

# **Political Parties in the Czech Republic and their Attitudes toward European Federalism\***

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## *Abstract*

The issue of European federalism is a topic much discussed by social scientists as well as by politicians from EU-member states. In respect to the process of European constitution ratification is obvious that the EU integration trajectory is not clear at the present time. Attitudes toward European federalism vary across Europe as well as between political parties within a single country. Czech political parties' attitudes to the European federalism are interesting for numerous reasons. First, the Czech Republic represents a new member state in the EU. Second, the Czech Republic is a state with its own experience of federalism, which ended at the beginning of the 1990's. Third, the Czech Republic is a state with deep tradition of European federalist thinking.

The paper deals with several questions. First, how important is the issue of European federalism for Czech political parties? Second, are the parties' attitudes to European federalism based on ideology, or on strategy? Third, how do the parties define the European federalism? To find the answers, research questions were devised using the following methods: party program analysis, interviews with party experts, and methods of description and comparison.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The future of the European Union and its system is a much-discussed issue in academia and in politics. The current Union finds itself at a point of reflection, and the future course is unclear. The issue of European federalism has been highlighted recently in the context of events surrounding the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe; simply, the European Constitution.

The issue of European federalism is not new to European history. Projects for a federal system in Europe have deep roots in the past. Even so, no studies exist focusing on the positions of the individual political actors on this issue. This article, therefore, will attempt an analysis of the positions on European federalism of the political parties in the Czech Republic.

### **1. Previous research**

Recent research on European federalism has been done by many of the big names in political science (Riker 1996; Burgess 1998; 2006, Hesse and Wright (eds.) 1996; Sidjanski 1992, 2000, Heinemann – Grüder (ed.) 2002; Filippov, Ordeshook, Shvetsova 2004; Kelemen 2004). These scholars focused their attention chiefly on the many possibilities for implementing the federal system in Europe, on the positives and negatives of the federal mechanisms of government in the existing European Union, or on a normative discussion of the entire set of issues. Long neglected were the attitudes of individual actors on the national or European political scene toward the idea of European federalism itself, and toward its eventual mechanisms in practice. During the 1990s researchers focused on the positions of political parties toward the process of European integration, with the most attention given to those political parties that, with varying degrees of intensity, stood in opposition to the ongoing process. This research produced the concept of *Euroskepticism* (Taggart 1998; Taggart and Szczerbiak 2001, 2002; Szczerbiak and Taggart 2002, 2003, 2004; Kopecký and Mudde 2002; Conti and Verzichielli 2002; Conti 2003a, 2003b). Many academics also focused on finding and explaining

causal factors for the attitudes of political parties within various frames of reference (party family, left-right spectrum, party competition on the domestic scene) towards European integration (Marks and Wilson 2000; Hooghe, Marks, Wilson 2002; Marks, Wilson, Ray 2002; Marks, Hooghe, Nelson, Edwards 2006), and on what degree of importance the issue of European integration assumes in competition among the parties (Budge et al. 2001, Steenbergen and Scott 2004, Brandenburg 2004, Hobolt 2004, Sitter 2002).

In the Czech Republic, the work of several authors concentrated first on the attitude of individual political parties toward the issue of joining the EU (Šedo 2003; Mareš 2000, 2003), and later on the positions of Czech political parties on specific topics – the referendum on membership (Šaradín 2003; Dürr, Marek and Šaradín 2004), elections to the European Parliament (Šaradín (ed.) 2004), or the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe. Another theme mapped out was the general attitudes toward Europeanization of the Czech political parties (Cabada and Krašovec (eds.) 2004; Riishøj 2004, Hloušek 2004; Dančák, Fiala, Hloušek (eds.) 2005), but these attitudes, as well as those above, were not for the most part broken down into detailed conceptualization. Other authors examined the attitudes of Czech politicians toward the general question of European integration, and, using a scale of party positions developed by Taggart and others, attempted to categorize the individual Czech political parties (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2004; Kopecký and Mudde 2002; Hloušek and Kopeček 2004; Havlík 2006), or propose their own set of categories (Kopeček, Šedo 2003; Dürr, Marek and Šaradín 2004); however, more detailed conceptualization and a general placing in context was still missing. There was no work at all focusing on the political parties that took a positive attitude toward European integration (in the broadest sense) as opposed to a skeptical one. There was no research at any level on the attitude of political parties toward the very idea and practice of European federalism. Although many studies exist on possible federal arrangements of the ES/EU, there is no satisfactory analysis of the positions of individual political party actors toward the system as it exists in practice.

## 2. Theoretical foundations, hypotheses, and methods

The lack of research on the attitudes of political actors towards European federalism, and the relative blank slate in this area of studies, gave us an opportunity to address the problem in a number of new ways. First of all it was necessary to define a time period, and thus limit the number of parties that have to be studied. The elections to the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic in 2002<sup>1</sup> were chosen as the reference point for the analysis.

