

## CHAPTER 12

# **A CHERISHED CHILD LEFT OUT IN THE COLD: THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND HER ENLARGEMENT PRIORITY**

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This chapter assesses the achievements of the Czech EU Presidency in the area of enlargement. The empirical analysis is structured with the help of the conceptual framework introduced in the first chapter of this volume (socialization and EU Presidency performance). Thus, my aim is not to provide an exhaustive description of the agenda and negotiations during the Czech Presidency. My aim is to analyse the character of the Czech Presidency (the resources utilized, the norm competition, the impartiality of the conduct, and the effectiveness of the results) in order to answer a more general question about the conformity of the Czech behaviour with the usual presidency roles and about the socialization of the Czech Republic into the European normative environment.

I will treat *norm* as the key concept of my study. Norms play a key role in my operationalization of both the socialization of the Czech Republic and the Czech EU Presidency performance. I will not ask whether the behaviour of the Czech Republic is induced by norms or by material interest considerations. My focus lies on the question of what are the norms which induce and regulate its behaviour (see Drulák in this volume). The conclusions about the sources of the successes and failures of the Presidency (performance) will be based on the analysis of the wider normative basis which allows the actor to distinguish appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.

I follow the conceptual framework outlined in the introductory chapter of this volume, which allows us to trace the hypothetical link between the socialization of the Czech Republic into the European normative environment on one side and the conformity of the Czech behaviour with the usual presidency roles on the other. The level of socialization is determined by the level of norm competition, together with the availability of tangible and intangible resources. The resources (the administrative capacity) available to the Czech Presidency were already analysed in another chapter (see Karlas

in this volume) and so was the norm competition (the level of Europeanization of the Czech polity, policy and politics and the competing norms among the political elite) (see Braun in this volume). In my conclusions I will largely adopt their arguments about the rather high degree of norm competition among the Czech political elite on one side and the sufficiency of the resources available to the Presidency on the other.

Thus, my empirical analysis covers the second half of the conceptual framework, focusing on the Presidency performance. The Presidency performance will be broken down into two distinct analytical categories which reflect two norms commonly associated with the roles of the Presidency: impartiality and effectiveness (see Drulák in this volume).

The first section introduces the EU enlargement as a priority of the Czech foreign policy in general and more specifically as a priority of the Czech EU Presidency. The next two sections focus on the effectiveness and the impartiality of the Czech Presidency in the area of enlargement in order to analyse the Presidency's performance. The conclusion returns to the original research questions and hypotheses regarding the links between the socialization of the Czech Republic and the Presidency performance.

#### EU ENLARGEMENT AS A PRIORITY FOR THE CZECH EU PRESIDENCY

Further EU enlargement has been a long-term priority of the Czech Republic and a steady ingredient of Czech European policy (EU enlargement is mentioned already in *Návrh koncepce směřování České republiky v rámci Evropské unie 2004*; *Koncepce zahraniční politiky České republiky 2004*). In the past years the Czech diplomacy invested a good deal of political capital in the enlargement case, trying to repulse the critique of the “enlargement-sceptical” governments.

The quest of further EU enlargement has been positively received by both the political elites and the general public. On the political level, most major political parties continuously express their general support for EU enlargement (Beneš 2008; Sychra 2006; Král 2005). In contrast to other topics of European integration (such as institutional reform or the Common Foreign and Security Policy), the Czech political scene was able to find a consensus in favour of the EU enlargement. Even though the EU enlargement is accepted by all major political forces as beneficial for both the EU and the candidate (neighbouring) countries, individual political parties may hold diverging views on some particularities. For example, the Czech Republic officially supports the entrance of Turkey into the EU once all its entry conditions are met. Nevertheless, the consensus on the political level is quite limited given the

opposition against Turkey's EU membership from the Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL) (Král 2005: 9–11).

