

Medial reflection of Euro myths in the Czech Republic

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Abstract: *The main aim of this article is to provide a deeper understanding of Euro myths in the Czech Republic and reveal their origins and nature. After bringing definition of Euro myths, several myths are analysed and put into theory of myths. We consider there are three main sources of euro myths: (social) media tabloidization, wrong national transposition resulting in 'gold plating' and the misunderstanding of legislative proposals. In all three cases tabloid and social media play an important role as the carrier of myth information to a broader audience. They help to spread euro myths among citizens and satisfy their demand for tabloid information which puts the EU in the negative light. The media also help to spread euro myths through national boundaries as the connection between Czech and British media shows. The case study is mainly empirically based on the analysis of approximately 20 of the best known euro myths. Most of them have become relevant after the EU accession of the Czech Republic in 2004.*

Keywords: *Euro scepticism, Political Myths, Euro myths, Media, Tabloidization, Transposition, Regulation, Czech Republic, EU, Gold plating*

Introduction

The main aim of this article is to contribute to the deeper understanding of Euro myths and to answer the question ‘What is the origin and nature of Euro myths within the Czech Republic?’ After responding, we could easily identify the myth-makers, their intentions and reveal the forms in which Euro myths appear within the Czech Republic. This case study is mainly empirically based on the analysis of approximately 20 of the best known euro myths. Most of them have become relevant after the EU accession of the Czech Republic in 2004. As there are dozens of euro myths within the Czech population active in different periods, we decided to choose samples of the most popular Euro myths. Despite this decision it is to a large extent arbitrary as it allows us to present the variety of forms Euro myths occur.

Myth has been subject to large scale research in various academic fields including history, anthropology, sociology, political science or philosophy, giving different understandings of the myth concept. Despite this everyone shares some ideas of what myth represents. Myth could be understood in different ways by cultural anthropologists or political scientists (Tamse 1975). As this article deals with ‘Euro myths’ and because of the different understanding of the myth concept among disciplines, we will first have to define what we mean by Euro myths. The first chapter tries to bring forward our definition, which will be mostly derived from the concept of political myth as understood by Christopher Flood (2002). The second chapter will focus on Euro myths, which were active in the Czech Republic in the period after the accession in to the EU in 2004. This chapter tries to reveal the environment where Euro myths were created, and explore the origins of the Euro myths. The last chapter presents some recommendations how to prevent myth-makers from producing myths and derive some theoretical implications for the myth concept.

1. Defining Euro myth

There are several types of myths mentioned in scientific literature. In this way, notable work has been presented by Christopher Flood (2002) who distinguishes three kinds of myths. First, he refers to the general theory of myth, which is well documented and where the main subject is a sacred myth. The second type of myth is according to Flood connected with the study of ideology. While both types are not treated in a related way, they are both intimately related to the third kind of myth which Flood calls political myth (Flood 2002: 3). Despite this some scholars disagree (for example Roland Boer considers all myths political; Boer 2009: 8) our understanding of myth is closer to Flood’s definition. He defines Political myth as *‘an ideologically marked narrative which purports to give a true account of a set of past,*

present, or predicted political events and which is accepted as valid in its essentials by a social group' (Flood 2002: 44). Acceptation of validity in essentials seems to be most important condition because it gives to the myth a necessary authority. In other words myth is as strong as people believe in it, without questioning ideological influence. The second important aspect is the factual error myth contains.

Notable Political myths are a significant part of national identity because they help to the communities mediate anxieties (Mørk 2011: 48) and thus contemporary research focuses on political myths in connection with national identity (see Svilicić, Maldini 2014; Milošević, Stojadinović 2012). Because of the close connection to national identity, political myths were in history used for propaganda and conduct of the masses (Stefanović 2008: 33). However, we are convinced that not all myths are used for the mobilization of certain social groups. They might serve as well as a passive tool to strengthen identity or the values of its target groups by forming an information environment. Also Flood pays attention to the environment in which a myth may occur. Flood argues that a myth is only possibly to appear within an atmosphere of consensus, where the message and the reception are mutually supportive (Flood 2002: 43). Myth and environment relates significantly and a myth could strengthen the environment in which the myth has risen.

Myths were debated also in connection with the European Union (see for example Nitoiu 2013, Hansen-Magnusson and Wiener 2010, Manners 2010, Hansen and Williams 2009) mainly assessing myths in the area of EU policies. For example Heather Macrae (2010) works with 'functional myths' which are *'drawn primarily from Policy initiatives and generally emphasize the ability of the EU to shape global discourse and facilitate 'cutting-edge' legislation'* (Macrae 2010: 157). Rather than a constructive role they might play a vital role in our understanding, attitudes and identification with political and social institutions (Jones 2010: 90).