After setting a time period, a suitable theoretical framework had to be selected. Given the existing state of research in the field of political party attitudes toward European integration, the framework adopted was that of *cleavage theory* as presented by Marks, Wilson, Hooghe, and others who argue that on the basis of ideological location of a party it can be predicted what the party's stance will be on European integration. Another tool is *saliency theory*, based on the hypothesis that parties strategically emphasize the importance of certain themes while downplaying that of others in an effort to maximize their gains.

As for federalism itself, it proved most advantageous to concentrate on what the term means in theory and in practice. First, what the parties themselves mean by European federalism, how they perceive it, how they define it. Second, what the party position is on the controversial topic of European federalism as a system appropriate for the European Union: whether the topic is important to the party, whether the party is unified on the issue, and also whether the party sees the federal model as appropriate for the existing European Union. . On a more specific level, it proved necessary to thoroughly define a set of terms to be used in the text: the term *European federalism* is equivalent to the term *Eurofederalism*, and refers to a principle for organizing the government of the ES/EU. The term *federal model of Europe* refers to a

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<sup>1</sup> These elections were held just before this research project was begun.

normatively neutral system of organizing government in the European Union. *European integration* is understood as the process of unifying the European states which began in the 1950s; this term is understood to stand above the term European federalism. The term *current European system* refers in the text to the current European Union; the term *European question* refers to the general process of European integration and the European Union.

Three basic hypotheses were put forth:

- Parties that take a positive attitude toward European integration also take a positive attitude toward European federalism.
- Parties that advocate European federalism (as a suitable system for the European Union), regard the issue of European federalism as an important one.
- The issue of European federalism is important for political parties to the extent that it is an object (instrument) of domestic party competition.

Confirmation or refutation of these hypotheses was undertaken through a set of research questions.

Do parties that take a positive view of European integration also take a positive view of European federalism? Do parties that take a positive position on the current European Union also take a positive position toward European federalism? Do parties that take a positive position on the need for a European constitution, but are negative toward the content of the text, take a positive stance toward European federalism? Do parties consider the current European Union to be a federal system? Is the issue of European federalism important for the party? Is the party unified on the issue of European federalism? Is the issue of European federalism, in the party's opinion, important to the public? Is the position of the party on the issue of European federalism influenced by the ideology of the party, or by party strategy (tactics)? What is the "debate over European federalism" all about?

For the first theoretical section, an analytical-descriptive method was taken, along with comparative methodology. In the part focusing on attitudes of Czech political parties, methods of document analysis and surveys of party experts were used.

## **1. EUROPEAN FEDERALISM**

The roots of European federalism reach deep back into history, but the idea of this kind of arrangement in Europe took on new currency in the 1940s. The reason was the fresh experience of World War II, and the conviction that a new, peaceful order must be brought to pass. In this context a number of interest groups and associations sprung up advocating the ideal of a European federation<sup>2</sup>. The outcome of these articulated ideas was the establishment of a European Community. The birth of the Community was accompanied by disputes between *federalists* and *intergovernmentalists*. Despite the obvious prevalence of an inter-governmental approach to European unification, federalist ideas were formulated and promoted with *relative* success. Among the evident attempts at “federalization” of the European Commonwealth was a plan for the creation of a European Defense Community (1950), a plan for the creation of a Political Union (1953), and the Tindemans report (1974) – a plan to create a European Union. These attempts were more or less unsuccessful, as they ran up against unwillingness by the member states to take part in a closer, political integration that would mean a limitation of existing sovereignty. On the other hand, successes included the holding of direct elections to the European Parliament (1979), stemming from the adoption of the Single European Act (1986; especially the principle of consensuality on issues dealing with the internal market); as well as the Treaty of the European Union (1992); not just on a symbolic level (change in name, flag, anthem, European citizenship), but in concrete measures such as the creation of a single currency. A clear, but so far unsuccessful, attempt at moving the European Union closer

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<sup>2</sup> Some still exist today: the Union of European Federalists (UEF), European Movement (EM).

to a federation of European states is the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe (2004).

But what is the meaning of European federalism? In general federalism means a system that unites entities that each enjoys a certain degree of autonomy, having their own constitution, parliament, and legal system. The units are joined together as part of a whole, whose powers, like those of its component parts, are strictly defined by the federal constitution. It is a system that is decentralized to a significant degree. It is characteristic of a federal system that the areas of defense, security, and foreign policy are the domain of the federal level. The constituent bodies are represented on the federal level through the legislative body, and take part in legislative processes, which, usually, fall under the majority principle.

Therefore European federalists seek the establishment in principle of a political union that would have the attributes of a federal state or system of government: a clear constitution with clearly defined powers at the “national” and “European” levels; in the areas of common defense, security, and foreign policy; and a bicameral parliament in which one chamber would represent the existing national states. The system should be founded on democratic principles in the sense of political responsibility of elected representatives responsible to the people. In this text, European federalism is seen as a system of government for the European Union having the characteristics of a standard federal system. European federalists, then, are those who advocate such a model.

## **2. POSITIONS OF PARTIES ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION**

Two theoretical concepts have been selected to help analyze the positions of Czech political parties toward European federalism.<sup>3</sup> One is *cleavage theory*, the other *saliency theory*. There is also a third prism, offered by Nick Sitter

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<sup>3</sup> There are many more existing concepts, see for example Johansson and Tapio (2001).