The attitudes of the public mirror those of the political elite. Even though the Czechs are not the most enthusiastic supporters of the EU enlargement, the Czech Republic belongs to the group of countries with the highest public approval of EU's expansion. The Czech citizens' support for further EU enlargement culminated after Czech Republic's accession into the EU, when two thirds of the respondents were in favour of it. The Special Eurobarometer on the EU enlargement published in 2006 recorded that 67 percent of Czechs agree that the enlargement strengthens the European Union (Special Eurobarometer: Attitudes towards European Union Enlargement 2006: 23). However, the poll in 2009 showed a drop to 54 percent being in favour of the enlargement (Eurobarometer 71: Public opinion in the European Union 2009).<sup>1</sup>

The support of Czech citizens for particular candidate countries differs sharply. According to the 2007 poll, Czechs (with a 73 percent approval rate)<sup>2</sup> strongly support the accession of Croatia – a favourite holiday spot for many Czech families. On the contrary, the prospect of Turkey's EU membership was met with predominantly negative reactions from the Czech respondents (57% were against it and only 27% were in favour of it) (Postoje českých občanů k Evropské unii a jejímu rozšiřování 2007; see also Král 2005).

Where do the roots of the Czech enthusiasm for further EU enlargement lie? Reflecting their own experience, Czech politicians treat entrance into the EU as beneficial and thus desirable (and acceptable) for the neighbouring countries. Thus, the Czech Republic feels a solidarity with and a responsibility for those who are less fortunate and suffer from an unfavourable geographic, geopolitical situation and few economic opportunities. Not long ago the Czech Republic itself was in the position of a candidate country, and the Czech representation naturally finds it appropriate to support further EU enlargement so that other countries are not deprived of the benefits of the EU membership. We may also argue that the Czech Republic's support for further EU enlargement is driven by the same incentives that were behind the German decision to support the 2004 enlargement round.<sup>3</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> The maximum support has been recorded in Poland (69 percent), and the EU average was 43 percent (Eurobarometer 71: Public opinion in the European Union 2009; Karlas and Beneš 2010 in print).

<sup>2</sup> Ironically, at that time only 29 percent of Croatians regarded the prospective EU membership as a good thing, 40% thought that it would be neither good nor bad and 28% saw the EU membership as a bad thing (Eurobarometer 67: Public opinion in the European Union 2007).

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of the German position on the eastern EU enlargement, see, for example, Schimmelfennig (2003) and Mayhew (1998).

Czech Republic seems to reproduce the pre-2004 arguments made by the EU member states supportive of the eastern EU enlargement. The Czech political representation shares with the European Commission the positive assessment of the EU enlargement process as the most successful foreign policy tool, spreading peace, prosperity, democracy and stability (Topolánek 2009f). The same argument has been raised by the supporters of the EU enlargement in the 90s. Last but not least, if the German support for the eastern EU enlargement was (among other incentives) motivated by business interests (new markets and new investment opportunities), the same can be said about the Czech support for the prospective Balkan enlargement (Interview with an official from the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009a). The Western Balkans (first and foremost Croatia) is not only a target destination for Czech tourists, but it also promises business opportunities for Czech companies. With the exception of Croatia, the volume of trade and investments by Czech companies in the region remains rather low. But still, the Western Balkans remains in the focus of Czech companies, as we can see from the number of realized or planned acquisitions and investments by the Czech energy giant ČEZ (Tesař 2009).

The salience of the enlargement issue culminated when the promotion of further EU enlargement had been listed as one of the key priorities of the Czech EU Presidency (Work Programme of the Czech Presidency: Europe without Barriers 2008). The support for further EU enlargement has been an indispensable ingredient of the discussions within the MFA and the government and made it into the early drafts of the Presidency priorities outlined back in 2007 (Evropa bez bariér. Východiska k prioritám předsednictví České republiky v Radě EU 2007).

Assessed retrospectively, the first draft of the Presidency priorities was quite optimistic regarding the prospect for the EU enlargement. At the best of times, the Czech Republic planned the EU – Western Balkans summit, where the candidate status (or even the start of negotiations) was to be awarded to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia (or even Kosovo). The authors of the Presidency priorities listed the attitudes of the member countries, the progress on the EU's institutional reform and the internal reforms within the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) countries as key conditions for the enlargement agenda to proceed smoothly (Evropa bez bariér. Východiska k prioritám předsednictví České republiky v Radě EU 2007). Notably, the tensions between the Western Balkan countries themselves were not taken into consideration as possible obstacles to the whole process.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Given the uneven pace of the accession process of individual Western Balkan countries, some of them (like Slovenia) hold or are going to hold (like Croatia) a veto (as EU member states) over the EU prospects of those lagging behind (like Serbia).