There is no official definition of what we can call in our article a Euro myth. While it seems to be easy to define what we mean by this term, but in reality it might be difficult. In its core a Euro myth is information regarding to EU policy, politics or polity which is not true or is misleading. However, this is a simplification, which does not contain an external dimension of the myth. Similarly Richard's Corbett's (European Parliamentary Labour party) definition of Euro myths: *'The bulk of Euro myths are pure inventions or gross exaggerations, deliberately spread to denigrate the EU by making it appear silly or sinister, or both'* (Corbett, not dated) is weak in its external dimension despite this it contains the purpose of the myth. Compared to Flood's definition, there is a necessary condition to accept the ideologically marked narrative by a social group (Flood 2002: 44). However, Corbett's definition is much stronger about the nature of the information. After synthesizing both and highlighting the functional nature of Euro myths we can define them as 'a politically marketed narrative which contains some error or misleading information which is perceived and

accepted as valid in its essentials by a social group'. In our definition we have changed 'an ideologically marketed narrative' to 'a politically marketed narrative' as there are two basic political attitudes towards European integration (positive and negative) while 'ideological narrative' reflects a more ideological attitude towards social and political reality. There are several positive myths about Europe created mainly by EU institutions, about 'green Europe,' 'social Europe' or 'Europe as a normative power' (Lenschow and Sprung 2010: 137). However, myths can be also negative. We share Corbett's negative attitude in the definition because it better reflects the empirical reality of Euro myths within the Czech Republic.

The existence of the Euro myth phenomenon (as we understand them) has been already the subject of interest by several academic publications. However, this topic is only marginally examined in the scientific literature. Among the few, a very interesting contribution is the book entitled *Standards and Their Stories How Quantifying, Classifying and Formalizing Practices Shape Everyday Life* (New York: Cornwell University Press 2009) edited by Martha Lampland and Susan Leigh Star. Another interesting publication is called *Eurocepticism: Party Politics, National Identity and European Integration* (New York: Editions Rodopi B.V. 2004) written by Robert Harmsen and Menno Spiering. The attempts of the European Commission Representation to Great Britain are also worth to be mentioned. Representation is a running webpage focusing on Euro myths discussed in the UK. Dozens of them were listed and explained there. Other relevant sources are mentioned on the list.

Most Euro myths are putting EU in to a negative light and tries in some irritating way to make a fool of the European institution and its bureaucrats. Positive myths about the European Union and its policies are rare in the Czech Republic and thus we can claim that negativity is a common aspect of Euro myths. Because sensitivity myths are of public interest and are a good source of inspiration for media, which are responding to public demand by its Euro myths coverage. Euro myths fit well with the general trend in media tabloidization as we will see later. Another aspect is attractiveness of such myths. They usually touch some areas which are personally, politically or culturally sensitive or have a socially different perception e.g. kids, alcohol, porn, traditional food, local habits etc.

Myths are produced by myth-makers. Stijn Smismans (2010) discussed in his contribution in the role of institutional and individual mythmakers (Smismans 2010: 57). While institutions might develop myths in order to legitimize their functions and provide a purpose and identity for its workers (Akman, Kassim 2010: 113) individuals can create a myth unintentionally by a misunderstanding, or intentionally in order to put the EU into a negative light, to express a political attitude or a demonstrate identity. For example euro sceptic populists in the Czech Republic (e. g. Jana Bobošíková, Petr Mach) use Euro myths for attracting popular attention. This

fact was seen for example during the campaign in the European Parliament elections in 2014 (see picture 1).

Picture 1



An example of using a Euro myth in a campaign for the European Parliament elections held in 2014 by Petr Mach (leader of the Party of liberal citizens). The text on the billboard could be translated as: 'We will turn on the light on Euro-nonsenses.' The symbol of light bulb is chosen to prove the nonsense of EU regulation about the switching of regular to energy efficient light bulbs (Media Guru 2014).

In general we can distinguish the three sources of Euro myths. Firstly, many myths have their origin in what we call 'Gold plating' or wrong transposition of EU law into national law. Secondly, in some cases media (especially tabloids) are the source of Euro myths. They simply search for them or use wrong interpretation, in order to make their news more attractive. And thirdly, some myths were simply created by persons who misunderstood legislative proposals or interpretation of EU law. In the following chapters all three sources are discovered together with some examples of the greatest Euro myths. However, it is necessary first to introduce the general context in which Euro myths occur in the Czech Republic.

2. Preparing the ground for Euro myths

Christopher Flood argues that it is only possible for a myth to appear within an atmosphere of consensus where the message and the reception are mutually supportive (Flood 2002: 43). Due to the large quantity of negative Euro myths within the Czech Republic we should observe two aspects: a negative attitude towards the EU within the Czech society and the environment favourable for the reception of the message.

Czechs are one of the most Euro pessimistic nations in the EU. According to the Eurobarometer (autumn 2013), 44 % of Czech citizens think that they would face a better future outside the EU which is 11 % beyond the European Union average. Only two nations (Cyprus and UK) scored more sceptical than Czech citizens. The picture of the EU is rather negative in the Czech Republic as 36 % of Czech citizens have the EU connected with money wasting, which is beyond the European average of 27 %. Approximately same percentage of citizens connected the EU with bureaucracy where the gap to the average is slightly higher, representing 11% beyond the average. Only 22 % of Czech citizens think their voice counts in the EU, which is the third lowest rank after Italy and Latvia, where 19 % of people think their voice counts (Eurobarometer 2014: 8). Negative attitude towards the EU is rooted in various factors which are not the subject of this study (see for example Pepermans, Verleye 1998, Oorschot 2006)

Regarding the environment favourable for the reception of the message, the Czech Republic has also fulfilled this prediction. Only 26 % of Czech citizens are well informed about the EU (Eurobarometer 2013: 34) and 25 % of Citizens never search for information about the EU. On the other hand, 48 % of Czech citizens trust the written press and even more (55 %) to internet (Eurobarometer 2013: 37). The majority think, that media informs objectively about the EU (67 % TV, 66 % radio, 64 % press and 56 % internet). Situation could be simply described as the majority is not informed well about the EU, they don't understand the EU, and they have a negative attitude towards the EU but trust the media. These preconditions are very favourable to the creation of a myth.

