Section 2: The Political Representation of Social Interests in Central and Eastern Europe

Opinion and attitudes about the European integration.
The case of the Czech Republic

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INTRODUCTION

By now it is over a decade since that the Central Eastern European countries are living in a democratic political system, and perhaps now it is time to analyze the degree of political involvement and political participation in one of the East Central European countries that aspire to be part of the European Union on this year 2004: the Czech Republic.

The Czech Republic, that more than one decade before had a referendum about the split of the now Slovak country (1993), is today under an opposite process: the integration into a political frame that exceed their borders: the European Integration. The Czech Republic is one of the East Central European countries that aspire to be part of the European Union on this year 2004. This fact will mean a very important step for this Central European country and for the European Union as a whole, and this process is not free from some troubles.

Therefore we can wonder if the Czech citizens that aspire to be part of the European Union are ready to assume the risks and difficulties of that integration process. Since the time that the process of transition to democracy took place in this Central European country, we can wonder if this transition to democracy meant the emerging of a degree of political interest, and political participation similar to those existent degrees on the other Western European countries.

After doing an analysis of the re-emergence of a civil society during the 90’s in this country, we can ask what is the level of political involvement. In this sense, the principal aim of this paper is the analysis of the political interest, the knowledge, the opinions, and the attitudes of the Czech citizenship about the united Europe.


In this paper it is assumed that the processes of transition to democracy in Eastern and Central Europe were possible due not only to the external circumstances of the liberalization in the former Soviet Union, but the democratization of those countries in the Eastern Central Europe were possible due to the internal situation of each of those countries. In front of the significance of the external factors in the democratization in Eastern Central Europe in the great part of the previous studies, I assume that the internal factors of each country are decisive for the existence of a process of transition to democracy. I regard the external factors like necessary factors, but not enough for the process of transition to democracy in Eastern Central Europe countries, while the internal factors (could be factors of structural character, or of institutional nature) not only are necessary factors, but they are also enough to achieve the implantation of a democratic system in those countries.

The internal factors are those which can explain the different forms that acquired the process of transition to democracy in the different countries, the chronological sequence in the democratization of those countries, and the specifying and the dilation in the time of the emerge of the process of transition to democracy in Czechoslovakia, the last country of all the Central Eastern European countries that became a democratic political system in 1989.

The approach goes further of the static model represented by Lipset (1960) and Dahl (1971), trying to look for one model more dynamic, taking into account that precisely the uncertainty characterizes the

* This is my first draft on this topic. I know there is much more to do. Comments and corrections are welcome.
previous moments, and also the period during the process of transition to democracy in the countries under the “third wave of democratization” (Huntington, 1994). O’Donnell y Schmitter (1986) made quite clear the relevance of the uncertainty during the process of transition to democracy. Since are the politician those who make the political change, and the attitude towards the political change not always is immutable (but can change) can be produced one change also on the behaviour of the political elite at any moment of the process of transition to democracy.

In spite of not deny the importance of the structural factors in the process of transition to democracy, O’Donnell y Schmitter (1986) recognize the high level of indecision present in those situations where the unexpected events (the fortune), the insufficient information, the audacious and hurried decisions, the confusion about the interests, and even the undefinition of the political identities are with frequency decisive in the determination of the outcomes. This uncertainty in the process of transition can be observed in any of the two processes indicated by these authors: the liberalization and the democratization, because in those the successfully outcome of the instauration of the democracy will depend on the attitude and decisions of the political elite in the moment of a turning point.

The uncertainty in the process of transition is based on the importance of the behaviour of the elite and on the decisions taken by the political actors. Behaviours and decisions that, we must not forget, are not out of the structural factors, but they find themselves immersed in the last ones. This uncertainty can be manifested so in the initial stage or genesis of the process, so during its working. The working or development of the process of transition (in which can be produced a level of uncertainty) acquire different forms or models in each of the countries in which is developed, existing differences between the countries under the frame of the third wave of democratization in the context of Eastern Central Europe.

After the II World War, the emergence of the “post-totalitarian” regimes (Linz, 1996) in the Eastern Central Europe countries in the 40’s similar to the soviet regimen existent in the Soviet Union were an extension of the soviet model to several Eastern Central European countries, where the legitimisation of the new regimes were always very precarious.

This lack legitimation was manifested for the first time in the (unsuccessful) revolutions happened in the 50’s and 60’s, and between them, there was the so called “Prague Spring” in 1968. In those years and countries were verified several characteristic cycles where in first place there was some liberalization that was later settled by one intervention from abroad, with or without military character (Taibo, 1995). These

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1 From a static approach, Lipset (1960) and Dahl (1971) analyse the necessary requisites for that can be possible the emergence of a democratic system in a definite moment after an authoritarian political regimen. Lipset (1960) argues that there is a direct causal relation between the modernization (independent variable) and the democracy (dependent variable), that is, he establishes a deterministic causal model where the modernization is a necessary condition for the emerge of the democracy, and the existent exceptions in front of this model do not have importance for him (he doesn’t have into account that exceptions).