On the eve of the Presidency, the Czech government published the final version of the Presidency priorities (Work Programme of the Czech Presidency. *Europe without Barriers* 2008), providing a shortened but still quite ambitious list of priorities (Lehtonen 2009). The Czech Republic chose a slogan *Europe without Barriers* as the Presidency's motto and sorted out three priority areas (the "3 E's"): *Economy, Energy and the European Union in the World*. The EU enlargement has been listed as part of the *European Union in the World* priority area.<sup>5</sup> The rationale for further EU enlargement stems – according to the Czech government – from the EU's stabilizing role as a beacon of prosperity, an economic power and a value system.

The Czech enlargement agenda focuses first and foremost on the gradual integration of the Western Balkan countries into the EU (Beneš 2008). The Czech political representation treats the accession of these countries as a completion of the historic unification and stabilisation of the European continent. The Presidency voiced its intention to achieve "as much progress as possible" on this issue (Work Programme of the Czech Presidency. *Europe without Barriers* 2008: 1). Among the Western Balkan countries, the priority has been given to the accession talks with Croatia, which has been singled out as some kind of show case. Croatia is well ahead of other countries in its progress towards the integration into the EU, and its prospective membership faces little or no opposition from the traditional opponents of the EU enlargement. Being a traditional holiday spot of Czech families, Croatia's accession receives enormous approval rates among the Czech constituency (see above). Thus, major progress on the issue could have been sold to the Czech electorate as a tangible result of the CZ PRES (cf. *Evropa bez bariér. Východiska k prioritám předsednictví České republiky v Radě EU* 2007). Last but not least, the Czech diplomacy seems to believe that the Croatian accession can serve as an example for all to see and "constitute a major source of motivation for the other countries [of the region]" (Work Programme of the Czech Presidency. *Europe without Barriers* 2008; see also Schwarzenberg 2009a).

The Presidency priorities devoted considerably less attention to the negotiations with Turkey. Moreover, the Czech Presidency referred to Turkey as "a strategic ally of the EU". Even though the Czech Republic officially supports Turkey's full EU membership, the text of the Presidency priorities evaded the sensitive expression "Turkey's EU membership" and spoke merely about the ongoing negotiations which "represent a significant impetus

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<sup>5</sup> The EU in the World priority area encompasses three priorities: the EU enlargement, the transatlantic relations and Eastern Europe.

for further transformation processes in that country” (Work Programme of the Czech Presidency. Europe without Barriers 2008: 1).

To sum up, the EU enlargement has been placed relatively high on the agenda of the Czech European policy in general and on the list of the Presidency priorities in particular. Nevertheless, the expectations regarding the individual countries’ progress were relatively modest (compared to the more optimistic scenarios circulating in 2007) with the exception of Croatia, which was singled out and nourished as an example and a source of motivation for the neighbours. The Western Balkans has been clearly prioritized over Turkey.

### PRESIDENCY PERFORMANCE

#### *Impartiality*

I will operationalize the impartiality by assessing the assertiveness of the Czech political representation and the reactions elicited by the Czech behaviour within the following settings: 1) the behind-the-scenes Council meetings, and 2) the public discourse. In my analysis, I will utilize interviews with the Czech diplomats, speeches of Czech politicians, the official reactions from other member states and also the European media’s reactions to the Czech EU Presidency. The lack of emotions, the conciliatory statements by the Czech representatives and the lack of negative reactions from the Czech Republic’s counterparts at the negotiating table and from the public sphere indicate the impartiality of the Czech Presidency in the enlargement policy. As my analysis shows, the performance of CZ PRES in the field of enlargement can be described as impartial.

As an interview with an MFA official suggests (Interview with an official from the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009a), the Czech EU Presidency elicited hardly any negative responses, even behind the scenes of Council meetings. We can illustrate the point on one of the key issues of the enlargement agenda: the Slovenian blockage of the Croatian accession talks (see the section on *effectiveness* for further details). The Czech Presidency put the issue of Slovenia blocking the Croatian EU accession on the agenda of the April GAERC meeting. But the meeting refrained from any “blaming and shaming” of Slovenia, and the result was received rather positively by the Slovenian side (Press release on the conclusion of the Czech EU Council presidency and the launch of Swedish presidency 2009; Press Release: GAERC discusses Croatia’s EU accession negotiations and foreign affairs issues 2009; Interview with an official from the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009a). Thus, even in a situation where the priority of the Czech

Presidency was threatened, the Czech Republic did not resort to political force and did not provoke negative reactions from other member states.