As many theoretics argue mass media plays an essential role in a democratic society (Blumler, Kavanagh 1999, McNair 2007, Davis 2010 etc.). They are the main source of information for the public, they contribute to educate and provide the entertainment for their audience. The media in particular testify to the events with which the consumers may not have their own experience. In this case, beneficiaries are fully dependent on the content and quality of information in this form as presented by the media. They can convince of the benefits or the suitability of certain behaviours. In this context, the British media studies professor, Professor Denis McQuail underlines further the role of media in society. According to him, the media is also a significant source of interpretations of social reality: 'The media is a place where the values of society are constructed, stored and most visibly expressed' (McQuail 2009: 21).

The process of modernization and the emergence of new kinds of media lead to a fragmentation of society (Turow 2009: 6). This creates smaller groups, each of which becomes an individual audience and receives information that is presented to them through the media, which becomes their closest group. For economic reasons the media's content and the form of presenting the information adapts to each type

of audience. For economic profit the media can present events in such a way as to attract the required individual groups (Blumer, Gurevitch 1995: 14). According to this logic the larger the group of consumers, the more popular, economically wealthy and influential is the media.

Among the most profitable form of media in the Czech Republic, the same as in Western Europe belongs to the tabloids. This kind of media is defined as a journalistic model for popular entertainment appealing to a mass audience. It has a strong focus on the weird and bizarre (largely faked), negative news stories of prominent persons of society, their juicy scandals and political conspiracies. Because of their spicy content tabloids enjoy great popularity (Kaid, Holtz-Bacha 2008: 776). With the lack of deeper insight and the proper investigation of the issues, there is no wonder that tabloids give considerable space for creating myths of any information they receive, in our case the events occurred in the European Union.

According to the data (Median 2013) is the best-selling newspaper in Czech Republic is Blesk (daily average sales 1.156 000 issues). Blesk together with the Aha! fully meets the criteria of tabloids. There are several examples where tabloids have created (or participated in creating) a Euro myth with a negative connotation. Moreover, after the myth was busted from the side of the European institution or some involved actors, the media did not pay attention to the remedy of its disinformation. As a result the image of the EU suffered damage and people were left with their own negative feelings about the EU. In the next three chapters we will look at the three sources of Euro myths: tabloid and social media, gold plating and wrong transposition.

3. Press and tabloid media

There were several examples of Euro myths being published in the tabloids. For example the Czech tabloid Aha! published on the 14th September 2012 information, that Rosenberg (Czech porn star) got money from the EU for his pornographic movie *'Unbelievable, while hospitals and schools sometimes have a problem in receiving a small amount of money from the EU for necessary equipment. The retired porn star Robert Rosenberg (37) received money for a documentary about his life full of hard sex in front of the camera.'* (Aha! 2012). This information was noticed by other types of media and continued in sharing this information. Just two days later a Czech news server Parlamentní listy (Parliament letters)¹, which evokes the impression of official institutional medium, shared information entitled *'EU supports porn stars. Brussels is a whorehouse full of bi*ches, politicians say'* (Parlamentní listy 2012). There were 17 members of Parliament quoted in the article. Most of them strongly criticised the EU in its activity of pornography support. Soon, many newspapers shared this in-

formation without verifying its origin. Robert Rosenberg really said that he received money from the EU to make his movie; however, it was in a humorous show for YouTube users.

Daniela Staníková from the EU MEDIA Desk, an agency which supports movie projects with cultural values, publicly denied that Robert Rosenberg received any EU funding for his pornographic movies. Even Robert Rosenberg sent an SMS to the Representation of the European Commission in the Czech Republic that he never received money from the EU (Kombajn 2012). However this information was only of little importance to the media. In this case, unverified, joke information was the source for a Euro myth.

It seems that pornography and sexual issues receives higher attention from the media among other issues which gains media attention. In March 2013, 6 months after the media wrote about the EU's support to the pornographic movie industry, they informed us that that 'The EU is going to ban pornography.' The Czech front news server iDNES.cz informed correctly that this is only a warning from free-speech activists who warns us that Brussels would like to secretly ban pornography. It also correctly mentioned that the issue is about a non-official report which is not part of the legislative system. However, the Czech leading daily tabloid Blesk changed the context of the information. Under the title: 'European Union Censorship: Brussels wants a pornography ban!' It informs us that Brussels and the members of the European Parliament could interfere into our bedrooms because Brussels wants to ban pornography. However, this is not liked by free-speech activists who tried to change the situation. It also informs us that documents about the elimination of gender stereotypes, which were going to be discussed in the European Parliament the next day, this was a trap which contained hidden texts which could ban pornography in the next few years. In the end Blesk mentions that this document will be not part of legislation, however with putting emphasis on the conclusions made by critics which warns that voting could lead to a control of internet within all member states (Blesk 2013).