(2002). These two, or three, theoretical concepts serve to help analyze the attitudes of the Czech political parties towards the issue of European federalism.

## 2.1 Cleavage Theory

Authors working with *cleavage theory*<sup>4</sup> (Marks and Wilson 2000; Hooghe, Marks, Wilson 2002; Marks, Wilson, Ray 2002; Marks, Hooghe, Nelson, Edwards 2006) argue that a party's position on European integration can be predicted on the basis of its ideological location.

Marks, Wilson, and Ray (2002) examine the analytic usefulness of *cleavage theory* by confronting it with three alternative hypotheses. They explain the positions of parties on European integration or later problems in terms of dependence on the national context, on the electorate (the party takes positions that increase its chances of getting votes<sup>5</sup>) and on factors of party competition: while mainstream parties<sup>6</sup> tend towards preserving the status quo by minimizing the importance of new issues (European integration), less important parties<sup>7</sup> tend to adopt more extreme positions on such issues so as to emphasize their importance, and alter the existing party balance (Marks, Wilson, Ray 2002). The fact that party positions in Western Europe on European integration are to a great extent influenced by the existing domestic party competition led some authors (Marks, Hooghe, Nelson, Edwards 2006) to examine this thesis for the region of Central and Eastern Europe. They showed that if the positions of parties in Western Europe on European integration can be predicted on the basis of their positions on two of the issues dominating domestic politics; i.e. the left-right economic dimension, and the non-economic

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<sup>4</sup> Theory of social cleavage according to Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan in 1967 (Marks and Wilson 2000)

<sup>5</sup> The authors make the assumption that the positions of the political parties are analogous to the position of the median voter (Marks, Wilson, Ray 2002).

<sup>6</sup> The formulation of the hypothesis is dependent upon how the mainstream parties are classified: in terms of votes, left/right position, or participation in government) (Marks, Wilson, Ray 2002: 588).

<sup>7</sup> Small or excluded (Marks, Wilson, Ray 2002)



dimension (*new politics*) (see Hooghe, Marks, Wilson 2002), then this is also true for the parties in Central and Eastern Europe. But it cannot be said that the same model of explanations applies to parties of Central and Eastern Europe as to those of Western Europe. Marks, Hooghe, Nelson and Edwards (2006) describe the structure of party competition as two-dimensional<sup>8</sup> using the poles *Left/ Right* (first dimension) and *Gal* and *Tan* (second dimension). If the pole *Gal* encompasses the green – alternative – libertarian parties, the pole *Tan* represents the traditionalist – authoritarian – nationalist parties. In the Western democracies Euroskepticism is said to be bi-polar, because it is concentrated in parties falling under the categories *left* and *Tan*.<sup>9</sup> The situation is different in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, where economic and non-economic dimensions are interrelated. The result is that Euroskeptic attitudes are concentrated in *left* and *Tan* parties, which are in contrast to Western Europe interrelated, while pro-European integration positions are represented by parties of the *right* and *Gal*. The authors seek explanations for this in the mechanisms of transition<sup>10</sup>. Euroskepticism in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe is unipolar, because negative positions on European integration line up with the *left* and *Tan* parties. The authors back up their arguments with examples from the countries in the post-Communist region, pointing out the exception of the Czech Civic Democratic Party, which falls into the categories *Right-Gal*, but in the context of the region proves to be the most euroskeptic.

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<sup>8</sup> The first is the left-right economic dimension, seen as the attitude of the political actor toward economic redistribution, welfare, and government regulation in the economy. The second dimension is non-economic, or perhaps cultural: the dimension called *new politics*, which began to establish itself in Western Europe in the 1970s in the form of ecological parties, parties defending the rights of minorities, and other alternative types of parties.

<sup>9</sup> Marks et. al. (2006) argue that the project of the European Union is a centrist project, created by mainstream parties: Christian democrats, liberals, social democrats, and conservatives. Parties of other party families took a negative position on the European project, because for various reasons they did not take part in it: radical left parties see the integration as a project of elitist capitalism, while parties of the *Tan* pole see European integration as the embodiment of elitist supranationalism, which undermines national autonomy and traditional values (Marks et. al. 2006). These parties represent the principal opposition to the European project in the Western democracies.

<sup>10</sup> The parties that “lost” during the transition represent the opposition to the new reforms, or the newly-instituted system, [and take the position – original – of economic equality and – traditional – authority]. On the other hand, the formations that “won” during transition continue to advocate breaking away from the – traditional – past.

