensable for engaging the EU in the Middle East, and in the Muslim world in general, for encompassing European Islam in its peaceful form and for starting the badly needed process of democratisation of the Muslim world. She also claims that the accession negotiations should have started already in 1990s, perhaps along with the other candidate countries. Her arguments are based on a very thorough knowledge of history and reality of the Middle East and the Muslim world in general. The question is to what extent this very sophisticated level of argumentation can play a role in the political discourse, given the fact that Hybášková is originally a career diplomat, and this way of thinking still reflects her alignment with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs rather than with her post of an MEP.

Position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs/diplomatic service

As for the Czech diplomacy (i.e. the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), although it is run by a Christian Democratic minister at the moment (Cyril Svoboda), for most it is an expert institution as the whole of the Czech public administration. Although deputy ministers/state secretaries are political appointees, all the ranks below them, including section directors (vrchní ředitelé) and department directors (ředitelé) are apolitical. Moreover, the deputy minister for the matters relating to the EU, Mr Vladimír Müller, who has an important say over Turkey in relation to the EU (including the Czech position on the negotiations) is a Social Democrat. This means that although one could expect a more lukewarm approach from the Foreign Ministry on Turkey, this has actually not been a case. The position of the Czech diplomacy is

²¹ BBC Czech

very much based on in-house expertise of the individual desk officers but also on the inter-departmental co-ordination.

The position of the Czech diplomacy on the Turkish accession is so far determined by the co-ordination between two departments: Department of Southern and Eastern Europe (which includes the desk officer for Turkey), responsible mainly for bilateral relations with Turkey, and European Union Section – Department of EU Co-ordination and Institutions (OKIEU), responsible for EU-related business, including the issue of Turkey at the level of EU institutions.

Generally speaking, Turkey is not a priority for the Czech diplomacy. Bilateral relations with Turkey are fine and not marked by any particular constraints, despite the fact that the official visits are not very frequent. In October 2003, the Prime Minister Vladimír Špidla and Minister of Trade and Industry Urban paid an official visit in Turkey; in January 2005, the Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Güll visited Prague and in May 2005, President Václav Klaus visited Turkey. A sign of the smoothness of bilateral relations is the fact that Turkey lifted the visas for the Czech citizens as of 1 January 2005, including the so-called “sticker” visas which Turkey still applies to most of the countries in Europe. Turkey is quite an important trade partner, ranking in the 19th place in terms of volume of mutual trade exchange²².

As was already said, the issue of Turkish membership in the EU is mainly EU-driven. Perhaps for this reason the Analysis and Planning Unit has already held an internal roundtable to assess the potential impact of the Turkish accession²³. Apart from that, in 2004 the aforesaid unit committed an external study to analyze the potential risks and opportunities of Turkey joining the EU²⁴. Therefore, the position of the Foreign Ministry on the eventual Turkish membership is still being shaped. From the information provided by high ranking officials it can be assumed that the Foreign Ministry might accept an alternative of Turkey having some sort of special status in relation to the EU (or strategic/privileged partnership) rather than full membership. The attitude of the Czech Foreign Ministry towards the Turkish accession can be expected to be somewhat relaxed, because Turkey is not a priority country. It is rather likely that the Czech Republic will follow the European mainstream.

One point that might potentially play a role is the issue is the activity of the Czech diplomacy in the Middle East peace process, and in the reconstruction of Iraq after the Saddam’s regime was overthrown. As was already mentioned, Iraq is one of the priorities of the Czech diplomacy and the link between Turkey and Iraq was already acknowledged by the foreign minister Svoboda. This would rather speak in favour of the Czech Republic activism on the issue. On the other hand, there is the issue of human rights, which became in recent years one of the focal points of Czech foreign policy. A newly established Unit of Transformation Co-operation is focusing on promoting human rights and running or assisting projects that would help improving democracy, human rights and rule of law as well as helping the political dissidents

²² Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, www.mzv.cz

²³ The round table method has been introduced fairly recently. The aim is to summon the relevant experts from the Foreign Ministry as well as from other parts of public administration and to discuss the position papers developed within the Foreign Ministry

²⁴ This is done in the framework of research tenders, regularly announced by Foreign Ministry, looking into external input/expertise on issues considered to be important for the Czech diplomacy

and politically persecuted people. Although it focuses on clearly authoritarian countries, namely Myanmar, Cuba and Belarus, if human rights prevail to be an issue in Turkish accession talks, that might shape the position of Foreign Ministry to a somewhat more lukewarm approach to Turkish membership bid.

Public attitudes, media and civil society

Turkey is still largely perceived within the Czech society as quite a distant and exotic country, and most of the people would still know it mainly as an increasingly popular tourist destination during the summer season. The points that play a role in perceiving Turkey as a potential member state of the EU that are relevant in EU-15 discourse are likely not to have a strong resonance within the Czech society, at least for the time being.

To evaluate overall attitudes of the Czech public towards the Turkish accession is quite difficult, although some patterns can be identified. Firstly, the fact that Turkey is a Muslim country should not be too relevant. The influence of the Catholic Church (and in fact any other Christian church) in the Czech Republic is very limited, compared to some other countries in the region (notably Poland) due to historical considerations, and Czech Republic is one of the countries in Europe where people consider themselves mostly non-confessional. Thus, the reservations expressed to Turkish membership in the EU, articulated by some prominent Vatican figures (notably cardinal Ratzinger – current Pope) are not likely to find any strong resonance in this country. This claim is based on the assumption that Czechs, unlike other European nations, tend to describe themselves as non-confessional, without attachment to particular Church or faith²⁵. Also, there is no direct experience with Islam, including its radical forms. The country has never been exposed to a serious threat of a terrorist attack or any other form of Islamic violence. On the other hand, there have been some cases associated with the intention to build mosques (notably in Orlová – region of Northern Moravia/Silesia and the spa town of Teplice in Northern Bohemia) which caused some public debate and raised some opposition, especially from local inhabitants, who feared that the mosques could become centres of Islamic radicalism. Thus it is difficult to assess to what extent the Czech public can link the issue of Islamic radicalism to possible Turkish accession. According to experts, the Czechs can clearly distinguish between the two issues. As will be explained further, some initiatives are trying to link the two issues and “sell it” as such to the Czech public. However, it is equally difficult to assess the impact of such initiatives, at least at this stage.