And how this myth was crated? A Dutch European Member of Parliament Kartika Tamara Liotard (European United Left-Nordic Green Left) submitted in the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality the proposal for Report, which among others contended a reference to the resolution which calls for '*a ban on all forms of pornography in the media and on the advertising of sex tourism.*' (European Parliament 2012). This attracted the attention of free-speech activists. Lars Christian Engström, a Swedish Member of the European Parliament stressed that in a previous resolution it was not clear what the term 'media' means. Engström and other activist were afraid that despite approval of this report it is not a legislative instrument; it could be later used by the European institutions for further legislative proposals, as

they often do. The non-specific use of term 'media' could be interpreted as a ban of internet pornography which is considered to be part of freedom of speech. Also a reference in article 17 to the resolution of the 16th of September 1997 on the discrimination against women in advertising, which called for a ban on all forms of pornography in the media and on the advertising of sex tourism was controversial, because this resolution calls for statutory measures to prevent any form of pornography in the media. Again without specification which media is concerned (Engström 2013, European Parliament 2012).

Of course a reference within a proposal for a non-legislative report could not ban pornography within the EU. Due to its vague definitions and mistakes this proposal was from the early beginning destined to changes within the parliamentary committee. Moreover, this is one of many reasons why committees exist. A real chance that some vague document with such great impact will be approved in the form of regulation or directive is minimal and still there are many ways how to avoid its approval. Christian Engström made a good job when trying to prevent further problems at the very early stages. The media coverage and its interpretation of the issue is a different issue.

The average number of daily sales of tabloids suggests that any information about European issues could have an important influence on public opinion towards this institution. Besides the press, 46 % of Czech people are relying on information about the EU provided by television (Eurobarometer 2013: 10). The most watched television station in the Czech Republic is the commercial television station Nova TV with an average daily share of viewers at 24.5 % during the period from 17. 6. to 23. 6. 2013 (ATO 2013). However, the main evening news on this TV station meets the criteria of tabloid broadcasting (Kelly 2004: 35). The information is presented in an attractive way when the content is overshadowed by the entertainment frame of the news. There is also no serious analysis of the actual issues during this program.

Sometimes wrong translation could be the origin of a Euro myth as is in the case of bent bananas and curved cucumbers. It is a long-standing, stereotypical myth used by Euro sceptics in their campaigns against EU bureaucracy, and there are still people who believe in it. Some media wrongly informed that the EU banned the sale of bent bananas and curved cucumbers or misinterpreted the form of the regulation. For example the agency MEDIAFAX quoted Patrik Nacher; the author of the popular survey about 'most absurd regulations,' that the idea of regulating the look of bananas has won this competition with one third of all votes (Mediafax 2013). It is important to know, that Patrik Nacher is the owner of many servers who shares information included in this survey, where people were supposed to choose the most absurd regulation. However, there many myths in this survey — A subsidy because we do not have a sea, Subsidy to receive subsidy, Norms for the single size of Circus tents etc. or many of them are published out of context and thus misleading.

If we look at the concerned Commission Regulation (EC) No 2257/94 of the 16th of September 1994 laying down the quality standards for bananas which took effect on the 1st of January 1995, we can really find the specification how bananas should look in order to sort them into categories according to their quality. The regulation sets out that in Class I bananas only slight defects are permitted, the shape with a minimum size (with tolerances and exceptions) of 14 cm and a grade of 27 mm (Regulation No 2257/94: 5). However, nothing is mentioned that shorter or thinner bananas should be destroyed or not allowed to be marketed. They simply belong to a different category of quality. The origin of this Euro myth could rest in the misleading interpretation of this regulation supported by a wrong translation of the term 'grade.' In agricultural terminology grade refers to 'thickness,' but in the Czech language it is commonly commutable with the different word 'stupeň' (degree) which very often refers to angle. Then only bananas with the angle of 2.7 cm are marketable.

This myth was discussed mainly in 2003 and 2005 and is constantly resurrected. It is interesting to note, that the Czech Republic had already transposed this regulation without media or public attention in 1999 and it is not even a new norm. The Czech Republic has had norms regarding bananas since 1983 as well as for other fruits or vegetable (iDNES 2003).

Another interesting case is about toys for pigs. On the 9th of May 2012, the Day of Europe, many servers' headlines informed: 'Pigs must have toys; prices of pork will increase, not joking' (Parlamentní listy 2012b). According to the newspaper Parlamentní listy the new EU directive sets the rule that pigs must have toys in their sheds. After introducing this information many politicians are quoted. For example senator Petr Pakosta (former Civic Democrat and later non-affiliated) called for locking EU bureaucrats into the sheds instead of pigs and senator Jaroslav Doubrava called the authors 'total idiots' (Parlamentní listy 2012b). Another quotation is by the former European Parliament Member, a strong Eurosceptic and populist sovereignty fighter Jana Bobošíková. She said: *'If some farmers have interest to tie a pink bow around pig's necks and buy them Barbie dolls it is only their problem. But it should not be the order of the European Union'* (Parlamentní listy 2012b). The above interpretation is very misleading and guides the reader to the impression that farmers must go to toy stores and by regular toys for their pigs. If we look at the mentioned directive we can simply realise that the reality is different.