The Czech performance in the field of enlargement did not generate any negative reactions on the political level and in the European public discourse. While the Czech political representation often “stirred the waters” of the political debates on many hot issues (EU-Israel relations, the financial crisis, energy security and the Eastern partnership) (Karlás and Beneš, forthcoming), I have recorded no groundbreaking, disturbing or provocative statements by Czech representatives tackling the enlargement agenda. The Czech Republic did not ride roughshod in the enlargement agenda. In fact, the Czech political representation issued rather conciliatory statements and employed a low-profile approach. For example, the Czech Republic kept her hands off the Slovenian blockage of the Croatian accession negotiations and the border dispute between the two countries. In December 2008, Slovenia conditioned the accession process of neighbouring Croatia by a solution to a long-time maritime border dispute. Initially, Czech representatives expressed their willingness to mediate in the conflict (EU Presidency To Mediate In Slovenia-Croatia Row 2009). But soon the Presidency got its hands off it, relegating the conflict to the status of a bilateral issue (Czech PM says Croat-Slovenian discord similar to Temelin dispute 2009).

The Czech Republic refrained from controversial statements. One can set the Czech Presidency against the Swedish activities during the first half of 2009. In late May the Swedish foreign minister Carl Bildt told the newspaper *Le Figaro* that the EU had “a strategic interest” in Turkey’s EU integration (*L’UE a besoin de la Turquie pour peser dans le monde* 2009). The statement provoked a cancellation of the planned visit of the French President to Sweden (Sarkozy cancels Sweden visit over Turkey 2009). In contrast, the Czech Presidency remained relatively silent at the level of the media and high politics. The Presidency focused on diplomatic and technical tasks, manoeuvring within the narrow margins set by the broader political situation (Slovenian-Croatian, Greek-Macedonian and Cypriot-Turkish disputes, the continuing enlargement fatigue in the EU, and the declining support for EU membership in the candidate countries).<sup>6</sup>

The argument about the impartiality of the CZ PRES in the enlargement agenda can also be testified by a quick glance at the European media.

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<sup>6</sup> The Czech Presidency promoted the idea of *future* EU enlargement indirectly by staging the conference about the successes of the *past* enlargement round. In the conference entitled “EU Enlargement - 5 Years After” the Czech Prime Minister fought against the enlargement fatigue in the EU by trying to “prove that enlargement has been a huge success” (Topolánek 2009f).

The Czech Presidency attracted a lot of attention (and criticism) from the European media (Kratochvíl and Beneš 2009). But there were virtually no criticisms of and negative reactions to the enlargement agenda, despite the sensitivity of the issue in many corners of Europe.

As the interview with the first MFA official suggests (Interview with an official from the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009a), the Czech diplomacy found it inappropriate for a presiding country to exert pressure on another member state (Slovenia). During the Croatian-Slovenian dispute, the Czech Republic took the role of an honest broker turned into a disinterested administrator, even at the cost of sacrificing one of its key Presidency priorities.

What are the possible sources of the Czech impartiality in the Croatian-Slovenian dispute? We can treat the impartiality of the Czech EU Presidency in the enlargement agenda as a product of a strong adherence to the norm of “consensual decision-making free of coercion”. The Czech political elites responsible for the Czech foreign policy since (at least) 2006 have been adherents of the idea that the rules of unanimity and non-coercion should be respected at all costs. The consensual decision-making (veto) is often seen as some kind of emergency break which ensures that the dynamism of European integration does not threaten key national interests (Vondra 2007; for the elites’ attitude towards the consensual decision-making, see also Drulák et al. 2007). Very often, consensual decision-making is seen as a bulwark against *the powers* (the big EU members) (Zahradil et al. 2001: 27), against political and diplomatic “coercion” or even against “pressure” from the EU (“Brussels”), which is often portrayed as *the power sui generis* but with the same negative connotations - i.e. the connotations of being coercive (Klaus 2009c). While Czech diplomats (and some politicians) do admit that bigger states do “naturally” have a decisive influence, politicians are determined to defend the normative ideal of “the equality of states” at all costs. Within this discourse, the ideals of “consensual decision-making free of coercion” and “equality of states” are the key components of a more general norm of “state sovereignty”.