## **2.2 Salience theory and strategic position**

*Salience theory* is based on the premise that parties strategically emphasize the importance of some issues, and minimize that of others, in an effort to achieve greater – generally defined in the broad sense – gains, or profit (Budge et al. 2001, Steenbergen and Scott 2004, Arnold and Pennings (2006), Brandenburg 2004, Hobolt 2004). If some authors associate *salience theory* primarily with election campaigns, and therefore with the gaining of more votes, others argue that the gain involves not only electoral victory, but also maintaining hold on office, or preserving party unity (Steenbergen and Scott 2004). Party competition, according to *salience theory*, often represents a “battle for control of the agenda”, but at the same time it must contain a definition of the political arena; i.e. what is important, or *salient*, and what is not (Steenbergen and Scott 2004:167). Steenbergen and Scott point out that strategic manipulation of issues by parties is limited by factors endemic to the given political system (Steenbergen and Scott 2004). On the basis of this theory, Steenberg and Scott explain the attitudes of political parties toward European integration in terms of four distinct hypotheses: first, that the importance of European integration for a party grows if other parties in the political system stress that issue. Second, that the greater the distance between the position of party on European integration and the position of voters on that same issue, the less importance the party gives to European integration. Third, if a party is ideologically compatible with other parties, but its position on European integration is not consistent, the importance of that issue will be diminished in an attempt to improve the party’s chances in forming a coalition. Fourth, the more European integration divides a party, the less important that issue is for the party. If, however, internal differences on the issue are too great, the importance of the issue for the party grows (Steenbergen and Scott 2004: 170-171). Using data from research carried out by Ray (1984 – 1996), the authors came to a number of conclusions. First, the systemic salience is an important factor; however it explains only partly why political parties stress the issue. Second, the expectations of the electorate influence the political parties in their

understanding of the importance of European integration<sup>11</sup>. Third, the research revealed that the variable “office-seeking” does not play a role in the importance given to the issue of European integration. Finally, the research also showed that until 1992 internal party differences on the issue of European integration played practically no role in decreasing or increasing the importance of the issue. After that, internal party divisions on European integration began to have a significant effect.

Both of the approaches described correspond to a significant degree with that of Nick Sitter (2002). According to Sitter, the process of European integration is one of the greatest challenges ever, to which parties react under the influence of a combination of three basic factors: first, the party’s own position (and ideology) toward such issues. Second, a party’s particular electoral strategy. Third, the dynamics of competition between government and opposition party (Sitter 2002:5). Sitter does not deny that long-term policy and ideology play important roles in the adoption of a party position toward European integration; nonetheless, the degree to which that policy is particularized – and Sitter works mainly with Euro-skeptic positions – depends to a marked degree on strategy and tactics (Sitter 2002:5)<sup>12</sup>

### **2.3 Basic models of party positions on integration**

Models of party positions on European integration have been classified by Szczerbiak and Taggart (2002), who defined the term *Euroskepticism* and broke it down further into *soft* and *hard*. The original scheme of these authors served to stimulate debate about the attitudes of political parties toward European integration (in the broadest sense). The concept of Kopecký and

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<sup>11</sup> Until 1992 the issue was not important to the public; the same could be said for the political parties. After 1992 and the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, the issue grew in importance for both the public and the political parties: where the parties’ position toward European integration matched that of the public, the parties emphasized the topic; where the parties’ position on the issue was “unpopular”, the parties had a tendency to play it down.

<sup>12</sup> Sitter thus explains attitudes toward European integration especially in terms of party competition, and sees euroskepticism as the “politics of opposition”. Euroskepticism among parties is according to Sitter “a product of the strategic choice of the party in the context of survival, organization, and attaining office”. (Sitter 2002:23).

Mudde (2002) moved the discussion further. The contribution of the Kopecký and Mudde typology was the distinction between 'idea' and 'practice' in European integration. On the other hand it is clear that the individual categories remained in essence very general.<sup>13</sup> With a certain degree of simplification, the categories of *Europragmatism* and *Euroenthusiasm* can be described as pro-European<sup>14</sup>. The revised concept by Taggart and Szczerbiak (2003) was undoubtedly a qualitatively positive contribution to the discussion; nevertheless, the fact that the typology continued to focus on only two relatively negative stances toward European integration (in the general sense) also demonstrated its limited nature. Subsequently, the model constructed by Conti and Verzichielli (2003) contributed by creating a scale of the negative and positive stances of political parties toward European integration (in the general sense). However, its limitation is that their typology is based on the original scheme of Taggart and Szczerbiak. Here the question should be posed whether their categories would not benefit from further clarification<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> One example is the category "*europahils*", which may include both countries that advocate the integration of Europe as well as countries whose motivations are based on economic integration; see Taggart's and Szczerbiak's criticism (2003).

<sup>14</sup> It may be possible to break this part of the model down even further. The criteria for categorization might be either the *form* itself of European integration or the European Union as an institution; or the *reason for supporting* the EU where the party does not support integration as an ideal in itself. The *form* of integration could be scaled on the basis of individual *variants/models* of European system. The reasons for supporting the European Union (with conscious "non-support" for the idea of European integration) could be sought for example in preservation of party integrity, efforts to be an acceptable coalition partner, or to improve election chances.