The Concerned Council Directive 91/630/EEC of the 19th of November 1991 laying down the minimum standards of the protection of pigs, states that under general conditions: *'In addition to the measures normally taken to prevent tail-biting and other vices and in order to enable them to satisfy their behavioural needs, all pigs, taking into account environment and stocking density, must be able to obtain straw or any other suitable material or object.'* (Directive 91/630/EEC). We can observe that the expression 'Straw or any other suitable material or objects' leaves some space for fantasy

and imagination. Later it was exactly this part that developed in order to increase the vague definition of what suitable materials or objects could be. The updated Council Directive 2008/120/EC of the 18th of December 2008 laying down the minimum standards for the protection of pigs under its general conditions (paragraph 4) states that *'pigs must have permanent access to a sufficient quantity of material to enable proper investigation and manipulation activities, such as straw, hay, wood, sawdust, mushroom compost, peat or a mixture of such, which do not compromise the health of the animals'* (Directive 2008/120/EC). The words 'Proper investigation' and 'manipulation' are particularly important. In the English version there is no doubt what materials and activities are referred to, however the Czech translation could be a bit complicated. In the Czech translation of this directive both the mentioned words are missing and are supplemented by the phrase 'etological activities' which refers to a range of behavioural pig activities (Compare Directive 2008/120/EC in the Czech and English versions).

It is possible that here lies the cornerstone of the myth. Many laic people do not know what 'etological activities' refers to. In this case it is not surprising that a simplification was made. For example Eva Seifertová in her article for Agroweb simplified these materials as 'toys,' then later correctly refers to its core (Seifertová 2007). It is thus possible that even other journalist made a simplification. Despite some sources may rest in the wrong translation, the origin of this myth is few years older than the discussion in the Czech Republic. In 2003 CNN revealed that a fine of £ 2500 for farmers who do not comply with new directive about pig protection, and do not provide toys for pigs is 'utter Eurosceptic rubbish' (CNN 2003). The U.K. Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs also partly contributed to the myth. Its representatives stated that the above mentioned toys and materials could be normal toys such as balls which might attract the attention of pigs as well and to serve a purpose (CNS News 2008). Even when there is no single mention about plastic toys, balls etc. since then the media and their readers imagine toys for children. This myth is a classical evergreen and from time to time rises again. For the last time in Lithuania in February 2013, almost nine years after their EU accession (Pig Progress 2013, The Baltic Times 2013).

Czech media in some cases follow British newspapers and simply copy or re-edit their Eurosceptic news, without verifying the validity. In this way myths are spreading through countries. Some myths were even present in British society for a longer time (The curved bananas and the toys for pig's myths) before they were discussed in the Czech media. This situation is caused mainly by the legislative process. Myths were first discussed in the stage of legislative proposal and subsequently received attention again when proposals were approved or entered into force. The following table shows five myths which received attention in both countries. According to the dates it could be realised that the British sources are original. It must be noted, that

sources might not be linked directly, because in the period between the publishing of the British and Czech sources there is sometimes a large time gap where more British news servers informed about the myth.

Czech source			British source		
Date	Source	Title	Date	Source	Title
21. 5. 2008	Parlamentní listy	'Straight cucumbers and curved bananas is really ordered by the EU'	12. 6. 2002	The Telegraph	'Yes, we can have curved bananas, judges decide'
10. 4. 2012	Týden.cz	'Brussels wants to ban hairdressers from wearing rings and heels'	10. 4. 2012	Sun+	'New EU rules to ban hairdressers from wearing rings and heels'
10. 3. 2013	Blesk	'EU censorship: Brussels wants porn ban!'	8. 3. 2013	Express	'Now EU wants to regulate the internet and ban pornography'
9. 5. 2012	Parlamentní listy	'Pigs must have toys, pork prices will rise. Not joking.'	29. 1. 2003	BBC News	'Farmers must keep pigs happy'
10. 5. 2013	AC24.cz	'European Commission criminalizes almost all seeds and plants without government registration'	1. 5. 2013	Permaculture	'New EU law that could ban our seeds'

It seems that there are more Euro myths in the UK than in the Czech Republic because the UK has been an EU member since 1973 and Euro myths have had more time to develop. Despite some myths which are shared through the EU member states regardless of state borders, many of them are country specific, touching nationally sensitive topics. For example in 2007 BBC news had the chosen eight best Euro myths (BBC 2007). Seven of them touch only on the British sensitiveness. There exist at least three examples. First, that Brussels is forcing Britain to give up its imperial measurements such as ounces, pounds, miles, acres and others. In response to this 'Brussels dictate' five traders submitted a case to the High Court. This myth is partly based on a rational ground. During its accession period Great Britain committed itself in the 1972 White Paper to the gradual adoption of the metric system. However, this formal obligation has been never enforced by the European Commission. In the second example the myth has spread out from the television comedy 'Yes Minister' where Jim Hacker became Prime Minister after successfully repelling the threat of renaming the British sausage as an 'Emulsified high-fat offal tube'. Later this myth spread out and many people were confused. The third good example is about the

breeds of dogs. People complained about the controversial EU convention in 2002, which intended to ban about 100 breeds, including corgis, bulldogs, cocker spaniels, and many more Queens' dog forms. In reality there was no such EU convention, but the Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals was created by the Council of Europe. Moreover, The UK is not a signatory part of the convention (BBC 2007).

There are many more examples of British Euro myths. In short: the EU wants to purge the Queen from our passports (Daily Mail 2007), False alarm over 999 calls (Sunday Express 2007), EU may force UK to give criminals the vote (Birmingham Post 2006), Brussels plot to wipe Britain off the map (The Express on Sunday, 2006), Bombay mix to be renamed Mumbai mix (The Sun 2006), Light ale gets a name change (Daily Mail 2005), EU halting British move to ban bull bars (The Independent 2005), Made in Britain label to be scrapped (Evening Standard, 2004), Bureaucrats declare Britain is 'not an island' (The Guardian 2003), Brussels to tax every phone line £30 (Financial Mail on Sunday 2000), British cheese faces extinction (PA News 1999), Double decker buses to be banned (The Daily Telegraph 1998), British hallmark for silver and gold to be replaced (1993), and many more. The blog of the Representation of the European Commission in the United Kingdom is listing every year several new Euro myths (ECUK 2013).