The adherence to the norm of “consensual decision-making free of coercion” manifested itself on several occasions. During the debate on the institutional reform, Czech officials expressed their uneasiness with the extension of the agenda decided by qualified majority voting (Drulák et al. 2007). Czech “Euroceptical” and “Eurorealist” elites criticize the Lisbon treaty for strengthening the position of *the powers* and for the “coercive” method of adopting and ratifying the treaty. Also, in the aftermath of the failed Irish referendum, the Czech Republic vigorously defended Ireland from any (real or perceived) pressure and blackmail from *the powers* under

the normative banner of “consensual decision-making free of coercion”. The Czech Republic did not expect a reward (of any kind) from the Irish side in return. So it seems that the Czech defence of Ireland followed the normative logic of appropriateness rather than the instrumental logic of consequentialism (for the theoretical concepts see March and Olsen 1998): the norm of “consensual decision-making free of coercion” was not defended due to some tangible expected benefits, but for the “value” of the norm itself.

Within this social context, the Czech Republic, acting as a presiding country, found it *inappropriate* to exert pressure on Slovenia (Interview with an official from the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009a). The EU enlargement is an agenda decided unanimously by all member states and the Czech Republic fully followed the imperative of consensus and non-coercion. The interviewed MFA official and also the political elites (e.g. the Prime Minister) justified the non-interventionist policy by reference to historical cases when the norm of “non-coercive consensual decision-making” has been upheld and the EU as a whole did not intervene and let the countries solve their bilateral disputes on their own.<sup>7</sup> Also, the interviewed Czech official described the non-intervention in the Slovenian case as an example of a universal rule: “any country could end up in the same position as Slovenia [vetoing some collective decision]” (Interview with an official from the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009a). According to Czech officials, in these circumstances it would be inappropriate to exert pressure on the deviant state.

It seems that the size of Slovenia also played a role. As we have noted earlier, the size of a country matters for the Czech elite in their interpretation of the norm of “consensual decision-making free of coercion”. The norm, at least in the Czech discourse, has clear anti-Great Power undercurrents. Czech Republic, as a small country, is quite sensitive about *great powers* exerting pressure and violating the norm. As the Irish case confirms, the Czech Republic tends to side with small countries under real (or even imagined) pressure from the big countries. The Czech Republic had no restraints against clashing with France on EU enlargement (especially before the Czech presidency) and exerting all its available power and the influence emanating from the institution of the EU Presidency to check France on many issues (Topolánek: Byli jsme trpaslík, který se postavil velké Francii 2009; Interview with an official from the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009a). But the Czech Presidency found it naturally inappropriate to exert pressure on a

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<sup>7</sup> The Czech Prime Minister compared the Slovenian-Croatian border dispute to the row between Austria and the Czech Republic about the Beneš decrees (Czech PM says Croat-Slovenian discord similar to Temelin dispute 2009).

small country like Slovenia. For example, the Croatian plea for Czech intervention did not fall on fertile ground. According to Czech diplomats, Croatia misunderstood the role of the Presidency, whose task is not to exert pressure on individual member states (Interview with an official from the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009a). The Czech Presidency advised Croatia to take into account the fact that the decision is made by consensus and that the Presidency can not force Slovenia into anything.<sup>8</sup>

To sum up, the Czech Presidency acted impartially in the enlargement agenda. The impartiality stemmed from the Czech adherence to the norm of “consensual decision-making free of coercion”. At the end of the day, the Czech Republic found it inappropriate<sup>9</sup> to exert pressure on Slovenia and did not punish Slovenia for a policy which was clearly detrimental to the Czech national interest in further EU enlargement.

### *Effectiveness*

In line with the conceptual framework of this book (see Drulák in this volume), I have decided to operationalize effectiveness as the number and the significance of the compromises reached and mediated by the presiding country. In the light of this criterion, the Czech EU Presidency has not been effective. The Czech Presidency did not find a political solution to any of the existing stumbling blocks in the enlargement agenda, and the progress has been limited to being “less-than-expected” on the technical (though still politicized) level.