2 Leaving the deterministic model of Lipset, Dahl (1971) has into account the relevance of the exceptions to the causal relation between the modernization and the democratization, and this author has established another additional conditions that favour (and not determine) the emergence of the “Poliarchy” (political regimen more close to the democracy). To Dahl the exceptions mentioned by Lipset existed because as well as the modernization, there is necessary another political values or factors. The important fault of the Dahl’s model is that, Lipset does not make an analysis of the stability of the democratic system once established, and neither has into account the uncertainties during the process of transition to democracy.
interventions were reflected with certain energy in the GDR (1953) and in Hungary (1956), and one intervention some less direct in Czechoslovakia in 1968 (where it did not take part the Soviet Union like a superpower, but the military alliance guided by that: the Warsaw Pact), and in Poland in 1981, (where it was not a foreign intervention, but one action taken by the polish army).

At the end of the 80’s it was evident that the soviet model (political, economic, and ideological models) introduced in the Eastern Central European countries couldn’t be sustained for more time.

Although the causes of the breakdown of the post-totalitarian regimes were several, all of them can be reduced to one idea: the existence of specific internal contradictions of the communist regimes. One of the main spheres in which these contradictions were more evident was in the economic frame. The general inefficiency of the Centralized planning was more and more evident in these regimes of the Eastern Central European countries.

This intrinsic contradiction of the communist regimes represented the origin of the two direct causes of its breakdown: the ideological erosion and the economic crisis. The ideology of the communism was so critic for the stability of the system that only through the “lost of faith” of their sympathizers, inside and outside of the party, was possible its breakdown. However, with the progressive erosion of the communist ideology, the economic development became the main source of legitimisation of the political party. That is why the stagnation in the production (and the consequent beginning of the economic crisis during the decade of the 80’s) can be quoted as one valid reason of the collapse of the communist regimes (Poznanski, 1992).

Under the circumstances of the governance and economic crisis of the communist regimes in the Eastern Central European countries, between the people each time was more and more necessary three objectives: one change or one reconstruction in the economic, political and social spheres. In the Center Eastern European countries, included also in the “third wave” of transitions to democracy (Huntington), happened one politic transition, but also one economic transition and one process of national construction (Defe, 1996).

The interdependence between these three objectives (the political transition, the economic transition and the process of national construction), makes more difficult to determine which is the chronologic sequence more appropriated in the development of each of them (Schöplin, 1994).

These three transitions are the clear objectives of the revolutions happened in 1989 in the Central Eastern Europe countries. However, each of the three processes is not free of uncertainties (Kwavinkiewicz, 1994). After the events of 1989, the leading elites in each of the countries had to decide the nature of the transformation they were guiding. There was a growing uncertainty not only about the objectives to achieve and about the media to achieve it, but also existed uncertainty about the conditions ex-ante in the societies that walked to the post-communist transformation.

In the process of transition to democracy happened in 1989 exists one essential element: the uncertainty. Its manifestation occurs especially in the factors that favour (not determine) the process of transition, and especially in the factors of internal character (how are the decision of the elite of one country in one specific moment). However, in the genesis of the process of transition, had placed one essential roll the external factors, and between them, the progressive opening of the regime in the Soviet Union.
At the middle of the decade of 80’s the each time more serious economic troubles in the Soviet Union carried to the leaders of that country to lead one economic re-structuration (perestroika) and one public opening (Glasnost). With the access into power of Mihail Gorbachev in 1985, the Soviet Union leaved its long stage of confrontation with the West, looking for acomodation and cooperation. In Eastern Central Europe these changes opened the hope of one bigger independence and of one big social reform.

The existence of several external factors, mainly the process of opening of the regime in the Soviet Union, were essential in the genesis of the process of transition in the Center Eastern European countries. However, we must not leave to take into account some internal factors that favoured its development. Between the internal factors we can point out the inexistence of opposition to the process of opening from the Soviet Union from the leading political elite in each of the countries.

This lack of opposition, together with the existence of a civil society more or less articulated, favoured the existence of processes of transition to democracy of consensuad character in some of these countries, mainly in Poland and in Hungary, where the political party in the power was too weak and was too divided to control the mobilizations from below and to impose the conditions of the process in a unilateral way (Grzegorzekiert, 1995). Each one of the countries had diverse internal institutional characteristics, which guided to the existence of different modalities in each of the process of transition to democracy.

The process of transition to a democratic system in the Eastern Central European countries had been at the end of the 80’s. The democratization of these countries was not something determined nor something completely accidental, but was due to different causes: structural changes (caused by the scientific-technological revolution) and coyuntural factors, mainly political ones: national politics (the development of new political groups), international politics (the attraction of the democratic political model and the economic model from western countries, and the wish of the Central Eastern European countries to become part of the European Economic Community), and the decisions made by the political leaders in each country.

Between all the Central Eastern European countries, in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia happened in 1989 one revolution that had like the main consequence the end of the post-totalitarian regime. Although the objective was the same, the instauration of a democratic system, however the way followed to achieve to this result was different in each one of the countries. We can clearly difference the cases of the three Eastern Central European countries “different ways to the democracy” (Rustow,1970): while in in Czechoslovakia the communism fallen down by capitulation (process of transition not by consent), in Poland the end of the communist regime was carried through one compromise between the political elites, and in Hungary through the electoral competition (two cases of transition by consent).