4. Social media

About 36 % of Czech people are searching for information about the EU on the internet. Most of them are young people in the age range of between 15 and 24 who spend significant time on social networks (Eurobarometer 2013: 10). Because of the specific target group DG COMM within the European Commission put emphasis on increasing information awareness on social networks where myths are also present. As of the 29th of October 2012, there were 3.79 million Facebook users in the Czech Republic. In the top 10 political institutions the European Parliament has only scored 9289 fans, right after them are the Eurosceptic Party of Free Citizens with 9 922 fans (Socialbakers.com 2013). Other social networks are in comparison to Facebook irrelevant. For example the number of Twitter users within the Czech Republic is estimated to be 79,000, almost 50 times less than Facebook users (Ihned 2012). What does a typical Facebook Euro myth look like? Facebook enables the spread of Euro myths by sharing posts or liking them.

For example in recent years users blindly reposted: *Pythagoras' theorem – 24 words; Lord's Prayer – 66 words; Archimedes' Principle – 67 words; 10 Commandments – 179 words; Gettysburg address – 286 words; US Declaration of Independence – 1,300 words; US Constitution with all 27 Amendments – 7,818 words; EU regulations on the sale of cabbage – 26,911 words*. Comments which followed do not need any clarification.

Almost everyone complained about dully bureaucrats and an evil empire or continued to share this post without verifying its correctness. If we look at the eur-lex database, there were several legal acts concerning cabbages in the EU, most of them abolishing the countervailing charge on cabbages originating in various countries or setting up the reference of prices. Only a few within EU history dealt with the sale of cabbages. For example the Commission Regulation (EC) No 634/2006 of the 25th of April, laying down the marketing standard applicable to headed cabbages and amending the Regulation (EEC) Nr. 1591/87 consists of 1922 words, out of these words, 1332 words are Annexes where individual species of cabbages are mentioned as well as definitions of the quality standards (Commission Regulation No. 634/2006). It is a myth, which is much older than the European Union itself.

The above myth is very well documented by Barbara Mikkelson (2012) who goes to its early origins in 1940s when the myth was first orally reported. B. Mikkelson claims that the great nations of the USA, France and Britain had this myth about various products including duck eggs, shell eggs and fresh fruits. She also notes that it is interesting that for more than 70 years of its existence, the reference to the 26,911 words is almost constant however, it was the product of someone's fertile imagination (Mikkelson 2012). She briefly describes the use of this myth in connection to other products. Most probably the first use of this myth in connection within the European Community was mentioned in the 1987 Book *Pearls of Wisdom: A book of Aphorisms* where they connected with import of caramels and caramel products (Mikkelson 2012). Since then the myth lives its own life and social networks helped to spread it.

Myths are present also in e-mails which are forwarded among people. In February 2013 people started to receive chain e-mails in Slovakian with the message that the EU orders the privatization of water sources. Depressed users could have read the call for preventing the EU to privatize 'all sources of drinking water in all member states.' The message also contained information that Portugal had already submitted their rights and the price of water was increased there by 400 %. This E-mail also contained mystifying information that after privatization water would become an export commodity which quality could not be kept high. This call urged users to 'vote' against water privatization and provided link redirected them to webpages for the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) — *Water is a Human Right Campaign*.

The privatization of water systems and resources is in the full competence of member states, respectively regions or towns. The EU has no right to order the privatization of water resources. The EU only recommended to some indebted countries to consider the privatization of some parts of their water delivery services. Indebted Portugal really did privatize some waterlines, but several years ago. This was also the example of the small city Pacos de Ferreira, where water prices have really increased in last several years by 400 %. As we can see above the myth is fully out of context

and is manipulating with data. The small town is represented as Portugal and the recommendation to privatize is presented as *fait accompli* order by the EU. Regarding this myth, there is also another interesting aspect.

The above myth urges people to 'vote' against water privatization and is redirecting people to the ECI. However, The ECI is a public initiative, based on setting up agendas which are backed by more than one million signatures from at least seven member states. If such a number of signatures is reached the European Commission is obligated to deal with the concerned issue which is the subject of the ECI and is within the legal competences of the European Commission. If we leave aside the fact, that signing the ECI is not a 'vote,' but just regular signature, as in the case of this Euro myth. Public expression has been changed from a positive expression in support of something to a negative meaning (a petition) in order to stop a certain action.

We do not know who is behind the misinterpreting of e-mails, however we can track and estimate how the myth was created. In 2013 there entered into force a new directive on the ward of concession contracts (Directive 2011/897). There is no single word about water privatization and the directive only stated that if some towns are giving concession contracts to private subjects, these subjects must fulfil some conditions of transparency. So it is up to towns whether they will provide services by themselves or choose external contracts (Directive 2011/897). The link between this directive and the water resources privatization was created most probably in an interview with Heide Rühle, a Green European Parliament member. In the interview she stated that: *'The concession policy does not make it directly, does not open the door directly to the privatization of water, it makes it through the back door. So it opens, millimetre by millimetre, the possibility that private companies can enter the market, so that the market is opened up and that there is private access to the market.'* (Das Erste 2012). The media in this case played again an important role and supported her claim with expressions from random citizens who said, that they always drunk water before and now they will be prevented from drinking water from public wells.