Also the fact that there is no Turkish minority in the Czech Republic plays a role. In fact, there is not a strong Muslim minority in general, and most of the Muslims living

²⁵ The figures of 2001 census suggest that only 32.2 % of Czechs describe themselves as “confessional”, 59% as “non-confessional” and for 8.8% unidentified. Out of those claiming to be confessional, 26.8% are Roman Catholics. Source: Czech Statistical Office, figures for 2001 census.

<http://www.czso.cz/csu/edicniplan.nsf/o/4110-03-->

obyvatelstvo_hlasici_se_k_jednotlivym_cirkvim_a_nabozenskym_spolecnostem

in the Czech Republic come from countries other than Turkey²⁶. The typical image of Turks among the Czechs would probably be the one from neighbouring Germany, associated with “gastarbeiter”. This does not have to invoke negative connotations – it is rather possible to argue that this image is less negative than that of other Muslims (notably Arabs), and the prevailing image might be that the Turks are more easily adaptable to the Western way of life than the Muslims of other ethnicities. However, there is no empirical evidence to purport this thesis, although it might be shared among the experts.

As for the public opinion polls on Turkey, the only opinion poll relating directly to the issue of desirability of the Turkish membership in the EU is Eurobarometer 63, where the collection of data was undertaken for the Czech Republic by TNS Aisa agency. The poll shows that in the spring of 2005, 51% of Czechs opposed the Turkish accession while 37% were in favour and 12% undecided.²⁷ While this support is higher than in some old-EU member states (notably Austria where only 10% are in favour while 80% against), it seems to be considerably lower than in other Central European states, where the trend seems to be the opposite – in Poland 54% in favour, 31% against, Slovenia 53% in favour, 40% against and Hungary 51% for, 38% against. Only Slovakia exhibits a similar trend to the Czech Republic (50% against, 37% for, 13% undecided). While the public opinion might have some impact on the position of some political parties who might use it as an argument, generally its impact on foreign policy is rather limited.

The Eurobarometer 63 survey went into more detail, regarding some particular aspects/stakes in possible Turkish accession, and it is possible to compare some of the data with the average of EU-25.

Question/issues	Czech Republic		EU - 25	
	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
Turkey will systematically have to respect human rights if it is to join in 10 years horizon	85	5	84	7
Turkey will have to improve substantially the state of its economy if it is to join in 10 years horizon	78	8	76	10
The accession of Turkey would risk an influx of immigrants into richer EU countries	69	22	63	23
Turkey partially belongs to Europe geographically	67	26	55	33
The cultural differences between Turkey and EU are far too significant to justify its	55	35	54	33

²⁶ The overall number of Muslims in the Czech Republic according to Muhammad Ali Šilhavý, President of the Centre of Muslim Communities in the Czech Republic is about 20,000, out of that about 400 are of the Czech origin (interview at BBC Czech, 20 September 2001). But he admits that the estimates are very rough as there is no official evidence. However, according to the Czech Statistical Office the figure of Muslims is much lower (cca 3700), based on the last census in 2001 (source: CSU, http://www.czso.cz/csu/edicniplan.nsf/o/4110-03--obyvatelstvo_hlasici_se_k_jednotlivym_cirkvim_a_nabozenskym_spolecnostem)

²⁷ Standard Eurobarometer 63, europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb63/eb63.4_en_first.pdf

accession				
Turkey partially belongs to Europe historically	42	49	42	42
The accession of Turkey would contribute to mutual understanding of European and Muslim values	38	51	41	44
The accession of Turkey would enhance security in this region	37	51	38	45
The accession of Turkey would positively influence the ageing European population	25	58	29	50

Source: Eurobarometer 63.4, Report on the Czech Republic

The outcomes of the survey and the comparison suggest that the Czechs generally tend to agree with most of the suggestions more than the EU average. However, the differences are in no way significant compared to EU average and they exhibit a similar trend of thinking.

As for the media coverage of the issue of Turkish accession, it was rather intensive during the period from autumn 2004 onwards, despite the fact that Turkey is not a focal country for the Czech Republic and thus for international reporting in the media either. Generally, the Czech media tend to focus on catchy topics rather than looking for balanced information on the international scene. The information on Turkey was brought mainly by the major opinion-shaping newspapers (such as *Hospodářské noviny*, *MF Dnes*, *Lidové noviny*, *Právo*) and weeklies/magazines (*Týden*, *Respekt*), and then the radio (BBC Czech, *Radiožurnál*, *Czech Radio 6*) and public TV (CT1).

The attention paid to the Turkish issue in the media had its ups and downs as well. The periods when the issue was covered especially intensively relate to important dates in the EU-Turkey relations. In this sense, the focus was also EU-driven, and not only by the developments in Brussels. Also, the influence of foreign media and debates in other countries was evident on the Czech reporting, with publishing interviews with or articles by various EU politicians and foreign experts²⁸. The positions and statements of politicians in some member states, notably Germany, Austria, France and Britain, were often reported on, too²⁹. Thus, the most comprehensive coverage of Turkey was around the publication of the regular report of the European Commission (6 October 2004), and in December 2004 around the vote in the European Parliament on the opening of accession negotiations, as well as the key European Council meeting in Brussels. Other issues that particularly raised the media attention was the issue of the controversial reform of the Turkish penal code (proposing to criminalize adultery), the issue of the recognition of Cyprus by Turkey, the petition against the commencement of accession negotiations (see further) and more recently (March 2005) information of the suppression of women demonstration in Istanbul, putting the issue of human rights at a stake again.