The different level of development of the civil societies in these countries (Bruszt y Stark, 1992) has one direct relation with the order of the events of the transition and, at the same time, one inverse relation with the speed of the first stage of the process of transition. We can observe that except in Poland, the rest of the Eastern Central European countries had light civil societies.

In front of consensual character of the transitions in Poland and in Hungary, the transition to democracy in Czechoslovakia (Banac, 1992) is characterized by the form in that the post-totalitarian regime came to its end: through a big collapse that was evidenced in the big general strike on the 27 of november of 1989, fact which made patent the great lack of legitimacy of the communist regime and predicted its final downfall.

As consequence of the process of transition in 1989 were produced the three objectives followed by the political elite: 1) the emergence of a democratic political regimen, with the profusion of political parties and the introduction of democratic rules
under which there should be the political power, 2) the transformation of the economy from the Centralized Economic Planning, towards the existence of one market economy, 3) the development of one national construction (Stokes, 1993).

In the context of one new democratic system in these countries, the more important “rules of the game” to determine would be the “meta-rules” of the political system: 1) the kind of governments: presidential or parliamentary systems, choosing all of them for one parliamentary system, and 2) the kind of electoral systems: majoritarian or proportional systems, choosing Poland and Czechoslovakia (after 1993 the Czech Republic and Slovakia) for a system of proportional representation, and Hungary by one “combined” electoral system (Stokes, 1993).

Alter the success of the democratizator processes of 1989, and the establishment of these “meta-rules” of the democratic game, in 1990 were celebrated the first general elections in the Center Eastern European countries. The winner political parties could have the power, but alter that moment they will have to be under the rules of the democratic game in their decision taking.

2. ONE OF THE BIG CHALLENGES IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA IN 1990: THE RE-EMERGENCE OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY

The pluralism in the post-totalitarian regimes contrasts with the almost lack of pluralism in the totalitarian regimes and the limited pluralism in the authoritarian regimes (Linz, 1996). In contrast with the totalitarism, the post-totalitarian regimes normally have one much more important level of social pluralism. And in the mature post-totalitarian regime there is often one forum of discussion inside of “second culture” or a “parallel culture”, which is the frame for the resurgence of the opposition to the political regime, expression of the dissidence of the civil society.

The concept society civil has been used during a long time, and defined and conceptualized by different academics. In this paper, I will use the concept developed by Simon Smith (2003) for the case of Czechoslovakia. Smith conceive the resurgence of the concept of civil society at the end of the XX century with a new sense understood as one spontaneous and informal sphere. The problem about the definition of the relation between civil society civil, political parties and representation of interests is solved defining the civil society civil like “everything that is apart of the State, of the economic power, of the market relations, of the political parties, and of every kind of formal political activity”. This definition acquired live with the emergence of the “new” social movements outside of the political structures previously existent.

In Czechoslovakia during more than one decade the post-totalitarian regime existed at the same time with a tenuous civil society since the group of human rights Charter 77, linked to the Helsinki Process, had emerged in 1977. Some dissident groups behind the Charter 77 emerged in the years 1988 and 1989, but none of them could be considered as one organized political opposition. There were protest groups in the civil society, but they were not very numerous: they were small, disorganized and non political (Linz, 1996). During 1970 and 1980 there was a situation of one repressive political regime in front of one opposition weakly organized. The social dissatisfaction was showed in activities in small scale, seminars or literary forums. To face directly to the political power was not one serious option (Smith, 2003). However, the repression couldn’t avoid the organization of the society, emerging new organizations that represented interests, opinions and activities. In this context, emerged
the Civic Forum, that beginning with one modest role in the representation of interests, became the winner in the first elections to the Parliament celebrated in Czechoslovakia in 1990.

3. INSIDE CZECH REPUBLIC: IN SEARCH OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

For the Czech national movement, political democratization was a basic means to achieve its demands. The ethnic and civic principles were in agreement, national identity defined itself as democratic. Yet the attitude of Czech identity to liberalism and citizenship brought some complications, first of all thanks to the conflict with the Pan-Germanism. The condition of the success of the movement in both the Czech and the German case was the achievement of an ethnic majority in an autonomous and liberal state.

The attempts to restore liberal-civic identities after 1989 were difficult. It was difficult for the intellectual elite to overcome the inertia of the, on the whole, viable fragments of later Communist-national ideology that had relatively successfully poached the charisma of its predecessors. However, the Czech public got over the division of Czechoslovakia quite calmly and Czech statehood organically replaced the Czechoslovak one in the concept of the national identity. (For example the flag of the new state is the same as the flag of Czechoslovakia, the date of the proclamation of the Czechoslovak Republic on the 28th October 1918 is a national holiday in the Czech Republic).

The civic principle became one of the leitmotivs in the attempt to re-build the Czech national identity in 1989. It can be based upon the Czech attraction to the West, with the consequence of a spontaneous desire for ‘getting back to Europe’ after the revolution and of the self-interpretation of Czechs as a culturally European nation. The state undoubtedly plays an increasing role in national identity, which seems to be good for development of the civic principle. On the other hand there are serious obstacles in the way of this principle. The Czech state has so far been defined, at least implicitly, ethnically – as a natural home de the Czech people. The co-existence of ethnic and civic principles (although both sincerely respected) has so far favored the ethnic one.

