

The Czech discourse on the EU's external activities²²

By Vít BENEŠ

The Czech Republic is often regarded as a 'eurosceptic' country, not least for its rather lukewarm attitude towards projects of common foreign, security and defence policies. Even before the entry into the EU the Czech Republic demonstrated during the Iraq crisis in 2003 that foreign and security policies remain the sole responsibility of individual member states. After the 2004 enlargement, the Czech Republic, led by a Social Democrat government, officially supported the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), but still under the condition that any plan for a stronger European foreign, security or defence policy should not weaken NATO.

The 2006 elections brought to power the 'eurosceptic' Civic Democrats who formed a government with two 'eurooptimist' but small and weak parties. The euroscepticism of the new government was clearly demonstrated during the negotiations of the reform treaty. On a number of occasions, the Czech government has tried to mitigate the institutional reform and minimize the legacy of the rejected reform treaty. This resistance was fought under the banner of state sovereignty against the creeping strengthening of supranational institutions and against the promotion of qualified majority voting in the Council. Foreign, security and defence policies undoubtedly belong to the few sacrosanct attributes of state sovereignty to be defended against any 'institutional reform'. Moreover, CFSP and the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) were, from time to time, simply perceived as a projection of the interests of the most powerful EU members, and as a tool for their domination over the smaller members. But is the reality that simple? In this paper, I would like to show that even the current 'eurosceptic' government shares certain basic assumptions that underline CFSP and ESDP. I do not deny that the Civic Democrats (the strongest party in the current government) remains sceptical towards further institutionalization of CFSP and ESDP and (more or less) also towards the current shape of these policies. But I argue that on the deeper, discursive level, even this 'eurosceptic' government remains committed to the idea of a competitive and strong Europe. Generally speaking, shared identities and the need for common external activities vis-à-vis third countries are sustained through the processes of "othering" (articulation of a difference) (Diez, 2004), representation of threats and challenges (Campbell) and securitisation (Wæver, 1995; Buzan et al., 1997). The preliminary results of our research indicate that even a 'eurosceptic' party such as the Civic Democratic Party (i.e. its representatives in the government) may be implicitly engaged in these processes. More concretely, it is engaged in the discursive construction of the threats and challenges endangering Europe as a whole (Russia, terrorism). It is also involved in intense securitization of new topics – namely energy security.

(22) The research was done in the framework of the project "European integration and the interests of the Czech Republic implemented by the Institute of International Relations, Prague. This paper does not provide a comprehensive overview of the changes and development of Czech domestic and foreign policies after the entrance into the EU. Instead, it focuses on one aspect of Czech policy within the EU: the underlying sources of Czech Republic's position towards the EU's external actions. Beside that, it also brings some insight into the Czech interpretation of the EU's role in global politics.

The method applied in our research was critical discourse analysis in the form developed by Ruth Wodak (Wodak, 2001; Wodak et al., 1999). She distinguishes three levels of analysis: 1) content and topics, 2) rhetorical strategies and 3) linguistic means and forms of realization. We have followed her steps and applied the analytical model to the Czech discourse on EU's external activities and the 'actorness' of the EU as a global player between 2004 and 2008 in order to trace the post-entrance development. The corpus of our discourse analysis consisted of circa 50 speeches, articles and newspaper interviews with leading figures on Czech political scene – party leaders and foreign policy experts (shadow foreign ministers). Beside these, other genres were included in the analysis: personal interviews with selected deputies or senators and recordings from parliamentary and senate committees for European affairs and foreign policy. Our research project focused on the Czech political landscape as such, but this short paper will concentrate on the discourse of the current Czech government.

Content and topic

First, the discourse analysis of the texts and speeches of Czech politicians revealed their shared commitment to a strong, competitive and open Europe. Even certain heavy-weights within the 'eurosceptic' Civic Democratic Party seem to endorse the general idea that coordinated action is needed for Europe to withstand global geo-economic and geopolitical competition. The idea of a competitive and strong (and open) Europe is quite widely accepted as a legitimate goal (Topolánek, 2007). At the same time, the term 'fortress Europe' depicts the kind of Europe that should be avoided.

Nevertheless, there is a disagreement about the sources of this weakness and the solutions to it. What will strengthen Europe? The conservative right (the Civic Democrats) argues that Europe (the old, tired and 'sick' Europe) should get rid of its rose-coloured attitude, that it should find the will to defend itself and to defend its values, notably the value of freedom. They treat the 'socialist way of thinking' as a universal culprit for the all the wrongs in Europe: for the economic weakness of Europe, for the rigid and inappropriate institutional set up, for the inward-looking and protectionist trade and foreign policies of the old Europe. The government dominated by the Civic Democrats sees the solution in a flexible and strictly intergovernmental institutional set-up.