²⁸ These include for example: Yves Mersch (chairman of the Central Bank of Luxemburg), Josep Borrell (President of the European Parliament), Graham Watson (leader of ALDE in European Parliament), Kemal Dervis (former Turkish minister of economy, now in opposition), Ahtisaari, Rocard, Rohan (authors of the wise men report on Turkey), Christoph Bertram (SWP Berlin-based think-tank) and others

²⁹ The attitudes of Schröder and Merkel were particularly in focus, but also e.g. the fact that Austria was intending to hold the referendum on the accession of Turkey (*Lidové noviny*, December 2004)

As for the public debate, it is not very structured and it remains dominated by the political stakeholders, i.e. representatives of political parties. Most of the activity of non-governmental actors is confined to publishing the respective opinions in forms of articles or op-eds in the major opinion-shaping newspapers and magazines. Occasionally, public debates on this issue appear, such as the recent debate on whether Turkey should become a member of the European Union, organized by the Association for European Values (and even there, the main speakers were political representatives, one speaking clearly in favour Jan Zahradil, and one ultimately opposed – Josef Zieleniec). Thus, it is quite difficult to distinguish the voices for and against the Turkish accession. Most of the actors publishing in major media bring in a balanced set of arguments assessing the risks and opportunities of Turkey joining the EU, such as Jiří Pehe, director of the New York University in Prague (political scientist), or the Association for International Affairs (think-tank focused on foreign policy issues). Pehe presents seven arguments in favour and seven arguments against the Turkish membership, which are basically but a summary of the existing arguments used by both the proponents and opponents of Turkish accession, although Pehe seems to rather take a stand of a proponent, seeing the possible advantages as outweighing the pitfalls, and presents the Turkish accession as a challenge for the EU as well as for the Western civilisation as such.

From the non-governmental stakeholders, arguing in favour of Turkish accession, the visible ones include some think-tanks close to ODS, such as CEVRO (Liberal – Conservative Academy) where Magdalena Frischova published an article arguing in favour, or Lukáš Pachta from EUROPEUM who published an op-ed in favour of Turkey at Integrace on-line portal focused on EU policy issues.

One of the most structured civil society stances comes from the Ecumenical Council of Churches in the Czech Republic. It is necessary to underline that the statement does not articulate directly the opposition to mutual improvement of relations with Turkey, and not even to accepting a Muslim country – on the contrary, it argues that this might be beneficial in terms of improving religious tolerance and bridge-building between the Christian and Muslim worlds. The public statement points to several factors that might at the moment make the launch of accession negotiations undesirable, notably the situation concerning human rights in Turkey, problems with implementing the measures aimed at improving human rights and the situation of Christian minorities in Turkey and warns from applying any double-standard method by the EU in this respect. It also points out to a serious public opposition to this move in the EU, which might lead to further alienation of European citizens from the EU. Thus, the problem is put in a wider perspective which needs to be tackled in the framework of the overall development in the EU, in any case purports that the EU must remain strictly conditional in this sense. The public outreach of this statement remains dubious, due to a low influence of Church in general, and might have some resonance among the more religiously oriented part of population of KDU-CSL voters.

The prime example of a co-ordinated voices speaking against the Turkish accession has to do with the existence of trans-border initiatives that appeared recently in Europe, striving to block the Turkish accession. The first petition in the Czech Republic appeared in the autumn of 2004, (between the Commission report and the

December EU summit), appealing on the Czech government to vote against the opening of negotiations³⁰. It was organized by a small group of people and headed by, David Grešák, one of the organizers claims³¹, and it was not thinking of any activities beyond trying to influence the cabinet decision. The petition was signed by about 3400 people in three cities – Prague, Brno and Olomouc, including some figures of public life, such as Alexander Tomský, publishing director of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. Another petition appeared in May 2005, this time already in a more structured form under the umbrella of the Voice for Europe³² platform, which was held simultaneously in Prague, Warsaw, Budapest, Bratislava, Vienna and Berlin³³. This platform is in the Czech Republic organized by Association for European Values, one of whose founders is above-mentioned David Grešák. The petition continues in 9 cities in the Czech Republic throughout summer 2005 where the volunteers are gathering signatures for this initiative.

The arguments put forward by the Association of European Values are two fold. The first argument is that the EU in itself at the moment lacks clarity concerning its “finalité politique”. If it is to remain a merely economically-integrated area, there is no problem with having Turkey in. However, if it is to develop into a political union, then it is impossible to accept Turkey. The reasons are confined mainly to a different perception of political rights (including human rights and freedoms, treatment of women, individuals) and different political culture.

The opposing public voices to the Turkish accession are sometimes quite difficult to identify, due to their “hidden” identity. For instance the existence of a platform that links the Turkish accession issue with the peril of Islamic radicalism in Europe should be acknowledged. The platform called “Future of Europe”³⁴ is running the website, in which it points out to increased problems associated with Muslim immigration in Europe, and based on this argues against the Turkish membership. However, it is very difficult to identify what kind of platform this is, as on the website it only states that it “...encompasses broad range of persons from all the levels of society...”, however, no structure, form or background are described. On the website this initiative argues that in the future the institutionalisation is planned (civic association), but the authors claim they want to remain anonymous thus far, because of the fear of revenge from Muslims.

Therefore, the public debate is going to remain most likely among what can be described as “expert public”, including the think-tanks, academics, or various advocacy groups (such as human rights activists, although these groups have kept very low profile on the Turkish case so far). The opposing voices are likely to continue their effort to penetrate even non-expert levels of public awareness, however, the resonance of these moves is likely to remain rather limited, due to the fact that the issue is not something that would touch everyday lives of the Czechs,

³⁰ This petition manager to summon around 3400 signatures in a week. Source: interview with David Grešák, one of the co-organizers

³¹ EU.iHNed.cz, 15 November 2004

³² Voice for Europe is a Europe-wide petition campaign against the accession of Turkey to the EU, with the aim to block the start of accession talks in October 2005. For more information refer to <http://www.eu-turkey.info/>

³³ Euractiv.cz, 9 May 2005

³⁴ http://home.graffiti.net/budoucnost-evropy:graffiti.net/roz/islam_cr.html

unlike many citizens in Western Europe for whom the issue links much more to problems of European Islam and co-existence with Muslim communities.