4. OUTSIDE CZECH REPUBLIC: THE VIEWS OF THE CZECHS TOWARDS EUROPE

4. 1. POLITICAL INTEREST

4.1.1. CITIZENS

Citizens’ involvement is a necessary condition for democratic decision-making processes. Political interest of citizens usually is depicted as an individual attribute that can be explained by referring to the resources and skills of the people concerned. The resulting multi-level model combines both individual and contextual factors to explain the cross-national differences and changes in political involvement and apathy in Europe in the last three decades. Political interest is defined here as the “degree to which politics arouses a citizen’s curiosity”; it is the “attentiveness to politics” and the potential readiness to participate. It is not a type of political commitment and involvement only.

In the database at the micro-level consists of a combination of all Eurobarometer surveys for the period from 1970 to 1998, in several Western European countries. Yet it is also clear that the absolute levels of political interest are still rather low, and analyses of trends show that on average only one out of every six European citizens frequently discusses politics with his or her friends, while every third citizen never touches upon this topic. Behind huge cross-national differences can be observed

Political interest at the individual level is required of operationalisation: A direct question on the “frequency of political discussion” is used here as an indicator of the direct expression of political interest. Virtually all Eurobarometer studies rely for this direct utterance of political interest on a straightforward question:

4 “When you get together with friends, would you say you discuss political matters frequently, occasionally, or never?”.
To measure the Political Interest in the citizens of the Eastern - Central Europe, the Eurobarometer in May 2003 used like indicator the “Interest in European Union news”. We look at the results of a question that compared interest in EU news to interest in other topics. In the Eurobarometer 2003, asked respondents whether they pay a lot of attention, a little attention, or no attention at all to news in nine areas, one of them being the EU.

If we compare the data, Four-fifths (82%) in the candidate countries say they pay at least some attention to news about the European Union (88% of the respondents from 2004 member countries). These results are far greater than those measured in the member states last year. There is a big difference between the EU-15 and the CC-13 among those who pay a lot of attention: only 20% of EU citizens told Eurobarometer that they pay a lot of attention to news about the EU; that number goes up to 40% in the candidate countries and 39% in 2004 member countries, although Czech Republic is among the less. EU residents are more likely to ignore EU-related news than are any of the countries in the candidate region (69% of residents in EU countries pay attention to EU news).

4.1.2 POLITICIANS

During the 90’s the Integration into the EU has been perceived as a major political step bringing the Czech Republic back to the center of European civilization process. In the 2002 elections was the first time since the beginning of the Integration Process that the Czech political leaders addressed the dilemma between giving up significant part of national sovereignty and accomplishing the long-desired goal of return into Europe. The issues of independence, sovereignty and Czech national interests thus came to the forefront of the political debate. So, the Integration into EU for the Czech leaders of the political parties has been a main debate in the last elections 2002 and after that date as well.

Some authors have shown the share of pages devoted to the EU in the political platforms: ODS 21%, Coalition 11%, CSSD 5%, KSCM 2,9%. One could conclude that ODS leads thanks to its major polemic interest in the matter, the Coalition following ODS under the banner of “euro-optimism”. On the other hand, not only the ODS, but also CSSD and KSCM have issued their own extensive documents on the EU. Therefore, we can prove there were any substantial differences in this respect: the EU is an important issue in all analyzed party discourses.

For the leader of the political party in the government, the integration into the EU means the chance to catch up with the prosperity of Western Europe. Like a new member in the EU, the Czech Republic will have higher rates of growth than the EU. If that is maintained, the result will be: a reduction in the social and economic gap; higher incomes and social standards; less incentive to migrate to other EU countries. Enlargement is not a threat, but an impetus for renewal.

4.1.3 MASS MEDIA

Private corporations mostly run the media in the Czech Republic. The major exception is the public service Czech TV, with two channels. After 1989, the Czech press underwent a process of gradual privatization promoted according to the model of conservative-liberal politics in early 1990’s.

Through a content analysis there are some studies that analyses the main TV channels and the five newspapers in the Czech Republic and their content in the news about EU. The two main news that were covered: the Nice Summit (news covered between 3-13 December 2000) and the Euro Launch (news covered between 30 December 2001-2 January 2002).

The press paid quite balanced attention to both European events. However, although the coverage of study during the Euro Launch was only for three days, the study has registered 109 articles in the newspapers,
while during the period of the Nice Summit (almost one month) the number was only 63 articles higher. Therefore, the press paid more attention to European affairs just during Euro launching. The average media coverage per day also supports this conclusion: while the Nice Summit was covered by 17 pieces of news a day on the average, as for the Euro Launch period there were 36 pieces of news a day (the number more than twice as high).

Both TV stations also paid considerable attention to European affairs at both spells. CT1 put several times bigger stress on these events. On CT1 the news of European problems always appeared in the news headlines while in Nova it occurred only once, when there was clashes between police and rioters.

We have seen the political interest of the political parties and of the citizens on the EU. But, what is the channel through the citizens receive the information about the EU:

To what extent do the citizens trust in the political or the mass media to get information about the EU?

