

Finality of the European Integration Process: Current Debate in the Czech Republic

Angelika Gergelová

Abstract: *The paper focuses on the current Czech political debate on the finality of the European integration process, the so-called finalité politique of the EU. The aim of the paper is to identify the main actors of the debate and to look at their arguments from the perspective of liberal intergovernmentalism represented by Andrew Moravcsik. The analysis deals with the two main issues: the future of the European integration/the constitutional settlement of the EU and the democratic legitimacy of the Union/the question of democratic deficit. The author presents the arguments of both Europhiles and Eurosceptics and proposes a liberal-intergovernmentalist alternative. An emerging group of pragmatists/realist, as distinct from the above-mentioned prevailing approaches, deserves more attention in the future. The paper is a basis for further research, which should bring more concrete results concerning the nature of the discourse, key actors, their arguments and opinion-formation in the Czech Republic.*

Keywords: *Finalité politique, liberal intergovernmentalism, Europhiles, Eurosceptics, constitutional settlement, democratic legitimacy.*

Introduction

The finality of the European integration process, more precisely *finalité politique* of the European Union, has been lately discussed with growing intensity. It has become the centre of attention, especially in the context of the latest constitutional project (Laeken Declaration, Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe, a reflection period and Plan D) and, most recently, in connection with the Lisbon Treaty.

The goal of the paper is to identify the main actors who discourse the finality of the European integration process and to show their approaches with the reference to the key issues discussed in the debate: the constitutional settlement of the EU and the democratic legitimacy of the EU.

The theoretical framework is based on liberal intergovernementalism represented by Andrew Moravcsik, a major proponent of this concept. He has analyzed the whole European integration process from its beginning in the 1950s to our days. Following his theory, we can ask a few provocative questions, such as: Does the EU really suffer from democratic deficit or is it just a perceived problem? When discussing finalité politique of the EU, should we promote further integration, aiming at the creation of a federal European state? Or, on the contrary, has the EU already gone too far in its political integration? What kind of answers can be most frequently heard in the Czech Republic? The application of the whole Moravcsik's theory to the Czech environment is beyond the scope of this paper, but we will focus on its certain aspects.

The hypotheses, which are to be verified partially by the paper and more thoroughly during the following research, are as follows:

- The Czech debate on the finality of the EU is limited to general statements, usually not founded on well-reasoned argumentation.
- Ideological conception prevails in the discourse; the positions of the main political actors are not in accordance with liberal intergovernmentalism.

Further integration: a must or a threat to state sovereignty?

The most widespread opinion among both the European elites and the public says that the EU is in deep crisis for it is not clear where it goes or what its main goal is. Some suggest that it needs a new boost in a form of a grand project, while others warn that it has already gone too far and has thus endangered the sovereignty of its constituents, i.e. the Member States. Moravcsik explains that none of these positions reflects reality, for what we can see now is a stable European Constitutional settlement, regardless of whether or not the constitutional treaty and the Lisbon Treaty enter in force (Moravcsik 2008a).

If we follow the Czech debate concerning the EU evolution, we can clearly distinguish the two major positions (those most frequently presented to the public): on the one hand, there are Europhiles supporting further political integration because it is considered to be good in itself; on the other hand, a group of Eurosceptics has an impression that nation-states have given up too much of their sovereignty in favor of supranational bureaucratic institutions.¹ Following the pace of liberal intergovernmentalism, we must suggest that a realist view is often missing. Member States, being the main agents of the European integration, have deliberately decided on delegation or pooling of sovereignty to supranational bodies when they considered it useful and beneficial for them (for detailed explanation see Moravcsik 1998).

When analyzing the Euro-optimist or Europhile approaches, typical of most of the members of the three biggest parliamentary parties in the Czech Republic (social democrats,

Christian democrats and the Green Party) as well as some scholars, students of European studies, philosophers and other public persons, we find out that they prefer stronger and deeper integration with almost no reservations to the European federation as a potential endpoint. They support the conventional wisdom claiming that the EU needs a new impetus. Otherwise the whole project is endangered and might even collapse. The proponents of this opinion favor further transfer of state sovereignty to supranational agents, who should play more important roles. Instead of weakening individual Member States, this would enable them to design the future settlement of Europe more consistent with pan-European values and identity. Shall we adopt this position we may be frustrated by the collapse of the constitutional project or by the non-ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. From this perspective, these documents are regarded as vital symbolic steps despite their conservative content and the modest changes they introduce.