As we could see social media and electronic communication might also be the source of myths of whatever interests they represent. In the case of the water privatisation information, it is exaggerated and the reader is inferred by suspiciousness towards the intentions of the European Commission.

5. Gold plating and wrong transposition

One of the sources of Euro myths which is hidden from media attention is gold plating, which refers to the EU secondary law transposition. It is a practice of national bodies when exceeding the terms and requirements during implementation of

EU law into national law. During this process some refinements and add-ons may occur (such as technical requirements, labelling obligations, deadlines, authorisation procedures and other administrative requirements (European Commission 2009)). This practice may result in extra costs for citizens and market operators or create a competitive disadvantage with other countries. It is important to note that gold plating is undesired and the European Commission is trying to intensively fight gold plating through its agenda of deregulation which were adopted at the Lisbon Summit in 2000.

The Cabinet Office Transposition Guide in the UK defines that gold plating occurs *'when implementation goes beyond the minimum necessary to comply with a directive'* (Cabinet Office 2005: 18). There are four following specification by what means this could happen. First, by extending the scope, adding in some way to the substantive requirement, or substituting wider UK legal terms for those used in the directive; or second, by not taking full advantage of any derogations which keep requirements to a minimum (e.g. for certain scales of operation, or specific activities); or third, by providing sanctions, enforcement mechanisms and matters such as burden of proof which go beyond the maximum needed (e.g. as a result of picking up the existing criminal sanctions in that area); or fourth, by implementing early, before the date given in the directive (Cabinet Office 2005: 18). Some authors add to previous cases also the possibility of retaining pre-existing standards where they are higher than those required by EU law (Miller 2011: 2).

The scope of gold plating may vary from state to state. For example in Great Britain, analysis showed that in 85 % of cases no burdens in excess of the EU requirements had been placed on UK business as result of gold-plating and in 14 % of cases there was some retention of existing higher UK standards (DBIS 2013: 6). According to the European Commission the situation in the Czech Republic worse. From 25 to 33 % of transposed directives are gold-plated (Czech Business Today 2012).

There are several examples of gold plating which resulted in EU criticism despite the mistake made by the wrong transposition. One day Czech customers were surprised by a strange situation when markets were selling only packed donuts. It was very strange and unpopular: nobody wanted donuts smothered in a plastic cover and people started to complain. Customers were told that the reason why they cannot get fresh donuts is Bill no. 347/2002 (Collection of Laws), issued by the Ministry of Health, which was implementing the Council Directive 93/43/EEC of the 14th of June 1993 on the hygiene of foodstuffs (Council Directive 93/43/EEC). First, barmy Brussels bureaucrats were blamed for their incompetence, however some knowledgeable citizens realised that maybe the problem is somewhere else. The above mentioned directive only required to adopt measures which will increase the hygienic standards of bakeries. No single word is mentioned about the packaging of donuts there, and thus it was common that even in other EU countries donuts were sold

unpacked. So why do Czechs still have packed donuts even two years before entry to the European Union? After blaming Brussels the Czech Health Minister Ms. Marie Součková faced criticism for the wrong content of Bill nr. 347/2002. She tried to scale down criticism by claiming that Bill nr. 347/2002 was just a redraft of an older Bill nr. 295/1997 made by a previous political leadership and that the changes were only minimal. In reality, if we compare both Bills, the changes are large especially regarding the issue of packaging. In this case the aim of the directive was completely misunderstood. The main aim was to increase the hygienic standard of bakeries and to give customers the opportunity to find in shops and bakeries donuts which were not previously touched by hands of the other customers.

Another example of transposition where gold plating resulted in additional costs for companies is the case from 2001. The Ministry of Health under the leadership of Bohumil Fischer passed a Bill which required the replacement of withers faucets with touchless automatic faucets in restaurants. The reason for the replacement was supposedly again Council Directive 93/43/EEC on hygiene of foodstuffs (Council Directive 93/43/EEC). There is nothing written in this directive about touchless automatic faucets. Instead the Directive mentioned basic hygienic rules: Lavatories must not lead directly into rooms in which food is handled; washbasins for cleaning hands must be provided with hot and cold running water, materials for cleaning hands and for hygienic drying (Council Directive 93/43/EEC). In April 2004 the Ministry quietly passed a new Bill Nr. 137/2004 where the regulation is much softer than in the previous version. However, it was too late. In both cases the Bills resulted in additional costs. In the first case, markets with bakeries faced the additional burden of plastic covers and packing stuff. In the second case some responsible restaurants invested money in automatic touchless faucets.

There are many more cases of gold-plating which are hidden from the public or media. For example on the Expert Round Table Discussion about the Resurrection of Czech Industry an Aspen Think-Tank Director and National Economic Committee of Government member Radek Špicar mentioned an example of wrong transposition of the Directive about bugs. According to this directive companies are required to be protected against 250 species of pests and bugs. The problem is that according to Špicar half of the bugs live only in Southern Italy and second half somewhere in Norway (Špicar 2013). Even when this information might be slightly lofty, this example shows that sometimes in-depth implementation may be harmful.