The Czech Debate on Ukraine

General Remarks

If it was acknowledged that the Czech debate on the perspectives on Turkey is not very much present, it is even less so in the case of Ukraine. While in the case of Turkey the debate (at least the political one) is EU-driven, this cannot even be claimed in the case of Ukraine. Until the developments in the Ukraine took a radically different turn after the repeated second round of the presidential elections in December 2004, the issue of Ukrainian membership was almost absent in the Czech discourse. Even the fact that this issue is so much in focus of Poland, being one of the neighbouring countries, this did not find any strong resonance in the Czech debate, not even in the media who are much more influenced by the reporting on foreign policy issues in Western Europe. Also due to the fact that the issue does not entail as many controversial arguments as in case of Turkey, it is not as “catchy” for the media. Thus it was only the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and some think-tanks that were posing this question even before the Orange revolution. Because the political debate on the European choice of Ukraine is so underdeveloped, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is likely to have the most pro-active role at this stage, with its expertise in the whole region of CIS/NIS.

But potentially, it must be recognized that the accession of Ukraine is going to have a greater impact on the country, as the historical, cultural and even economic links are greater than in case of Turkey. Ukraine is, unlike Turkey, not viewed as such a distant topic, also in terms of quite large and visible Ukrainian migrant community in the Czech Republic.

Position of the political representation

As was already mentioned, the positions of the political parties towards the EU membership perspectives of Ukraine are not something that would be a substantial matter of internal policy debates within the major political parties. Thus, the attitudes towards this issue would be largely shaped by the general attitudes and arguments of respective parties towards enlargement, as highlighted in the first section of this paper, or towards European integration and the future of Europe in general. Some points relevant particularly to the Ukrainian case can be identified, but the overall picture is not very clear yet.

ČSSD

For the Social Democrats, the issue of Ukrainian accession is mainly driven by the general support for EU enlargement. However, this assumption has to be balanced out with the concerns about further progress in European integration, which the accession of Ukraine might slow down or hinder considerably. As the position of CSSD on enlargement issues is very much determined by the position of the fellow socialist parties, especially in Germany, a wait-and-see tactics in this sense could be expected as the position of SPD evolves as well. Furthermore, a rather cautious approach of SPD can be seen, given the recent rapprochement between Germany and Russia, which diminishes Schröder's enthusiasm for recognizing the European choice of Ukraine. This is further complicated by an impasse following the German elections in September 2005 resulting in a grand coalition, so no U-turn in this respect can be expected, even if CDU/CSU takes over the Foreign Ministry as currently envisaged. One thing that would probably speak in favour of Ukraine within CSSD is the fact the cultural closeness of Ukraine is clearly recognized. Ukraine is one of the countries on the list of "managed migration", a Czech government programme launched by the ex-socialist minister of labour and social affairs Vladimír Špidla, although it was added on this list only at a later stage.³⁵ At the same time, the issue of Ukrainian labour migration is something that particularly the electorate of CSSD might become vulnerable to, because it can be interpreted as a danger for the Czech labour market, for the Czech social welfare etc. Very much will then depend how the CSSD is able to sell this issue, but this is rather a matter of more distant future.

KDU-ČSL

Unlike the issue of Turkey, which the Christian Democrats rather oppose, the issue of Ukrainian accession is not going to pose such problems to this party. KDU-ČSL has a profile of a pro-European force, including positive attitude towards enlargement. Thus, it is likely to pull along the other major parties determining the enlargement political discourse, i.e. CSSD and ODS. But the value argument can play a role in the position KDU-ČSL stance – the party might be inclined to link the issue of the two countries, i.e. Turkey and Ukraine, arguing that Ukraine is actually more "European" than Turkey – in historical, geographical or cultural sense, which can be used as a further argument for slowing down or even blocking the accession of Turkey. So far, there is no evidence for this in public statements of the party leaders.

ODS

The same arguments which apply to Turkey in terms of its projected accession to the EU would apply to the ODS attitude towards Ukraine. It means to accept more countries which fulfil the accession criteria and in this way to hinder further political integration and ensure more flexibility in the whole process. There is no evidence thus far that there is a link between the two countries – in other words, it cannot be assumed that ODS would prioritise any of the two countries in terms of EU accession, but the picture might change as the attitude of ODS evolves further. Some journalists for instance argue that ODS might in the future be tempted to align more

³⁵ The programme of managed migration strives to attract qualified labour force with a view of providing the migrants with work and residence permit. Originally it was aimed at four countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Kazakhstan and Moldova; Ukraine was added at a later stage

with the position of CDU/CSU if both parties get into government soon. In any case, so far the strongest ODS voices on foreign policy/enlargement, are rather silent on Ukraine, which is in a strong contrast to especially Zahradil's activism on Turkey.

One point that might potentially play a role in the attitude of ODS is the fact that Ukraine is an important country for the US foreign policy, for various reasons – for instance for the stakes in the Black Sea region or for the importance of Ukraine for both Poland and Russia. ODS Atlanticism is an important element in shaping the foreign policy stances of the party, which also plays a role – as was already acknowledged – in its position on Turkey. If the US administration is going to send out strong signals in terms of the desirability of Ukraine joining the EU (as it did several times on Turkey), this will probably have an impact on a more supportive attitude of ODS.

President

One of the few Czech politicians making explicit statements relating to the European/Euro-Atlantic aspirations of Ukraine was recently President of the Czech Republic Václav Klaus. During his official visit to Kyiv in June 2005, he claimed that "...the Czech Republic takes into account and fully respects the Ukrainian ambitions to become part of European and Euro-Atlantic structures in shortest possible time..." and expressed the desire that this process does not take very long. More generally, he expressed a support for recent developments in Ukraine and his official visit as a signal of recognizing this³⁶. An interesting point to be noted is that he also argued against the accusations of him being a Eurosceptic but on the contrary highlighted that a serious debate about the intensity of the EU integration process must be started and this is what Ukraine will come to realize and start to address as well. Apart from this statement, Klaus and Yuschenko also acknowledged the necessity to tackle the legalisation of the status of Ukrainian migrants in the Czech Republic. This was seen as one of the first political steps to treat the issue. The statement of the President was welcomed by the Czech Foreign Ministry, however, according to the spokesman of the Foreign Ministry Vít Kolář this process is just in the very initial stage³⁷.