Since liberal intergovernmentalism gives primacy to economic and interest-driven causes of European integration over ideological or geopolitical ones, the proponents of this theory prefer pragmatic results to symbolic rhetoric. Furthermore, they consider excessive emphasis on symbols, popular engagement or politicization when drafting treaty amendments to be the primary reason of their failure. Thus, adopting a more pragmatic view in accordance with Moravcsik's argumentation, we suggest that the EU Member States cooperate on the European level whenever they find it useful, beneficial and effective (which they do in many cases). Bearing this in mind, there is no need to fear that the EU will break apart without a new boost.

Euro-skeptics view the latest developments in the EU from a completely different perspective. Václav Klaus, the Czech president can serve as the example of this approach. On the one hand, his opinion is often considered to represent broad consensus within the Czech Republic, which is actually not the case. On the other hand, a lot of people, both politicians and academics, share his views on the EU.

Václav Klaus and some other representatives of the right-wing conservative political movement, namely the members of the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and Libertas.cz, admit that the country has had no alternative to membership in the EU. Nevertheless this is the only positive acknowledgement with respect to the Union we can hear from them these days. Focusing on the current debates, they have criticized the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe and the Lisbon Treaty. Their critique is primarily based on the protection of state sovereignty, which they regard as a vital interest of the Czech Republic as an independent state. Both the constitution and the Treaty of Lisbon endanger state sovereignty by transferring it to supranational bureaucratic institutions. The result is an emerging European superstate run by unaccountable officials based in Brussels, which leads to the loss of independence and distinct identity of individual Member States. Moreover, should the Lisbon Treaty enter in force, the EU would become a federal-type state.²

The concept of state sovereignty deserves special attention. Shall we claim that it is challenged by the evolution of European *acquis*, we must what this sovereignty is. Let's examine a complex reality of today's global system, i.e. international relations in terms of both economic and political cooperation/integration/interdependence. After having done so, we can conclude that state sovereignty cannot be viewed in the same terms as it was

after the creation of modern nation states. This concept has changed. Sovereignty no longer means unchallenged independence, self-reliance or unquestioned decision-making authority (a small European state such as the Czech Republic cannot seriously consider meeting these criteria). If we deliberately decide to delegate or pool some of our sovereignty to supranational or intergovernmental bodies, which pass decisions on the principle of majority (search for consent is much more frequent in real decision-making), we do not lose it. We share it with the others by participating in negotiation or bargaining and we shape the final solution. Anyone who is afraid of the European superstate should examine substantial administrative, legal, fiscal or coercive constraints applied to the EU in comparison with any of its constituent members (Moravcsik 1998).

Democratic deficit: a real or a perceived problem?

When discussing the democratic deficit of the EU, Europhiles and Eurosceptics are in agreement. It is widely considered that the EU is, for some reasons, lacking democratic legitimacy. This problem has been one of the major concerns of the European discourse in the last decade, especially in connection with the above-mentioned constitutional/law amendment project. The Czech Republic is not an exception. The EU democratic deficit is often mentioned and discussed by media; we can read newspaper pieces, political statements as well as academic articles or conference papers to this issue. What is the usual conclusion? The existence of the democratic deficit is hardly ever challenged; on the contrary, it is considered as a real problem facing the EU.

If we adopt liberal intergovernmentalist view, we come to a fundamentally different conclusion: the EU democratic deficit is a myth (Moravcsik 2002, 2003, 2008b).

Czech Europhiles provide a wide range of critical remarks and remedies for the democratic deficit, but what can be heard most frequently is a call for greater engagement of the public. People should be interested in the EU affairs and their opinion is to be heard. This is closely connected with the notion of European identity or European demos, both of which are the ideals we should try to achieve. Elections, referenda, debates, etc. show to people that their voice is important and, as a result, increase trust in the EU and its legitimacy. To support this view, however, we would have to hold the EU to the standards of an ideal democracy which cannot be found in any EU Member State. Is participatory democracy what we really want? Is an informed public deliberation something we can achieve by providing more participation opportunities? Are EU citizens willing to aggregate information, discuss complex EU issues and decide what the solution should look like in Europe-wide referenda or elections? Or do they prefer to confer this competence on their elected representatives, who should have enough expertise and be held accountable? The latter is closer to reality. Observing opinion polls carried out by Eurobarometer, we find out that European institutions are usually more trusted than domestic ones. At the same time, Europeans trust the EU as a whole and regard it as democratic.³ On the other hand, if they decide to participate in European elections or referenda, their electoral behavior is usually influenced by domestic,

more salient issues. Why does that happen? Because the people want their elected representatives to negotiate on the European level and co-design the final outcomes. They suppose that those politicians who best represent their domestic interests can do the same in the EU. Despite the fact that this may not be true, people tend to deal with those issues which are most vital for them.