<sup>15</sup> The category *functional Europeanism* may be understood in the sense of *salience theory*: a party considers "the Europe issue" or position as important, or insofar as it represents a strategy for the attainment of the party's own goals not directly related to integration. The category of "*functional Euroskepticism*" is thus a utilitarian category. It remains to be asked whether the equivalent of this category should exist for the so-called "anti-European" parties as well. Conti and Verzichielli's typology of *functional Euroskepticism*"; that is, the category of parties with reservations toward European integration is influenced by its aims on the domestic political scene. The category of "*identity Europeanism*" is a category in which a more detailed breakdown of positions would be possible, but perhaps less than useful. Conti and Verzichielli include in this category all parties whose position toward European integration is positive in the sense that European integration is considered a good in itself. It is evident, however, that – on the level of the theoretical model at least – there could exist parties that find European integration as a value in and of itself, but on the other hand are not satisfied with its current form or direction. In theory there could also exist parties that on one hand would agree with the idea of European integration and use, according to Conti and Verzichielli, laudatory language

### 3. THE PARTY SYSTEM IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The party system in the Czech Republic is at present a relatively stabilized pluralistic competitive party system, which however in this phase of development cannot be considered fully consolidated (Fiala – Strmiska in Malíř, Marek 2005:1359; see. Cabada and Šanc 2005)<sup>16</sup>, predominantly in regard to the interaction of their individual actors (Fiala and Hloušek 2003). In this sense it is also difficult to classify the system in terms of existing model typology of party systems.

The focus of research was elections to the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the CR in 2002. The elections were held on 14 and 15 June 2002, with 58% of eligible voters coming to the polls. A total of 29 formations were registered in the elections, of which six exceeded the 1.5% mark<sup>17</sup>

<b>Name of political party</b>	<b>% of [valid] votes</b>
Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD)	30,20 %
Civic Democratic Party (ODS)	24,47 %
Communist Party of Czech and Moravia (KSČM)	18,51 %
Coalition (Christian Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL), Freedom Union-Democratic Union (US-DEU)	14,27 %
Association of Independents (SNK)	2,78 %
Green Party (SZ)	2,36 %

Tab.2 (source of data: <http://www.volby.cz>)

Four of the party formations have been stable entities from a long-term standpoint. They are: The Civic Democratic Party (ODS) representing the right; the centrist position is occupied by the Christian Democratic Party – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL, often shortened to the "People's Party"); the left is divided between the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD)

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as a means of expressing their attitude on the "European question", but on the other hand have clearly defined opinions about the process of that integration.

<sup>16</sup> Cabada and Šanc classify the system as consolidated, because the total number of parties on the political scene has been constant. More on the problem of consolidation of the Czech party system in Fiala, Petr 2001 "The Czech Republic: is the political system transforming or consolidated? *Středoevropské politické studie* III, vol.1, winter 2001.

<sup>17</sup> The 1.5% mark was chosen as the threshold for receiving state election funding (see Outlý 2003), above which a party can be said to have some relevance.

and the anti-system, relatively “isolated” Communist Party of Czech and Moravia (KSČM) (Cabada and Šanc 2005: 150).

The Freedom Union – Democratic Union at first represented a liberal center-right position with emphasis on private property and market economics. Gradually it tried to take the position of a strongly liberal party oriented towards the middle class (Hloušek 2005: 450); nonetheless the party did not succeed in achieving a stable position on the party-political spectrum of the CR. The Association of Independents (SNK) originally presented itself as a formation coming out of local politics; it gradually (now along with the European Democrats – ED) began to define itself as a liberal party in the true center of the political mainstream. Since their beginnings the Greens have taken positions mainly on ecological themes (Kopeček in Malíř, Marek 2005: 1579).

## **4. ANALYSES**

### **4.1 Party documents**

Analysis of party documents focused first on party platforms for elections to the Chamber of Deputies CR and the European Parliament from 1996<sup>18</sup> to 2006. Attention was focused on the positions of parties toward points concerning the process of *European integration*, the *European Union*, and its configuration of institutions. Other issues examined include the proposed Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe; i.e. the European constitution. Attention was concentrated on issues directly related to *European federalism* where parties declared their favorable position or opposition on this issue explicitly in the text. Besides election platforms, analysis was extended to texts dealing directly with the European question, or various long- or short-term party programs, the quantity and availability of which varied depending on the

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<sup>18</sup> The first elections in the independent Czech Republic after the division of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic (1.1.1993).

materials produced by the different parties<sup>19</sup>. In the case of the KDU-ČSL/US-DEU Coalition, documents of both these constituent groups were analyzed.

Analysis of the program documentation of individual parties showed that parties focused on the issues of European integration and European Union with varying degrees of intensity which generally grew with the approaching entry of the Czech Republic. All of the parties that held seats in Parliament during 1992 – 2004 regarded the entry of the Czech Republic into the EU as the main goal of the CR's foreign policy. Until 1998 all of these parties also advocated the Czech Republic joining the European Union as soon as possible, and did not offer the alternative of not entering.