Position of the Foreign Ministry/diplomatic service/public administration

As was already suggested, as long as there are no clear political stances of the three major political parties on Ukraine, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the diplomatic service will probably remain the most pro-active actor vis-à-vis Ukraine and its European aspirations on the Czech scene.

The pro-active attitude of the Foreign Ministry can be demonstrated by the fact that already before the events of December 2004 which brought Ukraine closer to the EU track, the Analysis and Planning Unit was analysing scenarios how to respond when the political representation in Ukraine takes a clearly pro-EU course. However, it

³⁶ Source: Ukrainian Initiative in the Czech Republic, <http://www.ukrajinci.cz/index.php?l=cz&ids=1&idsub=2&.0.86212300%201123670842>

³⁷ Lidové noviny, 15 June 2005

seems that the Foreign Ministry did very little to support e.g. Polish proposals for the New Neighbourhood Policy of the EU, circulated in January 2003. Also the internal roundtable, which was already organized on Turkey (and on the Western Balkan countries), bringing in various stakeholders and striving to come up with expert, apolitical solution, on Ukraine still has not taken place but it is being planned.

The Ukrainian portfolio in relation to the EU still rests mainly with the Department of Eastern and Southern Europe unlike in case of Turkey where the Department of Co-ordination and EU institutions is responsible. This reflects the belief that Ukraine is not seen as a part of the EU agenda and is treated in bilateral focus, but also that it is taken in broader terms as part of the "Eastern" policy of the CR which is not as clear cut as in case of Poland (or the Baltic countries) and also not so much of a Czech priority (see further).

Looking at the official documents of the Czech foreign policy, namely the Foreign Policy concept for 2003-2006 (adopted under Špidla's government), we will find out that Ukraine is singled out in the document, but always as a second country after the Russian Federation³⁸. Therefore, no privileged approach to Ukraine can be assumed. However, one has to be aware that the document was adopted before the crucial changes in Ukraine, and as it was not amended, the implementation will probably change. However, this would reflect that Ukraine is still perceived by the Foreign Ministry as an agenda inseparable from the Russian dossier.

Thus the position of the Czech diplomacy on Ukraine is likely to take into account EU policy vis-à-vis Russia. On the other hand, the Foreign Ministry would like to play a constructive role in the regional co-operation (including Visegrád) and show understanding and support for Poland to steer the EU policy towards Ukraine. Therefore, it seems that the Czech diplomacy is oscillating between teaming up with Poland who is trying to develop a very active approach to Ukraine and bring it from the Russian orbit to the European one, and some of the old-EU countries who are not ready to be too active towards Ukraine because of particular concerns of intimidating Russia (among other considerations). Even the statements of the foreign minister Svoboda in this respect are rather lukewarm: "the Czech Republic welcomes the integration ambitions of Ukraine in relation to Euro-Atlantic structures..."³⁹.

Furthermore, the Eastern policy of the Czech Republic became less of a priority of the Czech diplomacy than it was at the beginning of 1990's. The focus has certainly shifted to the Western Balkans, where there was quite a lot of activism⁴⁰. The priority of the Czech Republic is to get Croatia in the EU in the first stage (by recognizing that this is at the moment actually the fittest country for EU accession among all the candidates) which would have a positive impact especially on Bosnia and Serbia in their EU-related efforts. So the priority is to develop a consistent EU policy towards Western Balkans, with the aim of including them all in the EU (which is politically less controversial than Turkey or Ukraine). This somewhat diminishes the enthusiasm for the support of Polish endeavour to pull the EU policy more towards the East

³⁸ The Foreign Policy Concept mentions Ukraine in relation to NATO and in bilateral framework (relations with the Russian Federation and Ukraine)

³⁹ statement in relation to NATO-Ukrainian Commission meeting in Lithuania, 21 April 2005. Source: iDNES.cz

⁴⁰ For instance the appointment of ex-foreign minister Jiří Dienstbier as special UN envoy for human rights in former Yugoslavia or the Czech-Greek peace initiative in 1999 prior to Kosovo air campaign

(Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova), and the Czech diplomacy is rather teaming up with Slovakia (which is also very active vis-à-vis Serbia and Montenegro), Hungary, Slovenia but also Austria.

But the Czech Foreign Ministry recognizes the importance of Ukraine for the country even at this stage, that is why it attaches more priority to it than to Turkey. The argument of “if yes to Turkey, why not Ukraine?” can be encountered in the couloirs of the Cerninsky Palace (seat of the Czech Foreign Ministry) as well. Ukraine is recognized as a historically and culturally close country (one should not forget that the Westernmost part of Ukraine was a part of Czechoslovakia prior to WWII).

One of the practical outcomes of the recognition of the importance of Ukraine was the mutual facilitation of visa policies between the two countries, which came to the fore after the Orange revolution, not least during the visit of the President of the Ukrainian Parliament Lytvyn in February 2005⁴¹ or Ukrainian foreign minister Tarasyuk in May 2005⁴², who both raised the issue of the necessity of easement of visa regime, especially for students and entrepreneurs. While the visa for the Czech citizens was originally lifted only for a limited period (from 1 May 2005 to 1 September 2005, which was a measure that applied to the whole of the EU plus Switzerland), it was subsequently prolonged for an indefinite period (as of August 2005). On the contrary, as the Czech Republic could not lift visas because of the EU regulation (Ukraine being on the “black list”), it at least abolished the fees that the Ukrainians applying for the short-term visas needed to pay. However, this move was a reaction to the gesture from the Ukrainian part and was not an outcome of pro-active Czech policy in this respect, and similar moves were made by some other countries in the region, such as Slovakia or the Baltic states.