On the other side, the Social Democrats are in favour of further institutionalization of foreign and security policies. One would expect that leftist parties (Social Democrats and Communists) argued that the external activities of the EU should in the first place protect the EU against the negative side-effects of the 'intangible' forces of globalization. But this is not the case. Globalization rarely occurs with overtly negative connotation. It does not serve as a source of legitimization in the discourse. The Social Democrats rather speak about the need to retain (or regain) competitiveness vis-à-vis the 'tangible' economic powers like China.

Argumentation strategies

The topic of 'energy security' is being intensively securitized in the Czech governmental discourse. In line with the theory of securitization, energy security is not only highly politicised, but energy security is considered essential for the survival of basic European norms (namely freedom) and for the survival of Europe as such (Topolánek, 2008a). The opposition, the Social Democrats, also place energy policy high on the agenda, though they do not travel all the way to "securitization" and seem to remain on the level of "politicization" (Buzan et al., 1997: 21-47).

The conservative discourse of the Czech government offers a quite clear image of threats or at least challenges for Europe. Recently, 'neoimperial' Russia (or at least neoimperial tendencies in Russia's foreign policy) is depicted not only as a potential threat to the Czech Republic or Central Europe, but as a (potential) threat to Europe as a whole. The argumentation strategies of naming and predication endow Russia with negative qualities as an 'other' to Europe. For example, while the EU creates the 'zone of stability', the activities of Russia are described as an attempt to establish a 'sphere of influence'.

In fact, these argumentation strategies implicitly contribute to the construction of a shared European identity (even though the content of this identity is different from the message conveyed by the left-leaning European politicians). The discourse of conservative "eurosceptics" (Civic Democrats) legitimizes a common response to external threats and depreciates individual actions (such as bilateral contacts and agreements with Russia) (Topolánek, 2008b).

Linguistic means

Following the script of Wodak and her collaborators, we have investigated a wide range of possible linguistic means utilized in the Czech discourse. Here we will mention only one of them: the use of the personal pronoun 'we' – including all its dialect forms and the corresponding possessive pronouns. The pronoun 'we' is probably one of the most important linguistic tools for the creation of a shared identity and a way to legitimize common external action vis-à-vis 'others'. Quite interestingly, in the discourse of some leading Civic Democrats (such as the Czech prime minister), the pronoun 'we' embodies Europe as a whole. On the other side, the leader of the Social Democrats tends to speak about Europe as 'they'. Of course, he stresses that the EU is necessary and useful for us, but the pronoun 'us' is reserved for the Czech Republic.

Conclusion

By visualizing the common European enemies and threats (such as neoimperial tendencies in Russia, 'forces of evil', terrorism or the economic competition of rising China and India), by securitizing new topics (energy security) and by explicitly or tacitly accepting concepts like 'strong Europe' and 'Europe as a global actor', the Czech right-wing government actually constructs, lays or at least maintains the very basic foundations for a common European foreign, security and defence policy. This discourse legitimizes the

existence of these policies even though it remains sceptical towards existing or proposed institutions of foreign and security policy (e.g. the European foreign minister) and towards the current outlook of these policies (they are too much under the influence of the old member states).

The 'eurosceptic' discourse of the Civic Democrats and the Czech government stands, in some respect, in opposition to the traditional, 'eurosceptic' discourse represented by Václav Klaus, who denies the very idea of Europe or the EU as a political actor. But still this discourse remains (in line with the arguments of Václav Klaus) critical towards the institutionalization or supranationalisation of the European foreign and security policy.

Bibliography

Buzan, Barry, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde (1997) *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Campbell, David (1998) *Writing Security*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Diez, Thomas (2004) 'Europe's Others and the Return of Geopolitics', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 17(2): 319-35.

Topolánek, Mirek (2007) 'Jak dál v Evropské unii a pozice České republiky (How to continue in the EU and the position of the Czech Republic)', Speech by the Czech prime minister in the Senate, 9 February 2007.

Topolánek, Mirek (2008a) Speech at the Bled Strategic Forum: Strategic Challenges of Climate Change and Energy Security, 31 August 2008.

Topolánek, Mirek (2008b) 'EU musí dát víc na obnovu Gruzie (EU should pay more for the reconstruction of Georgia)', *Czech News Agency*, 20 September 2008.

Wæver, Ole (1995) 'Securitization and Desecuritization', in Ronnie D. Liepschutz (ed.) *On Security*, pp. 46-79. New York: Columbia University Press.

Wodak, Ruth (2001) 'The discourse-historical approach', in Ruth Wodak and Michael J. Meyer (eds) *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, pp. 63-97. London: Sage.

Wodak, Ruth, De Cilla Rudolf, Martin Reisigl and Karin Liebhart (1999) *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.