Analysis of the election programs and other party documents revealed a number of interesting facts. First and foremost, early on the parties dealt with the issues of European integration and the European Union mostly on the margins, in generalized formulations. The ODS gradually presented itself as a critic of current European integration and the European Union, which it regarded as too “federalizing”, but it did not define what it meant by “federation”. It contradicted its own thesis to some extent in its campaign for the EP by arguing that national states would play an ever-greater role in the European Union. The party focused mainly on the economic criteria of integration. It placed itself explicitly in opposition to the federalists. To the contrary, the KDU-ČSL (People's Party) and the US-DEU (in the period until 2004) were advocates of federalism. The People's Party especially placed great emphasis on the values aspect of European integration. The PP also presented their concept of a European political system founded on the principle of European political parties. Both parties, however, devoted their main attention to issues of European Union institutions, and did not elaborate their positions on economic issues in terms of the principles of a federal order (fiscal union, budgetary policy, etc.) The position of the Communists was very critical of the

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<sup>19</sup> This variability seemed problematic at first, but it came to be understood as an advantage, because it signaled the importance of the issue for the party.

format of the European Union as a result of post-war European integration. The Communists declared their support in general for a European integration encompassing all of the European countries. Under present conditions, however, the Communists do not support a supra-national principle for the European Union. The position of the SNK and later the SNK European Democrats was not very explicit at first, but the concepts contained in its platform for elections to the CD CR indicated the party's clear leanings toward a gradually developing federation. After an initial period of political searching, the Greens *de facto* expressed support for federal aspects of the European Union (even though they explicitly refused to recognize distinctions between individual models of unification, regarding them as obsolete), which they underlined by calling for the EU to be given a seat on the UN Security Council. All of the parties except for the ODS and the KSČM supported the adoption of the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe, but with varying degrees of criticism.

## **4.2 Interviews with experts**

In the spring of 2006, interviews were conducted with experts of the individual political parties for European issues. These experts were people within these parties who took part in developing party positions on EU issues and were recognized as experts by other party members, or considered themselves to be such. The conversations had the character of a structured interview: the experts gave their answers to eleven open questions (see Appendix). Although the research was conceived as one interview per party, in the case of the KSČM interviews were held with two experts. The reason for this was lack of unity in the party on the issue of European integration and the European Union, which was also evident in the ambivalent formulations in different party materials.

Interviews with the party experts revealed a number of interesting facts. First, the conversations showed that parties emphasize the importance of the general



topic of European integration, but do not distinguish between its individual forms or models. European integration is an important theme for parties in its *general* dimensions. Secondly, it was shown that few of these experts had a personal or party-based opinion on the character of the European arrangement. From the conversations it was evident that the topic of European federalism is not emphasized by the parties, even the ones that deal with it in their election and other materials or regard it as part of their political program (KDU-ČSL, US-DEU). Although parties address the issue in their party materials, either in a positive (KDU-ČSL, US-DEU) or negative (ODS) light, the topic is not an important one for them, and the answers from the experts indicated that it was not important to the public, either. The conversations revealed that the ideas of the experts on the content of the term are rather general.

It was also shown that all of the experts surveyed preferred the supra-national model of European system except for the ODS and part of the KSČM. In favor of an explicitly federal model was the expert from the US-DEU, and for the model of “*loose*” federation one of the experts from the KSČM. Federal leanings (with qualification as to actual potential for consensus) were expressed by experts from the ČSSD and SNK European Democrats. Experts from the KDU-ČSL and the Greens argued that the special character of “European reality” render speculation based on such models meaningless.

The interviews with experts confirmed the parties’ positions on the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe as expressed in their documents. Positions in favor or against could be divided into two groups: position toward the *idea* of the Treaty and position toward its *content*. All of the experts surveyed criticized the content of the text to varying degrees of explicitness (except the SNK European Democrats). Agreement with the idea of such a text in principle was expressed by experts from the KDU-ČSL, US-DEU, ČSSD, the Greens, and one of the KSČM experts. The expert from the SNK European Democrats emphasized the necessity of a new treaty for the EU, whether constitutional or otherwise. The ODS’s criticism was that in terms of content the treaty institutionalized the direction of the EU towards “*federation*”. The

second KSČM expert was opposed for the reasons contained in the party's program and materials.

Lack of unified opinion on European integration and its forms was confirmed in the case of the KSČM; the other experts said that the members of their party are unified on the issue, although they may differ slightly in regard to tempo (KDU-ČSL). Because European federalism is not an important topic to the parties, the issue of unified party opinion on federalism (though not on integration) has lost relevance. Also losing relevance was the problem contained in the fourth question (see Appendix), which was both construed different ways by the experts, and like the previous question tends to be unimportant to the party. However, the parties that described their position on European federalism as being founded on strategy were the SNK European Democrats, and part of the KSČM. These experts talked about achieving their goals by means of a federal format for the EU. The US-DEU expert spoke words to the effect that the topic is not being emphasized at the moment, because "you can't win elections with it". Positions on federalism based on ideology were expressed by the experts from the KDU-ČSL, ČSSD, and one of the experts from the KSČM. The Green Party expert said that their position was based more on "idealism" than ideology or strategy. According to all the surveyed experts, the present European Union is not a federation. The formulation of criteria necessary to constitute a federation was answered only on a most general level.

The experts all concluded that at the present time there is no debate being conducted about European federalism (ČSSD, KDU-ČSL, Green, US-DEU); if there is, then only within very narrow circles (ČSSD, KDU-ČSL), or it is being conducted in terms of the promotion of special interests by the individual states (US-DEU, Green).