Still, the Czech diplomacy is not thinking much ahead about the eventual shape of the EU-Ukraine relations. It seems that as well as in case of Turkey, the privileged partnership could be an optimum scenario, given the recent developments in the EU interpreted as unwillingness to enlarge further. But equally important is the uncertainty about what progress there is going to be in Ukraine and how durable and deep the changes started by the Orange Revolution will be. The inclusion of Ukraine is also not viewed as crucial for geopolitical stability of the country, which again is different from the Polish/Baltic case. The most optimistic voices close to Cerninsky Palace speak of recognizing the candidate status towards the end of Yushenko’s mandate.

Ukraine is extremely important for the Czech Republic in terms of internal security (including organized crime, trafficking) and migration, despite the absence of a common border, because the Czech Republic is very much a target country for Ukrainians. It is estimated that the overall number of Ukrainians working and/or residing in the Czech Republic is around 200,000, making the Czech Republic one of the most important targets for Ukrainian migration in Europe⁴³. The migration is fostered by massive Czech demand for low-qualified jobs, especially in the construction sector, household keeping, retail etc. Because the issue of Ukrainian

⁴¹ Interview with V.M. Lytvyn, *Hospodářské noviny*, 11 February 2005

⁴² iDNES internet portal, 10 May 2005

⁴³ Pavel Máša: “The Czech Republic Would Benefit from the Legalization of Ukrainians”. Article in *Lidové Noviny*, 25 June 2005. The official number of Ukrainians with a residence permit is around 60,000.

migration to the Czech Republic is so dominant to the bilateral relations between the two countries, this gives important stakes in the process of Ukrainian integration to other parts of public administration, namely the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Interior. The issue was on the table since the end of 1990's, when the Czech Republic became target of a massive influx of asylum seekers from Ukraine, who used the liberal Czech legislation to work in the country while their asylum application was being processed (this actually happened after visa was introduced as part of Justice and Home Affairs *acquis*) after the visa obligation was imposed on Ukraine as part of the harmonisation with Justice and Home Affairs *acquis* in the accession negotiations. After the subsequent amendment the number of Ukrainian asylum seekers dropped considerably, however, the problem of Ukrainian migration remained very much on the table. The problem of Ukrainian migration rests mainly in the fact that it becomes a feeding ground for corruption (the procedure is very bureaucratic) and organised crime, known as "clientelism", with Ukrainian "clients" hiring the potential labour force, arranging all the formalities (often in the form of bribes to the Czech officials) and at the same time collecting money from the people who want to migrate, thus making enormous profits on this but also keeping control over the "zarobitchany" (i.e. labour migrants) once they are in the Czech Republic. This system is often referred to as a modern form of serfdom.

It seems that the Czech public administration was for a long-time unable to tackle this issue, and if it attempted to do so, it was through adopting more restrictive measures. It was firstly the issue of visas, which were imposed in 2000, and subsequently amendments of various pieces of legislation, such as Asylum Act, Foreign Citizens' Residence Act or Employment Act⁴⁴, which were clearly responsive to the Ukrainian problem. The Czech administration tried to address this issue also at bilateral level. For instance in April 2003, a joint Czech-Ukrainian round table was summoned, comprising representatives of ministries of interior, labour and social affairs and foreign affairs (as well as others, such as the Foreigners and Border Police or Organized crime and anti-corruption authority), which was supposed to start a structured dialogue on issues concerning illegal and legal migration, border control, visas and asylum⁴⁵. All these initiatives were tabled partly due to the fact that no managed migration policy was in place. There was a slight turn in 2001, when the first pilot project of managed immigration was launched⁴⁶ under minister V. Špidla (currently EU Commissioner for social policy, employment and equal opportunities). The project is aimed at attracting qualified labour force from particular countries, which are considered as culturally close enough not to pose problem with adaptation to the Czech society. The project was launched for Bulgaria, Croatia and Kazakhstan, and later extended to Belarus and Moldova (October 2004), Serbia and Montenegro and Canada (July 2005) and as of 1 January 2006 also to Ukraine. However, it is doubtful whether this programme can address the issue of Ukrainian migration. The Ukrainian labour migrants in Czechia usually work in unskilled professions, which are not covered by this pilot programme. That is why the issue of legalizing the status of hundreds of thousands Ukrainians residing in the Czech Republic comes to the fore, as was recognized by Klaus and Yuschenko in Kyiv, and after some of the Czech media published some very strong criticism of the current state (see further).

⁴⁴ iDNES, 30 September 2004 : The State Will Make Life More Difficult for the Ukrainians. www.idnes.cz

⁴⁵ Interview with Serhij Ustych, Ukrainian Ambassador to the Czech Republic, www.integrace.cz

⁴⁶ For more information on the project, please refer to www.imigracecz.org

Public attitudes, media and civil society

There are some opinion polls which can shed some light on how the European aspirations of Ukraine, and indeed Ukraine or the Ukrainians in general, are viewed by the Czechs. At first we refer again to the Eurobarometer 63 survey, assessing the public attitudes towards Ukraine as EU member state. With 46% of respondents in favour and 45% against⁴⁷, we can clearly see that the Czech Republic is by far the most lukewarm of all the new EU member states towards Ukrainian membership. With almost equal number of proponents and opponents, the outcome of the survey brings the Czech Republic very much in line with the opinions in some old-EU member states (such as Belgium, Denmark or France) rather than with the enthusiasm demonstrated by the citizens of the other newcomers to the EU. This trend is furthermore supported by some other polls recently carried out in the Czech Republic. According to the Trend 2005/4 survey⁴⁸, undertaken by the STEM polling agency, the respondents were supposed to classify the relations with 13 countries⁴⁹. Out of these 13 countries, Ukraine comes out the worst, even after Russia and China. Only 17% of respondents gave the country the best marks, while 37% mediocre and 46% the worst. A similar trend was encountered by another STEM poll in the Trend 2005/4 survey, in which the respondents were supposed to assess which nationalities they would welcome as neighbours. Out of the 16 nationalities surveyed, the Ukrainians rank in the 11th place in terms of desirability, with 30% of respondents seeing no problem in having a Ukrainian neighbour, 38% marking this fact as “unpleasant”, 22% as “hard to accept” and 10% as “unacceptable”. The nationalities marked as worse were Vietnamese, Arabs, Afghanis, Chechens and Romas.