4.2. TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

4.2.1 Trust in political institutions

Next we look at the public’s trust in four political institutions: their national governments, their national parliaments, their civil service, and political parties. As it has before, the Eurobarometer shows that the CC-13 states trust national governments, and national parliaments about the same level.

The most trusted political institution in the candidate region is the national government (47%), followed by the national parliament (43%) and civil services (both 30%). Political parties are trusted by only 16% of the region’s population. European Union citizens trust their national parliament (42%) and their national government (37%) most, followed by political parties (16%), almost the same as in the future new member countries.

The Czech Republic is among the most generally sceptical countries, where the political institutions are only trusted by 25%, followed by Slovenia (24%), Poland (18%) and Bulgaria.

In spring 2003, only 16% of people in the candidate region tend to trust in political parties (this rate was 14% in autumn 2002). This level is very similar to that in the EU members. The trend analyses show an increase in trusting of political parties since autumn 2002 in Czech Republic (+2).

There has been a significant change in how much people trust their governments, that increased by 8 percentage points. We see a similar picture as we focus on national parliaments. The same countries as before are the most likely to have increased their trust in their legislative bodies.

4.2.2. Trust in other social institutions

The CC citizens are most likely to trust the Army (72%), the EU (51%), and the United Nations (49%). People living in the candidate region have significantly more confidence in the EU than European citizens do (44%). Within the candidate regions, citizens say that they have confidence in the EU, the United Nations, and religious institutions -- more than do people in the member states.

The European Union tops the list in four candidate countries, and is in second or third place in three others. The United Nations is in the top three of eight countries. Eurobarometer included the United Nations and the EU in the list. Here we take a look at how these two organizations compare to national institutions and to each other. In the CC-13 level, the EU is more trusted than the United Nations, the two organizations being the third and fourth respectively.

In eight of the 13 candidate countries, the EU attains more trust than the United Nations. But a group of the candidate countries expressed higher trust levels towards the United Nations than towards the EU. People in the Czech Republic trust the UN more than the European Union.
4.2.3. Media use

This section reports on how frequently citizens of the candidate countries watch the news on television, read it in daily newspapers, and listen to it on the radio. After reporting how much people trust the media in the candidate region.

The Czechs (47%) are among the least likely, and Hungarians are the most likely (70%), to watch the news on a daily basis. However, the Czechs are among the most frequent readers of daily papers, with a 20% every day, 29% several times a week, 22% once or twice a week. Whilst fewer than one in five Romanians and Bulgarians read for news every day (14% and 17%, respectively). And the radio doesn’t play a much important role in providing news on a daily basis for Czechs, 29% every day, 26% several times a week, 12% once or twice a week, 22% less often. (Are among the fewer who listen to the radio to provide news on a daily basis).

Trust in the media

Levels of trust in the printed press and in the electronic media. Trust in the media is similar in the candidate region and the EU. Television remains the most trusted source of information in the candidate countries -- 60% trust television (EU-15: 57%); 55% tend to trust the radio (EU-15: 65%), and 42% tend to trust the press (EU-15: 47%).

The country-by-country analyses show the same pattern everywhere, but actual levels of trust vary on a wide range. Trust levels for the press are among the highest in the Czech Republic (61%).

4.3. KNOWLEDGE

4.3.1. Knowledge of basic EU-related facts

The citizens of the candidate countries are rather poorly informed about some basic facts of the European Union. The largest percentage of correct answers was to a question about the European flag: 66% would recognize it. About half in the CC-13 (53%) and more than two-thirds in the 2004 countries (69%) know that the headquarters of the EU are in Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxemburg.

Some of the countries in the 2004 member group might take part in European Parliament elections as soon as 2004, but 51% of the public in these countries does not know if the members of the EP are elected directly (versus 52% in 2002), and 17% mistakenly believe that they are not (16% in 2002).

The CC-13 population, on average, (scores from 0-9) gives 3.56 correct answers to the nine statements, and respondents from the 2004 member countries give a significantly higher average of 4.68 correct answers. But Czechs was 4.02, a bit below of this score for the 2004 member’s average.

4.3.2 Self-perceived knowledge about the European Union

A standard feature of the Eurobarometer is a question that asks respondents how much they feel they know about the EU. The 25% of candidate country citizens feel they know “quite a lot” to “a great deal” (i.e., those choosing the numbers 6 through 10 on the scale) about the EU. This shows still a bit lower level of perceived knowledge in comparison to the results measured in the member states (27%).

This difference in citizens’ perceived levels of EU-related knowledge is also reflected in the averages we measured on the 10-point scale. People in the candidate countries scored at about 4.21. The average of the 2004 members is 4.69, and the Czechs have a score a bit below: 4.37. The Czech Republic is quite far, with only 28% that fell they know “quite a lot” to “a great deal” about the EU.

4.3.3 Providing information about the European Union

The survey also measures public opinion toward some key EU issues, such as whether or not schoolchildren should be taught about the way the EU institutions work. More than three-quarters in both
the CC-13 (76%) and the 2004 member countries (78%) said children should learn about EU institutions in school. The Czech respondents are the least likely to want their children taught about the way EU institutions work (64%).