One interesting finding was the difference in argumentation presented in the election programs and other party materials mentioning European federalism, and in their ability to describe or define it. This difference

especially interesting with parties that discuss ideas about the proper shape of European federalism in their election and other party materials, whether explicitly (KDU-ČSL, US-DEU, in the oppositional sense ODS), or implicitly by advocating certain reforms (institutional or policy) clearly inspired by the federal model (ČSSD, Green). A major difference in argumentation was also evident in the case of the KSČM: the answers of one of its experts were completely identical with the party position, while that of the second respondent was the complete opposite. Meanwhile, consistency of position was found with the SNK European Democrats. The interviews also revealed that the parties have still formed no concept or outline for the European system, the European Union, or events on the European level. The reasons for this circumstance must apparently be sought in what the ČSSD expert said at one point in the interview: that the Czech political parties are numerically and philosophically weak.

## CONCLUSION

Analysis of election programs and other party materials, along with interviews with experts from parties that received more than 1.5% of the vote in 2002, provided answers to specific research questions, on the basis of which it was possible to confirm or refute a set of hypotheses.

The first two hypotheses presented at the beginning of this article were refuted. However, it was possible to confirm hypothesis three.

*It cannot be said that parties whose position on European integration is positive must take a positive position on European federalism as well.* On the basis of the information gathered it was clear that the position of the Civic Democratic Party on European integration is positive; but it is sharply negative towards what it calls European federalism.

It is also clear that parties whose position toward the European Union is positive generally tend to take a basically positive attitude toward European federalism; however, this is not always the case, as shown by the KSČM “Euro-realists”. A position in favor of European federalism was shown by the

centrist parties (KDU-ČSL, US-DEU, SNK European Democrats), and by the ruling Social Democrats after 1998. The position of the Green Party, and one wing of the KSČM, can also be characterized as positive. All of the parties analyzed took a favorable position on European integration in general, except for the Communists. In this sense it may be possible to agree with the thesis posed by Marks and others according to which the project of the European Union is the creation of the “mainstream” parties: Christian democrats, liberals, social democrats, and conservatives. This is why the parties from these party families favor European integration. On the other hand, it might be possible to dispute another conclusion by Marks et. al. (2006) according to which euroskepticism in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe is concentrated in the camp *left* and *Tan*, while a positive position is represented by the parties *Right* and *Gal*, with the exception of the Czech Civic Democratic Party, which is the most euro-skeptic in the region. It can be deduced that the position of the Civic Democrats on European integration is *not* negative, as indicated in party documents. Nor is it negative toward the form of the existing European Union, with the existing constellation of institutions, according to the interview with the party expert. It can be said that the position of the Civic Democrats is very critical toward *further* political unification of the Union, which does not mean however that it would be critical toward unification on an *intergovernmental* level. The Green Party, which supports European integration including its supra-national dimension, can be labeled as something of an exception.

The second hypothesis, that *parties that advocate European federalism (as a suitable system for the European Union consider the issue of European federalism as important* was not confirmed, either. Although the KDU-ČSL and the US-DEU in their materials explicitly defended European federalism, the experts admitted that the issue had no importance in the party. In the materials of the Civic Democrats, European federalism was explicitly characterized as a threat, but the expert from ODS also confirmed that the issue had no importance in the party. The Social Democrats in their materials did not

explicitly name the federal model as the one they advocate; however, their declared position on reform of institutions and common policy pointed in the direction of a federal system. But the Social Democrat expert as well denied that the issue had any importance within the party. European federalism was treated as important by the SNK European Democrats and the “Euro-realist” wing of the Communists. According to the expert interview, the “Euro-skeptic” wing of the Communists is very ambivalent (the issue is important “in the negative sense”, but it is not seen as critical, and the Communists do not have an “officially” declared position). All of the experts emphasized the importance of the general issue of European integration.

The second hypothesis is closely related to the third hypothesis, that *the issue of European federalism is important for parties to the extent the issue is the subject of party competition*. The expert responses clearly showed that at the present time the issue does not represent a subject (instrument) of party competition, and in this sense it is not important for the parties. To a certain extent this confirms one of the theses of Steenbergen and Scott (2004), based on *salience theory*, that the importance of an issue grows if other parties in the political system put emphasis on the issue. It is clear that none of the relevant political parties places emphasis on the issue of European federalism. The SNK European Democrats stress it to some extent, but their relevance in the system is low. A part of the Communists also emphasize the issue to a certain extent, but for one the party as a whole is politically isolated, and secondly this is not the “official” party position. It is interesting that a majority of party experts do not think that the issue of European federalism is important to the Czech public in general, either. The author was unsuccessful in acquiring data that would measure the attitude of the Czech public towards the models of European integration; however, on the basis of available data on the attitudes of the Czech public toward the Treaty for the European Constitution published by the Center for Research on Public Opinion (CVVM) it was possible to speculate that the importance of the issue to the Czech public is greater than the experts

believe. To the research question “What method of decision on the acceptance/rejection of the Treaty for the Establishment of a Constitution for Europe is best for the CR?”, 62% of respondents indicated *referendum*, while only 22% indicated *Parliamentary vote* as the best method.<sup>20</sup> To another research question, whether the respondent would take part in a referendum on the adoption of the European Constitution, 58% of those surveyed said yes (either “definitely yes” or “probably yes”); 27% said no (combining categories “definitely not” and “probably not”), and 16% said they didn’t know.<sup>21</sup> This would seem to indicate a definite interest on the part of the public in one of the aspects of a federal system. It might therefore be asked whether public interest in the issue of European integration itself is not greater than thought by the experts, or whether the reason for the assumed lack of interest is not lack of public information. In this regard we can again refer to CVVM data: queried about information on the Treaty for a European Constitution, 5% of those surveyed said they were well-informed (combining categories “very well” and “well”), while 91% of respondents said they were not informed (combining the categories “not very well” and “not at all”); 4% didn’t know.<sup>22</sup>