The basic issue thus is to what extent the rather negative image of Ukraine as a rather poor country with serious economic and social problems is formed by the Ukrainian labour migration in the Czech Republic or reporting on the operation of criminal groups both within the country and elsewhere (including the Czech Republic). This perception might be further fostered by the fact that Ukraine is not a typical destination for Czech holidaymakers (thus limiting the first hand experience with the country) and business ties are less intensive than in case of the neighbouring countries (including small cross-border trade).

The rather negative image of Ukraine and Ukrainians was for some time fostered by the media, when the reporting relating to Ukraine referred mainly to the problems encountered in connection with Ukrainian illegal migration, organized crime, trafficking, and in terms of the internal developments in Ukraine to the political, economic and social problems which probably evoked a feeling that the country is very far away from Central Europe which was on a track towards EU membership.

⁴⁷ Source: Gazeta Wyborcza, <http://bi.gazeta.pl/im/6/2827/m2827366.jpg>

⁴⁸ The data for this survey were collected between 4 and 10 April 2005

⁴⁹ In terms of popularity/good relations, the countries were ranked in the following order (from most positive to most negative): Slovakia, France, UK, Italy, Poland, Austria, Hungary, Japan, Germany, USA, Russia, China and Ukraine.

The situation regarding the reporting on Ukraine changed dramatically in the autumn of 2004, where the major opinion-shaping newspapers, TV and radio started to follow the developments surrounding the presidential election. On a daily basis, Ukraine was the prime topic in the foreign sections and in the editorials of major dailies. After the victory of Yuschenko, the trend continued, and although Ukraine was not covered with such intensity, the style of reporting changed considerably. Many more articles referring to Ukraine as a country that has taken the first steps to approach the EU appeared, and of course the amazing diplomatic activity of the new Ukrainian president was in focus as well, including the comprehensive coverage his visits to crucial EU member states and Brussels. However, the issue of Ukrainian rapprochement to the EU remained at the level of reporting, and the Czech media got stuck at reprinting the press releases of the major press agencies, while there were virtually no in-depth analysis or op-eds on this issue, unlike in the Turkish case.

The attention of the media regarding bilateral relations remained focused on what seems to be the most relevant issue between the Czech Republic and Ukraine, i.e. issues relating to migration, internal security and visas. The necessity for easing the visa regime was raised several times, as was already highlighted, by some prominent Ukrainian figures (foreign minister Tarasyuk, or President of the parliament Lytvyn, or even prior the Ukrainian ambassador Ustych.) in the Czech media.⁵⁰ However, the most controversial issue relates to the legalization of the residence of hundreds of thousand of Ukrainians working in the Czech Republic. This was recently most comprehensively articulated by a provocative and frequently cited article by Pavel Máša in *Lidové noviny*⁵¹. In the article, he criticises very strongly the government practice by allowing the system of managing (or rather mismanaging) Ukrainian migration to operate in the current form, which fosters corruption as well as organized crime as explained previously. Máša also criticises Václav Klaus for his attitudes during a recent visit to Kyiv, in which he excluded a possibility of any possible “general pardon” for Ukrainians residing illegally or quasi-illegally in Czechia (like the one that appeared recently in Spain), which is in a strange contrast to most of the other reports on this issue which actually purport that Klaus and Yuschenko agreed on a need to tackle this. This falls in line with the general discourse present in the Czech media so far, which suggests that Ukrainians are actually treated badly, both by the Czech authorities but also by employers (those employed legally) or by the “clients”. Although the representatives of the Ukrainian community in the Czech Republic, such as Oleksa Livinsky, the editor-in-chief of “Porohy” magazine⁵², claim that the situation has improved recently, he suggests that some time will still be required for Ukrainians to adapt to the mainstream Czech society. Also Dušan Drbohlav, one of the main Czech experts on migration from the Charles University, argues that the treatment of Ukrainians is bad, and the Czechs tend to view the Ukrainians as second-class citizens.⁵³ These claims fall in line with the previously cited polls on the perception of Ukrainians within the Czech society.

The relevance of the perception of Ukrainians in the examined phenomenon of Ukraine as a potential EU member state is that they can actually be very strong in

⁵⁰ Interview at Integrate policy portal, www.integrate.cz

⁵¹ Pavel Máša: „The Czech Republic Would Benefit from the Legalization of Ukrainians“. *Lidové noviny*, 25 June 2005

⁵² This magazine has been published by the Ukrainian Initiative in the Czech Republic for 12 years

⁵³ „The Ukrainians in Czechia Want More Rights“. *iDNES*, 30 September 2004

influencing the general public opinion. If a parallel is to be drawn with what we see in case of Turkey in countries such as Germany, Austria or the Netherlands, the acculturation and adoption to the host society is crucial in determining public attitudes. If this integration is successful, and the overall image of Ukrainians improves, we should not expect any major opposition to Ukrainian accession. If, on the other hand, some of the current trends continue to prevail, it is possible that the accession of Ukraine will be seen as a threat. Not least because in the Czech case it is associated so much with the migration issue, it is possible than in a few years we will see similar arguments about the threat of cheap labour or delocalisation that we have seen in some EU-15 in relation to 2004 enlargement.

The negative image of Ukrainians is to some extent attempted to be improved by some civil society organisations representing the Ukrainian minority, such as the Ukrainian Initiative in the Czech Republic or Forum of Ukrainians in the Czech Republic. Although their activity is focused mainly on the Ukrainians residing in the Czech Republic, by providing assistance in tackling the issue of legal status, adopting to the Czech milieu and fostering the feeling of Ukrainian identity, they started to be more active in relation to the Czech media and point out to the problems relating to the obstacles concerning Ukrainians who want to come and work in the Czech Republic. They are also organising various cultural and educational events, supposed to introduce largely unknown Ukrainian culture to the Czech public.

