

Fiala, Petr:

*Evropský mezičás.*

*Nové otázky evropské integrace.*

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Reviewed by Pavel Šaradín

So far in the Czech literature of political science such a book has been missing in which the author would survey the discussions, issues and attitudes relating to topical problems of European integration. Naturally, I don't mean a work dealing with the history, institutions or policies of countries in the European Union, but an in-depth study aiming at incorporating the development of this international organization in the last few years into a particular framework of interpretation, starting from 'the confrontation of normative ideas with empirically acquired data on the functioning of political structures and processes' (pp. 13) This is the point of departure for the research conducted by Petr Fiala. The project is comprised of three parts, each consisting of several chapters. The first part is called *New and old Europe*, the second *European values*, and the third, from my point of view most vital and essential, is named *Democracy and European integration*.

Fiala believes that the changes taking place after the expansion of the EU in 2004 are too fast, inconsiderate, often based on unreal premises or are a fabrication by the European elites. This

speed can do a good deal of harm to European integration, which the author regards as an act of unique value. People do not understand it, do not sufficiently absorb the changes and can become estranged from the dynamics of intensified cooperation and thereby from the entire process of integration. The recent changes or attempts at change are discussed in the first part of the book.

In the second part Petr Fiala analyzes European values and their order and presents some conceptions of democracy, manifestations of contemporary democracy and calls the reader's attention to the decreasing transparency of democratic processes. One of its manifestations is the growing rate of regulation, which increases the dependence of citizens on bureaucratic structures, such as the European Union. The Brussels bureaucracy of course arouses criticism from various sides but it should always be in harmony with political culture. The author, for instance, denounces the attacks comparing the European Union to totalitarian regimes and their mechanisms, which are rather frequent in Czech conservative-rightist discourse. Fiala writes: 'I regard the claims of

some radical Euro-skeptics about the new European totality to be equally dangerous as the opinions of radical Euro-optimists believing that the European structure will surpass and improve the deficiencies of a national state.' He is quite correct when in the detailed examination of the religious phenomenon in Europe he refers to the concept that in the preamble to the Constitution led to the omission of any mention of Christian roots: 'We are witnesses to a complete resignation to acceptance of our religious tradition and the key formative elements of contemporary European culture,' the author writes. (pp. 93)

In the third part, Petr Fiala analyses the essential aspects of the European constitutional contract and rejects it for several reasons. His main argument, with which the reader of the book was already acquainted in the first part of the book, is based on the role of the national state (in the non-nationalistic conception), a sort of basic constitutional framework of the 'people.' The European Union is not a state; it is only a political system, so that it is not possible to speak of the existence of a European people. From this perspective he proceeds to the next argument: 'On the European political level, in a certain sense, an effective system of decision-making has developed, com-

posed of a network of experts and committees, which enables pushing through of some national, regional and social interests and which is marked by a bureaucratic character as well as flexibility and lack of formality. This, however, makes political responsibility more difficult.' (pp. 109)

In this respect not even the strengthening of the powers of the European Parliament can change anything in this democratic deficiency because the only thing that can be influenced by European, i.e., second-order elections, is the Parliament's composition but not the concrete policy or the European government which would enforce a particular policy. The European Parliament lacks democratic control. Thus the book is a systematic defense of the role of the national state as an institution, which alone can secure political responsibility and democratic control.

Fiala's book is of great importance for the Czech public because it tries to call attention to the issues that remain unanswered. Even though we need not agree with the author in everything, e.g. in the comparison of the danger of radical Euro-skeptics and radical Euro-optimists, it is very useful to look at the European scene of recent years through Fiala's interpretations.