As for the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe and the positions of the individual parties, it was shown that the parties that agreed with the idea of a European Constitution are thoroughly pro-federal; the parties whose attitude toward the idea of a constitution was positive, but did not agree with the content of the Constitution’s text, were also pro-federal. None of the parties considers the current European Union to be a federation. A definition of the criteria that would make the Union a federation was formulated by the experts only on a very general level: policy on international law, similar economic and cultural conditions (ODS), federal institutions (government, Parliament, courts, and “*many, many other institutions*”, ČSSD), “*some basic attributes*” (KSČM - the first expert; not answered by the second one), “*transfer of competencies*”

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<sup>20</sup> Horáková 2005b: 2% answered “another way”, 14% “don’t know”. Data from April 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Horáková 2005b: data from April 2005

<sup>22</sup> Horáková 2005a: data from April 2005.

and “*the way elections are held*” (KDU-ČSL), “*greater and closer cooperation*” (US-DEU), transparent decision-making, reform of most important policies dealing with “*development of European countries and European regions*” and their democratization (Greens). The response by the expert from the SNK European Democrats was relatively thorough: basic unification of tax and social systems, unified legislation, unified criminal law, assumption of the defense function of the state. However, no fundamental conceptualization of European federalism was found even in the materials of the parties that operated with the term directly (KDU-ČSL, US-DEU). The parties concentrated mostly on institutional reforms and policies that the members states of the Union should have in common (KDU-ČSL, US-DEU, ČSSD, Green), but focused less on other aspects of the possible federal system (for example budgetary policy).

It turned out that the position on European federalism was not divisive for any of the analyzed parties except the KSČM, in which differing currents of thought on European integration and the European Union exist. This was evident both from the responses of the experts, but was also explicitly stated by one of the respondents. The first of those surveyed denied any split in opinion on European integration.

In view of the declared low importance of the issue for the parties (even in the case of parties that declared European federalism their European goal), it was difficult to answer questions dealing with ideological or strategic approaches to the problem. The difficulty was enhanced by the lack of clarity in some of the questions posed for the interviews. With some simplification it can be said, therefore, that the experts from the KSČM, ČSSD, KDU-ČSL and ODS characterized their own responses as being founded on their party's ideology. The experts from the SNK European Democrats and the US-DEU identified their positions as strategic. The expert from the Greens said that their position was neither “ideological” nor “strategic”, but “idealistic”. The lack of importance attributed by the experts to the issue of European federalism also

relates to the fact that, in their opinion, no debate is currently taking place over European federalism, either on the national or European level. Where discussion is taking place, it is limited to a narrow group of people, using undefined terminology, as an arena for promoting the particular interests of individual states.

Although it is clear that in political science discourse a debate over variant models of the European Union is being conducted, it seems that the political parties in the Czech Republic studied here are not engaged on the issue. This can apparently be explained by the statement of one of the surveyed experts concerning the numerical and philosophical weakness of the Czech political parties.



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### **Interviews**

- Interview with Jan Březina (KDU-ČSL; April, 11, 2006).
- Interview with Václav Exner (KSČM; March, 6, 2006).
- Interview with Jana Hybášková (SNK – ED; March, 17, 2006).
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- Interview with Luděk Sefzig (ODS; April, 12, 2006).
- Interview with Pavel Svoboda (KSČM; March, 28, 2006).

## **APPENDIX**

### **Interview questions:**

1. Which of the models of European integration is closest to your party? (Which of the integration paradigms is closest to your party?)
2. Does your party support the current European system; i.e. the current European Union?
3. Does your party support a federal model for Europe?
  - 4a) Is the position of your party on European federalism based on the party's strategy?
  - 4b) Is the position of your party on European federalism based on the party's ideology?
5. What is the position of your party on the so-called European constitution?
6. Is the issue of European federalism important to your party?
7. Do you think that the issue of European federalism is important to the public?
8. Is your party unified on the issue of European federalism?
9. According to your party, is the current European Union a federal one?
  - 10a) If so – what are the criteria that make it a federation?
  - 10b) If not – what criteria would have to be fulfilled to make the EU a federation?
- 11\*. What is the debate about, if there is a debate about “European federalism”? What does the term “European federalism – Eurofederalism” mean to your party?

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\* After the first interview the originally formulated question on the definition of the term was changed to the definition of the debate on European federalism. The answer to the original question proved to be clear from the other questions in the interview.