The question is how to fight gold plating and thus prevent the rise of new Euro myths? The answer could differ depending on the phase. The best way is the prevention of gold plating at the EU level in the working groups, where EU legislation is created. States and its bodies could promote forms of regulation which are proven to be the most effective. However, as demonstrated above, gold-plating is also a matter of transposition. The transposition of EU legislations are prepared by the Ministries

in charge of transposition and are thus directly in touch the issues of public administration. The technical nature of EU regulation requires expert knowledge which could be problem. Public administration in the Czech Republic still lacks a Civil Servant Act and many experienced bureaucrats are fired for political reasons resulting in the outflow of knowledge. An interesting example could be found directly in the Ministry of Interior, which is in charge of the preparation of the Civil Servant Act. At the Department of Structural funds with 55 employees, every year more than 30 % of personal are changed. Since 2009, only 10 people are still working there four years later and personal changes are affecting 81 % of employees. Servants are fired or made redundant, and after a particular reorganization (there have been 25 of them in the last 30 months) even more servants are employed in the same job (Rekonstrukce státu 2013). Another problem is the comparatively low wages in the public sector which is making civil servants prone to corruption or leaving for the private sector (Rekonstrukce státu 2013). Young people without experience are finding jobs at ministries just to get some experience and after gaining it continue to the private sector. Well working public administration based on expert knowledge can solve the issue of gold plating to large extent in the first phase and the adoption of a Civil Servant Act (in the form demanded by the European Commission), could improve the situation.

Another solution is *ex ante* and *ex post* evaluation based on the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA). A RIA to all legislative drafts submitted to the government has been in force in the Czech Republic since November 2007. Under the RIA is the drafting authority obliged to evaluate all impacts according to the RIA methodology. Thus positive and negative effects of the proposed legislation are examined including the determination and source of the administrative burden on businesses and the calculation of the planned costs for the performance of public administration (MICR 2010). In the Czech Republic EC legislation is subject to only a 'small RIA' which means the simplified approach. It does not evaluate the 'zero option' vs. 'proposed regulation,' but clarifies the minimal level of harmonization; appropriate was of the implementation and impacts of individual alternatives for implementation. Where national rules are stricter than regulation requires, special attention should be paid for reasoning (Komise pro hodnocení dopadů regulace 2012: 19).

Professional public administration using expert knowledge and RIA could well contribute to prevention of gold plating and decrease the number of gold plated regulations to a minimum. The rest could be highlighted by the media and market operators. However, it seems that the media plays in different way.

Conclusion

In accordance with Flood's prediction the Eurosceptic environment in the Czech Republic, the passive approach of Czech citizens and a low level of information about the EU together with the high trust in media objectivity created an atmosphere of consensus where the message and the reception are mutually supportive for Euro myths (Flood 2002: 43). There are several features that Euro myths within the Czech Republic share and what can distinguish them from classical myths.

First, they are all critical towards EU policies and institutions, putting the EU into a negative light. Due to the high level of Euro scepticism rooted within Czech society myths help to communicate or express community anxiety (Mørk 2011: 48) or simply demonstrate the attitude of individuals or social groups towards the EU and its policies.

The second difference is that contrary to some positive myths of 'Social Europe' or 'Green Europe' (Lenschow and Sprung 2010: 137) they are less complex in nature and are usually based on a single issue (bananas, cabbage sale regulation, and water privatization etc.). Of course there are some negative myths which are more complex nature like 'bureaucratic EU,' 'Sovereignty loss' which are commonly recognized, but the majority of Czech Euro myths are single issues which are in line and sometimes even support more complex myths. Andrea Lenschow and Carina Sprung quote Della Sala (2010) 'that the lack of the communal basis which is often present in nation states are in the form of national values based on a common history requires the EU to tell stories more according to the functional lines' (Lenschow, Sprung 2010: 136). 'They might be simply based on policy initiatives and abilities' (Della Sala 2008). Policy initiatives or abilities are a visible source of Euro myths which are reflecting their functional basis. It could be said that this way of communication mirrors the creation of Euro myths and explains why there is no EU constitutional myth based on shared values.

This study presented the three main sources of Euro myths in the Czech Republic: wrong national transposition resulting in 'gold plating,' (social) media tabloidization and the misunderstanding of legislative proposals. In all three cases the tabloid media plays an important role as the carrier of myth information to a broader audience. They help to spread Euro myths among citizens and to satisfy their demand for tabloid information which puts the EU in the negative light. The media also helps to spread Euro myths through national boundaries as the connection between Czech and British media shows. However, some myths are necessarily national touching, and national sensitive issues directly connected with nationality. Before blaming Brussels bureaucrats, the media should first focus on the real requirements under the secondary law and compare it with the national transposition. When re-taking

news from the generally Euro pessimistic British sources they should verify the facts, which might be already slightly changed in negative way.

European regulation (especially of a technical nature) is mostly hard to understand. It provides space for gold-plating and the subsequent additional burden for the market operators. Avoiding gold plating requires expert knowledge and thus a well working public administration. In the case of the Czech Republic, the adoption of a Civil Servants Act and a Regulatory Impact Assessment is the best way forward.

Note

¹ In June 2011 there were 50–80 thousand daily visitors of the Parlamentní listy which counts for 618 thousand real users (Parlamentní listy 2011), compared to 10,5 million inhabitants living in the Czech Republic.

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