Over the half of the citizens in the candidate countries say the EU should consider it a priority to get closer to European citizens by informing them more about itself (56%), its policies, and its institutions. 28% said this should not be a priority. And again, the Czechs are among the likeliest to consider information on the EU a priority (63% don’t think so).

5. OPINIONS AND ATTITUDES

5.1. POLITICIANS

Each of the political parties in the Czech Republic has its own attitude toward the EU. I’ll try to summarize each of them.

- The Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD), the major political force on left, is the party in the government since 1998. This party led a socially friendly and pro EU politics. In its relation to the EU Enlargement, the government held a very positive approach. The process of the accession was speeded up thanks to the Nice Summit and the legislative steps taken by the CSSD government. It has strongly believes in the positive outcome of European Integration. CSSD, whose electorate is often regarded as more pessimistic toward the Integration process in comparison with others voters, is very eloquent in identifying the positive reasons for the Czech Republic to enter the EU. On other hand, in the last electoral campaign of the 2002 the Social Democrats talked about the defending national interests. In each speech the party leader (Vladimir Spidla) talked about the necessity to protect the sovereignty of Czech Republic. However, he emphasized the need to defend this sovereignty inside the family of European nations. The future of the Czech Republic is view only as a member of EU. EU is defined as “Europe”, and described as a “unique project”.

Additionally, this party maintains the thesis about the Czech Republic lying between Eastern and Western Europe, between Russia and Germany. By entering EU, the Czech Republic will reinforce its ties to Western Europe and thus increases the security at its borders. The West is defined analogically to EU in representing the values of peace, stability and security.

- The Civic Democratic Party (ODS), (leader: Václav Klaus), the major opponent of CSSD, represents the right wing political force and ODS represents a euro-skeptical or euro-realistic view of EU. Its political ideology bears several features of British Conservatism. Its policy is coherent with the British conservative discourse in its criticism of supranational EU and the emphasis on protecting the state and national sovereignty. Although the ODS, when still in the ruling coalition until 98, began the Accession Process to the EU in 96, its current position has changed to a more reserved attitude. The party describes this position as euro-realistic. Its main goal is to preserve the crucial role of national governments. The ODS disapproves of any type of power shift not only toward supranational institutions but also toward internal political players. ODS puts the emphasis on defend the national sovereignty.

- Further, the ODS perceives the national interest to be threatened by the German attempt to question post-WWII order. It concerns the Sudeten-German minority claims to question the legitimacy of collective removal from the Czech border regions.

- Secondly, the Civil Democrats criticize the EU for its democratic deficit. For the ODS, it is desirable to return certain functions exercised by European institutions to national governments.

- The ODS ideology interprets the Czech political ideology in the tradition of Anglo-Saxon liberal conservatism. The ODS ideology perceives European integration in the context of Euro-American competition. In contrast to the beliefs of Social Democrats and the Coalition, ODS understands Europe in terms of a continent. It disagrees with the all-embracing unification of social and pension system, monetary policies and security. The Czech Republic membership in NATO is regarded as a more important for future stability of the Czech Republic than the participation in European security policy. ODS supports extensive
cooperation of Europe with United States in economic and political issues to build an integrated Euro-Atlantic coalition, not a “Fortress Europe”. ODS objects to identifying Europe in contrast to United States is thus perceived in the context of Euro-American civilization. For ODS, EU pursues the idea of Eastern Enlargement mainly for its own selfish reasons (economic reasons).

- The **Coalition**, formed by the **Christian Democratic Union (KDU-CLS)** and **Freedom Union (US-DEU)** These two parties stand between the Social Democrats and Civic Democrats. Both parties entered into close cooperation soon after the elections of 1998. They represented the real opposition once the ODS began to cooperate with the social democratic government. Recently the Coalition has gone through a number of crises. Nevertheless, it still belongs among the strongest political forces in the Czech Republic.

The Coalition expresses its conviction that the Czech nation belongs culturally into Europe. However, thanks to its small size, the Czech Republic is considered a second-rate country in the international arena. Similarly to ODS and CSSD, the Coalition emphasizes the importance of their equal status in EU.

EU is defined as a community of democracy, rule of law, effective economy and solidarity. These are the values the EU is built on. EU guarantees security for its citizens against terrorism and threat of mass-destruction weapons. EU is identified with the continent of Europe. Europe and America are part of the same cultural tradition—Western Euro-American civilization and they insure the stability in the future world.

- The **Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM)**. Formed after 1989 as the descendent of the Czechoslovak Communist Party that ruled Czechoslovakia under the Soviet supervision for more than 40 years. This party has been kept in opposition since 1989. The Communists gained between 10 and 15% of votes in every election. Until now, they are regarded as an extremist left-wing party with a painful heritage of authoritarian past and incapable of democratic behaviour.

The KSCM is very critical toward the current foreign and security policy centered on NATO as well as the Integration Process into EU. Communists criticize the EU for its foreign policy and the approach to the candidate countries. It regards the EU as an elite of rich nations, and the united Europe as an instrument of exploitation by multinational corporations. Europe is defined as prosperous, promoting human rights, culturally diversified. In comparison with other documents informing about the continental integration, Communists emphasize the supremacy of European civilization. European nations posse immense intellectual capacity and highly skilled labor. In contrast to the very positive picture of European continent, the EU is perceived in terms of capitalist exploitation, social injustice and the US political dominance.