The enlargement agenda has usually been rife with disagreement. The so-called “renewed consensus on enlargement” agreed by the December 2006 European Council (Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2006; Presidency Conclusions December 2006) is no longer viable in practice – as we can see from the public opinions on the EU enlargement and the confrontational attitudes and rhetoric of individual national representatives. The European public remains deeply divided in its attitudes towards further EU enlargement. A large majority of citizens in the new member countries favours further EU enlargement while the situation in the EU15 is completely the opposite of that in the new member states (Eurobarometer 71: Public opinion in the European Union 2009: 159-161). This pattern is reproduced on the political level: the political elites from countries like France, Germany and

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<sup>8</sup> It seems that the Czech loyalty to the norm of “consensual decision-making free of coercion” was stronger than the solidarity of a newcomer with the candidates for membership.

<sup>9</sup> Especially in the given social context, where the Czech Republic acted as a presiding country.

Austria regularly express their scepticism towards further EU enlargement (France, Germany remain cool on EU enlargement, 2009) while the political elites from new member countries promote the enlargement policy.<sup>10</sup> The Czech Republic itself intensely participated in these discussions, strongly advocating further EU enlargement. Not only does the European Union show a continuous disagreement on the future of the enlargement policy, but the relations with individual candidate countries and their accession processes are hostage to a number of bilateral disputes between candidate countries and particular member states (such as the Greek-Macedonian name dispute, the Cypriot question, or the Slovenian-Croatian border dispute). To sum up, there are conflicts regarding both the overall direction of the enlargement policy and the particular negotiations which provide an opportunity for the Presidency to act as an honest broker.

On a general political level, the Czech Presidency was not effective in terms of new compromises reached. The so-called “renewed consensus on enlargement” remained no less shaky than before. The first half of the year 2009 also did not bring any new initiatives – the Presidency chose a rather low-profile approach (see the section on *impartiality* above). Instead of vocally pushing through new initiatives, the Czech Republic carefully utilized the five year anniversary of the 2004 enlargement for an articulation of the successes of the past and the expected benefits of the future EU enlargement (Topolánek 2009f).

The Czech EU Presidency did not bring any progress regarding the bilateral disputes souring the accession negotiations (Macedonia vs. Greece, and Turkey vs. Cyprus). Moreover, the Czech Presidency had to cope with a new and rather unexpected Slovenian blockage of Croatia’s EU talks. In late December the long-running dispute between Slovenia and Croatia over their maritime border in the Piran Bay (Alic 2007) escalated into a diplomatic row threatening the Croatian accession talks. In December Slovenia vetoed the opening of nine negotiation chapters due to this border dispute, demanding the solution to the border dispute as a condition for the resumption of the accession talks. After its initial attempts to broker the talks between the two countries, the Czech Presidency stepped aside, relegating the dispute to the status of a bilateral dispute and leaving room for another would-be broker. Later on, the enlargement commissioner Rehn stepped in with his brokering efforts, but despite all the efforts, the planned accession conference with

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<sup>10</sup> The above mentioned diplomatic row between France and Sweden only highlights the severity of the intra-EU spat.

Croatia has been postponed twice and then in fact cancelled, with a new date subject to positive development (EU conference on Croat entry postponed again 2009; Turkey may rethink Nabucco if EU talks stall 2009). The Slovenia-Croatia border talks remained deadlocked (EU will keep pushing for Slovenia-Croatia border compromise 2009) until November 2009.

As I have already indicated, the Presidency refrained from provocative statements in the field of the EU enlargement and steered away from politically sensitive issues. Serbia's membership application is just another example of this. In January, Serbian representatives publicly announced Serbia's determination to formally apply for the EU membership by July 2009 (Serbia to apply for EU membership 2009). Within a couple of days, Serbia was politely advised by Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn (and by the Czech Presidency) to hold her horses since the political climate is not ripe (Serbia told to hold back EU application 2009) for such a symbolic and political act. Serbia complied with the advice and deferred her application until December 2009 (Serbia aims to beat EU entry 'speed record' 2010; Srbsko prý za českého předsednictví o kandidaturu do EU nepožádá 2009).