Ukraine is also increasingly in focus of some other NGOs and think-tanks. Notably the Association for International Issues (AMO) is running the Eastern European project, focusing *inter alia* on promoting the debate with the EU new neighbours. But the focus of the programme seems to be more on Belarus. Apart from this, it also published a report on the Visegrad group and tackling illegal migration (December 2004)⁵⁴. The paper contains some explicit references to Ukraine and some specific recommendations, *inter alia*, including Ukraine on a priority list of the Czech government for development co-operation, or consider sending the representatives of labour authorities into Ukraine, as one of the most important countries in terms of origins of migration. Other think-tanks (such as Centre for Strategic Studies or EUROPEUM) published papers and organised seminars on the topic of EU perspectives of Ukraine. It cannot be, however, assumed that these institutions would be either advocates or opponents of Ukrainian accession. It is rather so that they are trying to open this as a topic of a debate.

More activism can also be expected from some NGOs dealing with migration, and some research institutes focused particularly on the migration issues, such as Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs (under Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs) or Multi-cultural centre in Prague (maintaining the www.migraceonline.cz portal). They do not have stances on the perspective of Ukrainian membership in the EU yet, and their arguments are likely to be focused on the impacts of Ukrainian migration and problems arising thereof. If the membership of Ukraine becomes closer to reality, they are likely to start articulating their positions more clearly, based on the analysis of the likely impact of Ukrainian migration in connection with the EU accession.

⁵⁴ <http://www.amo.cz/publikacefiles/AMO%20-%20Migration%20ENG.doc>

Conclusions

The Czech discourse on further EU enlargement is very much politically driven. Although there seems to be a consensus among the main political parties on the desirability of enlargement, this consensus is very fragile. The fragility of the support of enlargement is also an expression of oscillating between idealism and pragmatism in foreign policy. While idealist arguments are still deeply rooted (“we have no right to prevent others to join the club, if they respect the rules”), it is obvious that the newcomers might become competitors to the new member states in many respects, which might make it increasingly difficult to “sell” the enlargement to the electorate.

The enlargement is also politically perceived very much as part of the broader future of the EU debate, including its “finalité politique”, as well as the shape of some of its major policies. On this issue the political representation is sharply polarised (ranging from Euro-federalists to strong Eurosceptics), and the positions of the political parties are not definitely shaped either. Thus, it is very difficult to determine at this stage the Czech political attitude when any sort of enlargement gets on the table. The dynamics of enlargement is inseparable for the dynamics of the internal developments in the EU. This is something that the Czech political representation is coming to realize already at this stage.

This can also partially explain why the Czech diplomacy is mostly supportive of the enlargement to Western Balkans in the first place. Apart from specific considerations relevant to the Czech case (historical, cultural, economic links, idealism related to the “debt” the EU has in Bosnia and Kosovo), it is viewed that Western Balkans are actually in many ways the fittest for the EU membership (particularly Croatia). Also, the fact that the Western Balkan countries are rather small, the Czechs might not be so concerned with disrupting the power balance that might appear with the accession of Turkey or Ukraine. In connection to the internal dynamics in the EU, it is assumed that the Union might not need such far-reaching adjustments to absorb the Western Balkan countries.

The political stances on Turkey are mainly EU driven, given a low priority of the country for the Czech Republic. The Czech political representation is mainly adopting the rhetoric that we see in the EU-15 (where the debate is much more developed and structured), especially in “sister” parties, with bringing in very few innovative arguments. As well as in Western Europe, we see the opposition of a confession-based party (KDU-CSL), albeit more moderate one due to its presence in the government. The two major parties – CSSD and ODS are in favour, but for different motives, which is what makes the compromise on Turkish membership a fragile one.

On Ukraine, the issue of EU membership so far comes politically very little to the fore. Ukraine is not in the main focus of the Czech foreign policy agenda either, given the diminishing importance of the Eastern policy compared to 1990’s. Most of the political parties do not have a clear vision on this, and if so, it is more determined by the general party discourse on enlargement. Thus, unlike in case of Turkey, the issue is much more apolitical, and provides – at least at this stage – for a greater role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and public administration in general.

There are some clearly distinctive issues marking the difference on the debate of Turkey and Ukraine which are likely to intensify as time passes.

Unlike in case of Turkey, an important element determining the direction of debate is going to be the issue of Ukrainian migration, which in case of Turkey does not play a role. On the other hand, Ukrainian accession is far less in focus in terms of civilisation and value arguments, which has largely to do with the Turkey being a Muslim country and with negative reporting on the state of human rights.

The public opinion is quite lukewarm in terms of accession of both countries to the EU – while in case of Turkey, opponents prevail, in case of Ukraine the population is almost equally divided. The impact of public opinion on the position of political representation cannot be overestimated, as the political class is hardly ever scrutinised on foreign policy issues. But it is likely to be stronger in case of Ukraine, because the potential Ukrainian accession to the EU is likely to have more direct consequences for the Czech society than the Turkish one.

The debate on Turkey is more intensive than on Ukraine, and it is much easier to identify the proponents and opponents. This can be explained by several factors: Turkey is higher on the EU agenda than Ukraine, there is much more focus on Turkey in Western Europe (which the Czech debate and media tend to follow) and the issue of Turkey is more controversial, that is why it brings in more attention of the media than in case of Ukraine.

As the accession of Turkey and Ukraine are still perceived as very distant events, the position of the political class, public opinion as well as the general debate are likely to evolve dynamically, depending on many variables. Much will depend on the internal developments in both countries, as well as the internal developments in the EU and self-perception of the Czech Republic as an EU member. In terms of points particularly relevant to both countries, these will determine the overall direction of the debate as well. In case of Turkey it is likely to be the link between the compatibility of Islam with Western civilisation, very much influenced by the experience of EU member states with big Muslim communities, and the issue of human rights. In case of Ukraine it is going to be the success (or failure) of integrating the Ukrainian migrant community to the Czech society and the overall management of the Czech migration policy, leading either to the enduring negative perception of Ukraine, or to its substantial improvement.