The Communist Party criticizes the trend of decreasing social benefits in EU. The large influence of big financial capitals causes the growing social tension.

5.2 MASS MEDIA

5.2.1 Newspapers

**Právo** (18% of market share): The contributions assemble in several groups: first, there are purely informative articles, and then impressions of Nice Summit as mediated by editors. The communication strategy of the daily presents the decision to support Enlargement as inevitable and rational. The daily doesn’t idealize (but also does not exaggerate the problems) but during the reviewed period we can see even a shift in favour of the extension process.

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5 The Christian Democratic Union (KDU-CLS) is a political force standing up to Christian ideals, at the same time preserving social benefits. Its attitude toward EU is very positive.

6 The Freedom Union (US-DEU) belongs to the moderate right of the political spectrum. Its position is similar to the ODS ideals in many aspects of economic policy; however, it strongly opposes the nationalist position and regards the accession to the EU as very positive.
Lidové noviny (7% of market share): The articles that were issued closely before opening the summit empathised how disunited was the EU, and they even labeled the forthcoming summit as hopeless. The LN casts doubts on the future agreement on the reform, and stated that the influence of small states would decrease. The LN covers the riots accompanying the summit and it underlines the unusual tediousness and complexity of the negotiations. The image of EU/Europe is quite contradictory in the LN newscast. The Czech Republic belongs to the EU but she is only put in spectator role. LN did not contribute to unambiguous attitude to the EU and to the Enlargement process; in this respect it rather kept the reader in uncertainty. The complicated negotiations in Nice and the events accompanying them seemed to strengthen feelings of vanity and scepticism, even though in the end a more optimistic view prevailed.

Hospodářské noviny: (7% of market share) HN attempts to stand up to its reputation of an objective daily with both coverage and commentaries balanced in opinions. Therefore, the reader shall get an impression of a sober and reserved evaluation of both EU and the attitude of the Czechs to her. Part of the daily’s communication strategy is to emphasize the economic advantages of European integration, but still it employs moderate means of expression.

Mladá fronta Dnes: (28% of market share) The Dnes’ view of the EU reforms and the Nice Summit was very sceptical and sometimes almost pessimistic if compared to the other dailies. Its communication strategy included presentation of contradictory information that was many times signaled in the headline. Dnes follows the lines of Euro-skepticism, as presented by the conservative-liberal part of the political spectrum, especially the ODS. In its communication strategy, D stands near to the tabloid Blesk, as it prefers expression means and a structure of information that both stress the conflict side of politics and the feelings of damaged interests. These two dailies both incidentally enjoy extraordinary great popularity.

Blesk (36% of market share) For Blesk it is more important to thrill its readers than for other dailies. The thrill is to be generated and maintained by reading. For this sake, the dominant representations fall into significantly dichotomous oppositions. The image of “Us” (the Czech Republic and its citizens) is thus constructed through tension between security and insecurity. Representation of the EU employs the tension between attraction and repulsiveness. The EU is on one side described as a significant institution of influence. The EU is presented above all as an active subject, administrating, setting the goals, making decisions and norms. The EU’s most frequent role is that of a seat of institutions and a source of quotas and rules. In contrast to the Czech Republic, the EU is only seldom an object to others’ damaging activity (as during the riots at in Nice). The means employed by the EU are often no very clean; on the other hand (as during the Nice Summit), the Blesk admits that the EU is able to make an effort to reach a solution. The hyperactivity of the EU naturally clashes with “Our” interests such as domestic peace and security. Within the EU sphere of reach “We” move between the security/safety and insecurity/danger. While the EU offers initiatives, “We” are in many cases only defending ourselves. On the other hand, we are aware of the inexorability of the accession to the EU, which could even hold advantages for us. The ambivalence of representations is kept on purpose.

5.2.2 TV

- CT1 (Public channel) The presentation of the Nice summit was clearly favourable. The commentary stressed the key significance of the proposed EU reform for the enlargement and that, compared with the past, the negotiations with the candidate countries have been launched. All Czech politicians considered the result of the summit as “acceptable compromise” met with satisfaction. CSSD and ODS expressed their satisfaction that the deal “does not lower the role of national interests” in the Union.
The CT1 not only constructed an image of events, but it also constructed its own image a highly informed media station. The newscast emphasized the importance of the accession to the EU and subsequently CT1 capitalised on bringing the latest “inside” news about the European politics.

- **TV Nova** With much less coverage than CT1 on the summit, TV Nova opened a surprising contradiction between the commentary and the visual part of the news. The commentary was relatively balanced and relevant. It put emphasis on the importance of the summit for the candidate countries, although subsequently it spent a high amount of time on a detailed description of the street clashes. The overall impression of the news was rather pessimistic, as the visions of chaos and violence prevailed. These were evoked by the shots from the demonstrations. Nova informed of the summit’s results in a optimistic way but, on the other hand, it emphasized the “toilsome” character of the meeting supported by the shots of tired politicians.