Even though the sensitive and key political issues remained intact, limited progress has been achieved on a more technical level. The Czech Presidency proceeded gradually in minor diplomatic and technical tasks, manoeuvring within the narrow margins set by the broader political situation and a widespread enlargement fatigue.

Undeniable progress has been recorded regarding the visa liberalization with the Western Balkan countries. During the Czech EU Presidency, the issue of visa liberalization has moved forward quite rapidly (Brussels could recommend visa-free travel for Balkan countries 2009). Between January and April 2009 the European Commission and the EU Member States' expert mission assessed the situation in all the countries of the Western Balkans, and on May 18 the Commission issued the second assessment report and submitted it to the member states (Visa Liberalisation: Implications of a proposal 2009; Visa-free travel for the Western Balkans 2009). The issue has been subsequently discussed by the member states. On June 15 the Council called for the visa free regime to be established ideally by the end of 2009 with those countries that would have met all the benchmarks by then (Presidency Conclusions 2009). The Commission thus received a mandate to recommend visa free travel for a group of countries. The progress in visa liberalization has been hailed both by the Czech government and the Balkan politicians and think-tankers as the key (and probably the only) achievement of the Czech EU Presidency vis-à-vis the Western Balkans, at least in contrast to the political stalemate on the enlargement agenda itself (Visas and the Czechs – savoring success 2009).

The Presidency was also able to forge a consensus allowing the Montenegrin application (received in December 2008) to be passed to the Commission for examination (Achievements of the Czech Presidency. Europe without Barriers 2009). This set an important precedent for Albania. At the occasion of PM Berisha's visit to Prague, the Presidency received an application for the EU membership from Albania. The success in these minor tasks rests also in the fact that they passed without much attention from the European media (Interview with an official from the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009b).

Concerning the negotiations with Turkey, the Presidency sought to open the Energy Chapter, the Taxation Chapter and eventually the Social Policy & Employment Chapter. Since energy (and energy security) was one of the priorities of the Czech Presidency, it is not surprising that the Presidency wanted to give priority to the opening of the chapter on energy.<sup>11</sup> The Energy Chapter was not opened, though, due to objections from Cyprus (due to an unresolved oil exploration dispute with Turkey) (Cyprus stands firm on Turkey's EU energy chapter 2009). The progress on the Social Policy & Employment Chapter was frozen for domestic reasons. The government had to shelve a reform of social policies following a controversy between employers and trade unions. The EU also requires Turkey to grant public employees the right to strike, something the government is not very keen on. At the end of the day, just one negotiating chapter (Taxation) was opened, and it was on 30 June, the last day of the Czech EU Presidency (Randoux 2009).

In a sharp contrast to the Western Balkans, the Turkish accession process was somehow sidelined in the Presidency priorities (see Work Programme of the Czech Presidency. Europe without Barriers 2008) and in the attention received from the Czech Presidency.<sup>12</sup> But if we look at the Presidency's final scorecard as a whole, it seems that the limited progress in the

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<sup>11</sup> The importance of the energy chapter has been stressed by the Czech Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Vondra in March during his speech at the general assembly of the European Parliament, where a debate on a report on Turkey prepared by rapporteur Ria Oomen-Ruijten took place (We Want To Give Priority To Opening Of Chapter On Energy 2009). The Czech Republic did not explicitly link the fate of the Nabucco project and the opening of the energy chapter. Nevertheless, Turkey itself did condition its support for Nabucco on the opening of the energy chapter (Border dispute with Slovenia delays Croatia EU entry talks 2009), and the importance of Turkey for the project was probably taken into consideration by the Czech representatives (Serbia told to hold back EU application 2009).

<sup>12</sup> One can compare Minister Schwarzenberg's strong (almost unconditional) expression of support for the early accession of all the Western Balkan countries (Schwarzenberg 2009a) with the much more reserved attitude to Turkey which was presented with a long list of demands and conditions by the EU (Schwarzenberg 2009b).

Turkish case eventually allowed the Czech Presidency to save its face in the enlargement agenda.