Eurosceptics tends to stress different aspects of democratic deficit, especially those linked to accountability and bureaucracy. The EU is said to be run by thousands of unaccountable officials who limit the independent activity of Member States in favor of Brussels bureaucracy and supranational institutions. Their arguments have to do with the emergence of the European super-state and the loss of sovereignty, as presented above. What needs to be pointed out is that the EU is too weak to become a strong federation hampering nation states' functions. At the same time, people who initiate, negotiate and decide on the European level are almost always accountable to their domestic electorate. Let alone directly elected MEPs, accountability is derived from national political systems and their procedures. Although there are many fields which are run by technocrats with delegated powers, this is very normal in all EU Member States today. Should the Union meet more demanding criteria than its constituent sovereign members?

A pragmatic view, more in line with Moravcsik's approach, seems to be emerging in the Czech Republic. We could have noticed some important signs of a European cleavage within ODS party and within the former ODS-led Czech government. Many representatives of ODS prefer pragmatism and hold a less critical view on the EU. What should be subject to further research is the evolution of their opinions from the pre-accession negotiations to nowadays. Then we need to focus on the key issues: the Constitutional Treaty, the Lisbon Treaty, Czech Presidency of the EU and the election campaigns of 2009. All of them are good indicators to observe the evolution of a real cleavage on the issue of the EU. The same cannot be said about the Europhiles as there is little dissent among them. That is probably why they do not engage in the debate on EU *finalité politique* with the same intensity as Eurosceptics/ Eurorealists. Consequently, the latter will be more suitable for further academic research on the topic, as taken from the perspective of liberal intergovernmentalism.

Conclusion

The Czech debate on the finality of the European integration process is usually limited to general statements based on ideological perception of the EU and the role of the nation state. We can single out two major groups, Europhiles and Eurosceptics, who view *finalité politique* of the EU from a different perspective. The representatives of both streams focus on deepening the integration (Europhiles support it almost without reservations, while Eurosceptics claim that the integration has already gone too far) and the democratic legitimacy of the Union (they agree that the EU suffers from democratic deficit, but disagree about its reasons and the remedies for that). Nevertheless, what deserves more attention in further research is an emerging European cleavage among right-wing conservative or liberal-conservative

politicians represented in particular by ODS party. A pragmatic/realistic approach applied by some members of the party is more in line with Moravcsik's liberal intergovernmentalism. Thus, it is necessary to focus the on evolution of the long-term political program, election program and campaign, speeches of key representatives of the party and their practical steps. For now, we can suggest that debate concerning the EU could become less ideological, but more reasoned and more realistic in the future.

Notes

- ¹ It needs to be admitted that this discord can be best seen in verbal expressions. When it comes to concrete action, it may not be that sharp.
- ² For more information, see the speeches of Václav Klaus devoted to the Lisbon Treaty at <http://www.klaus.cz>.
- ³ See Eurobarometer opinion polls, sections dealing with the perception of European institutions and the image of the EU in Standard Eurobarometers, available at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/standard_en.htm.

References

- European Commission (2009). *Public Opinion*. Online. Available HTTP: <http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm> (accessed 31 May 2009).
- Moravcsik, Andrew (2002) 'In Defence of the 'Democratic Deficit': Reassessing Legitimacy in the European Union', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 4: 603–24.
- Moravcsik, Andrew (2003) 'Le Mythe Du Déficit Démocratique Européen', *Raisons politiques* 10: 85–105.
- Moravcsik, Andrew (1998) *The Choice for Europe. Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Moravcsik, Andrew (2008a) 'The European Constitutional Settlement', *The World Economy* 1: 157–82.
- Moravcsik, Andrew (2008b) 'The Myth of Europe's Democratic Deficit', *Intereconomics: Journal of European Public Policy* 6: 331–40.
- Václav Klaus. Online. Available HTTP: <<http://www.klaus.cz/klaus2/asp/default.asp>> (accessed 31 May 2009).