

approach to EU decision-making. Public opinion has strongly supported EU membership to the tune of about 80%, although this has fluctuated downwards because of two unpopular decisions – the early closure of Units 1-4 of the Kozloduy nuclear power plant and amendments to the national constitution that provided for selling agricultural land to foreigners. Opposition to these two decisions has been central to the agenda of the newly-established ultra-nationalist party "Atacka", which won 21 parliamentary seats out of 240 in the recent general elections. Whether this was a protest vote against the political elite or a more targeted anti-European vote remains to be seen. For the first time the overall consensus on EU membership seems to be in question, because of concerns over sovereignty and national identity.

As to the social-liberal cleavage on economic policies, here there is a paradox. Inevitably, the Bulgarian post-communist transition was liberal and market-based. But, for many Bulgarians the desir-

able end of the liberal road now seems to be some form of "social Europe". In the recent elections, the Bulgarian Socialist Party's slogan "A Social Bulgaria in a Europe of Solidarity" was formulated as a response to the slogan coined by former Prime Minister Ivan Kostov's party "For a Strong Bulgaria in a United Europe". Both slogans seem likely to spark further fierce debate on the social-liberal and supranational-intergovernmental issues.

The shelving of the EU Constitution has, meanwhile, provoked fears that the safeguard clause of the Accession Treaty might be triggered and Bulgaria's EU membership postponed. The pros and cons of such a Plan B have been much discussed, with the prevailing attitude being that a delay might even have positive effects for the economy, even if politically it would clearly have a negative effect. For Bulgarians, the EU is a political project that goes far beyond a free market area.

On further EU enlargement, the official Bulgarian stance is to support EU membership for the coun-

tries of the western Balkans and for Turkey. There is little or no debate of the issue, but opinion polls show strong public support for this policy. □

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## **Why Vaclav Klaus isn't the only Czech eurosceptic**

**By Vit Benes of the Institute of International Relations in Prague**

Are the Czechs becoming eurosceptic? Czech attitudes towards the EU have to be seen in the context of the country's post-cold war political and economic transformation. A eurosceptic elite has been trying to gain support by appealing to the same values and principles that underlay the transition of the 1990s. These values – democratisation, de-nationalisation, deregulation, state sovereignty and economic liberalism – still have resonance with the public.

The eurosceptics try to reflect them in their campaign against the EU's democratic deficit, its

## VIEWS FROM THE CAPITALS

bureaucracy and the lengthening coils of red tape that often seem to envelop the jurisdictions of Czech institutions.

Eurosceptic politicians are usually to be found on the right of the political spectrum, so they tend also to criticise social welfare when it features in the EU's goals and policies.

But two important factors have limited the spread of euroscepticism in the Czech Republic. The first is the idea of the "Return to Europe" that motivated the reforms of the 1990s. EU membership has been widely seen as the final step in the Czech Republic's transformation and integration into Europe. Czech eurosceptics, or "eurorealists" as they sometimes style themselves, were often the most ardent reformists of the 1990s, of whom there can be no better example than President Vaclav Klaus. They criticise the EU in much the same way as they used to criticise communist institutions, even though in truth they cannot ignore the pro-European and pro-western sentiment that has been a

hallmark of the post-communist transition.

The second factor is that, in contrast to the early 1990s, public opinion is now well aware of the material aspects of EU membership. This enables people to connect the current rise in prosperity and welfare with EU membership, although there is a risk that such materialistic perceptions could also put a dent in support for further political integration. Czechs do not identify the EU with its political aim of overcoming the system of rival nation states and building a new global power – or at least not nearly so much as do the Germans or the French.

It is hard to imagine that the Czechs will come to regret their EU accession, because to do so would cast doubt on the whole process of political and economic transformation, and therefore the "Return to Europe". Czechs' fundamental euro-optimism is fed by the economic advantages of membership. Yet they may simultaneously begin to push for democratisation and for economic reforms in the EU. Their criticisms of the EU as a bureaucracy may also spill over into criticism of the EU as too ambitious a political union seeking to regulate more and more aspects of people's lives. This kind of scepticism would

### CZECH REPUBLIC

#### Head of State

Václav Klaus (ODS)

#### Head of Government

Jirí Paroubek (CSSD)

#### Last Elections: 2002 seats

Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD)	70
Civic Democratic Party (ODS)	58
Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM)	41
Christian and Democratic Union (KDU-CSL)	22
Freedom Union - Democratic Union (US-DEU)	9

#### GOVERNING COALITION

101 SEATS OUT OF 200

**CSSD** **KDU-CSL** **US-DEU**

(Socialist (EPP-ED) Group in EP)

#### INCOME PER HEAD 1995-2005

EU25 average \$26,142

Czech Republic \$19,475

reflect Czechs general aversion to strong regulatory public institutions, rooted in the country's history as well as in its more contemporary experience of communism and corruption.

What most enables eurosceptic politicians to speak out against the EU has been the turning of the distant dreams of the Velvet Revolution into everyday economic reality. The EU has become part of Czech political life, and has thereby lost its aura of sanctity. Once the Czech Republic joined the EU, some elements of the political elite quickly sensed that it is quite legitimate to try and re-shape the EU from within as well as to criticise it. So the eventual success of the political campaigns of these eurosceptics will depend on their ability to portray the EU as incompatible with the values and principles of the Czech transformation. □

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## **Bewildered Finns look to EU for certainty and leadership**

**By Hanna Ojanen, Senior Researcher at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs in Helsinki**

For a while, it looked as if the EU's constitutional treaty would pass almost unnoticed in Finland. The government had taken the view that there would be no need for a referendum because it did not fundamentally alter the nature of the Union. The treaty was therefore scheduled for adoption by the parliament in late 2005 after a debate in the autumn. Only a few voices, mainly from the Green Party and the far Left, had advocated a referendum.

After the "no's" in France and the Netherlands, the government at first decided it was important to continue the process of ratification so as to establish how many EU countries support the constitution as it stands. After June's European Council, however, Finland's government turned its coat. There

would not be a vote in the parliament in 2005, instead, the government said it would present a substantial report to parliament analysing the impact of the Constitutional Treaty and comparing it to previous treaties. This, the government reasoned, would spark the debate that's now clearly needed.

The new situation has brought to the surface an undercurrent of debate that is already challenging the government-led consensus. Several smaller opposition parties are critical of the Constitutional Treaty, and so too is the general public. An opinion poll last June showed that 47% would have voted against it, with the under-25's and farmers the most critical of all. Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen argued that Finland would have been better off with the treaty than without it, and took the line that the poll results did not necessarily reflect people's views on the Constitution because of the fact that they were not yet familiar with its contents.

Behind all the criticism of the EU Constitution, there