Despite this limited progress on the technical and the diplomatic level, the strategic political obstacles hindering the advancement on the road to EU enlargement remain in their places. Moreover, the limited progress achieved in the enlargement field stands in a sharp contrast with the ambitious Presidency priorities. To sum up, the Czech Presidency was rather ineffective in the enlargement field, if its achievements are measured by the number and the significance of the compromises reached.

### CONCLUSION

With regard to socialization, the Czech Republic is close to the category of *trouble-maker*.<sup>13</sup> The political elites often challenge the mainstream norms of the European integration (see Braun in this volume) yet they lack intangible resources (political capital) like experience, credibility or reputation. The lack of political capital has been to a limited extent compensated by sufficient administrative resources and central coordination (see Karlas in this volume).

The Czech political scene is an example of an environment where the European integration (or at least its current direction) is being challenged on a normative level. This challenging critique stems from the Czech Republic's different normative background – its proponents implicitly or explicitly base their arguments on the adherence to the norms (ideals) of state sovereignty, non-interference and consensual decision-making free of coercion. Even though the Czech elite is deeply divided on the issue and a part of them exhibit Eurooptimist stances and visions (the ex-president Havel, the Social Democrats and the Green Party), the Czech EU Presidency has been administered by actors from the more Eurosceptical or “Eurorealist” end of the political spectrum. Thus, in the context of the EU Presidency it makes sense to speak about political elites challenging European norms.

Even though the Czech Republic lacked intangible resources like reputation, it utilized relatively sufficient tangible resources like administrative capacities (see Karlas in this volume). The Czech Republic tried to overcome the supposed lack of resources and experience. The preparatory phase (the formulation of priorities) had been quite intensive and served as a useful

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<sup>13</sup> *Trouble-makers* lack resources and have doubts about the EU. *Eurosceptic* states are defined as actors with sufficient resources who, however, do contest the EU in the name of different norms.

“training ground” for the state apparatus (Interview with an official from the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009a).

The performance of the Czech Presidency in the area of enlargement has been *hesitant*.<sup>14</sup> The Presidency acted impartially but ineffectively. The impartiality stemmed from the Czech adherence to the norm of “consensual decision-making free of coercion”. In the moments of crisis, the Czech diplomacy found it inappropriate for the Czech Republic (as the presiding country) to exert pressure on another country, especially on a small one like Slovenia. The Presidency has not been effective in finding solutions to the main political obstacles.

The initial claim mentioned in the introductory chapter that small countries’ presidencies tend to be hesitant has been verified. My analysis confirmed the link between *trouble-makers* and *hesitancy* (see Drulák in this volume). Existing studies suggest that on the general political level the Czech EU Presidency acted as an active promoter of new ideas and norms which often clashed with the European mainstream and resulted in bias, lack of empathy, breach of the norm of impartiality and, in some extreme cases, even arrogance from the Czech side (Kratochvíl and Beneš 2009). Nevertheless, in the area of enlargement policy the Czech Republic behaved hesitantly, and we have recorded virtually no signs of *arrogance*<sup>15</sup> there (see the section on *impartiality* above).

In other policies and issues (remedying the global financial and economic crisis, the Eastern Partnership, energy policy, and EU-Israel relations, to name just a few), the Czech republic did not hesitate to promote new (and thus controversial) visions, to intervene and to clash with the European mainstream or with the priorities of the “big beasts” (like France).<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, the same Czech Republic showed a great deal of hesitance (and impartiality) in the enlargement agenda. The Czech Republic’s hesitance can be documented on its handling of the Croatian-Slovenian dispute, in which the Presidency found it inappropriate to intervene and exert any pressure on the small Slovenia (Czech PM says Croat-Slovenian discord similar to Temelin dispute 2009; Karlas and Beneš 2010 in print) even though the Slovenian stance threatened one of the key priorities of the Czech EU Presidency.

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<sup>14</sup> Hesitancy has been defined as an ineffective and impartial presidency performance.

<sup>15</sup> Arrogance has been defined as an effective but partial presidency performance.

<sup>16</sup> The then Prime Minister Topolánek even appraised the ability of the small Czech Republic to stand up against “big France” as a “miracle” and an undeniable success of the Czech EU Presidency (Topolánek: Byli jsme trpaslík, který se postavil velké Francii 2009). In his farewell interview, he did not forget to say “if needed, I sharply stood up against any country. Even against Russia” (ibid.).