To summarize, the Euro events did not belong among the priorities of the station. On the one hand the evaluation was favourable, but on the other hand, there was space enough for a sceptical refusal.

### 5.3 CITIZENS

#### 5.3.1 Attitudes toward the European Union

In this section I introduce the general sentiments and attitudes of the candidate countries towards the EU and being European.

First we will focus on how much people in the candidate countries feel European, and what would make them feel more so.

Later, we will look at the main trend-indicators of support for the European Union in the Candidate Countries. We will report on the image of the EU, the people’s feelings towards the EU, does it conjure up a positive or negative image for those who live in the candidate region? Levels of support for European Union membership are discussed here, along with the perceived benefit of EU membership.

#### 5.3.2 Feeling European

Most people have a European component in their identity. Candidate Countries Eurobarometer found that, except in Turkey, people consider themselves to some extent to be European rather than just their own nationality. This is more likely to be so in the Czech Republic (50% vs. 37%), as in another countries like Cyprus, Slovakia and Malta.

The attitudinal analysis shows that: 73% of people who regard their country’s membership to the European Union as a good thing feel European to some extent (as do 26% of those who told us their country’s membership will be a bad thing). At the other extreme, we find that 61% of people who regard their country’s membership as a bad thing identify with their own nationality.

#### 5.3.3 National pride

The extent to which people are proud of their nationality varies greatly from country to country. On average, we can emphasize similarities between the levels of national pride in the EU (85%) and the CC-13 (89%), and even more between the EU-15 and the 2004 member countries (86%). This is a highest score than that for the Czech Republic: 73%, (one of the lowest scores along with Bulgaria, Latvia and Estonia, who are least likely to feel nationalistic pride).

#### 5.3.4 European pride

When asked about how proud people are to be European, levels of pride vary considerably across the candidate region (64%), but are, on average, are slightly higher than in the member states (62%). Citizens in the 2004 member countries have a very strong European element in their identity with 79% being proud for being European.

The Czechs (66%), are a little more proud than the average of the CC (64%).

One might think that high levels of national pride would “prevent” high levels of European pride, as though these sentiments are mutually exclusive. In fact, the Candidate Countries Eurobarometer found a strong positive -- a statistically significant correlation between the two feelings. In other words, a high level of national pride makes an individual more likely to be proud of being European as well.
5.3.5 Freedom of movement would make future citizens to feel more European

The Candidate Countries Eurobarometer asked, for the first time, what people think makes them feel more European. People say they will feel more European if they can travel freely to EU countries (57%), or study or work in EU countries (53%), or if their country could become a member of the EU (53%). The 2004 member countries’ population mentioned the same things in the same order (59%, 54% and respectively, 50%).

5.3.6 Support for European Union membership

In the Eurobarometer there are some indicators of support for the EU in each of the candidate countries. The citizens of the candidate region are more likely now to hold favourable views about the Union as they were last year, and support went up the most dynamically in the countries that are about to join the Union this year.

In spring 2003, 64% of people in the candidate region regarded their country's future membership to the European Union as a “good thing”. The proportion of people in the region who regarded their country's coming membership as “a bad thing” was only 8% on average. A further 19% view their country’s future membership in a neutral manner. The lowest levels of support were recorded in Estonia (31%), Latvia (37%) and the Czech Republic (46%).

Articulate opposition is not particularly high in these countries. However, there is no country in the candidate region in which those who would regard EU membership as a bad thing outnumber those who see it as a good thing.

Over the past two years one can see a slowly accelerating growth in support for EU membership both on the CC-13 and on the 2004 member countries’ level. The trend analyses show an increase in support levels since autumn 2002, in the Czech Republic there was an increment of +3.

The importance of education as a powerful explanatory variable of attitudes toward membership in the European Union continues to show up in the analyses. Support levels for the European Union vary with education levels. Analyses of the economic activity scale show a gap of 20 percentage points in support levels between managers (77%) on the one hand and retired people (58%) on the other.

Those who say they know a great deal about the European Union are much more likely to regard their country’s membership as a good thing (79%) than are those who have a medium level of knowledge (72%), or who say they know little or nothing about the EU (53%).

Quantitative Surveys concerning the opinion of Czech citizens on the European Union, their own nation and national identity occur in two main forms. First there is the public opinion poll. The second form involves the projects organized by individual institutions, mainly in the Institute de Sociology of the Academy of Science or at universities.

One of the most significant of these is the Institution for the Public Opinion (IVVM), now under the Center for the Survey de a Public Opinion (CVVM). It concerns longitudinal surveys, and a record is kept of the development of the attitudes since 1996. The results of the Surveys are presented from July 2001, where the main questions are whether respondents would participate in a referendum on entry into the EU and whether or not they would favour such a move. Approximately 40 per cent of those who responded were in favour of the Czech Republic joining the EU; 20 per cent said they would vote against joining; 20 per cent were undecided; and 20 per cent said they would not participate in such a referendum at all.

Respondents were also asked about the possible advantages and disadvantages of joining the EU. The main advantages were seen as improvement in the quality of life, improvements in the legal structure and environment and freer movement of people. At the
same time, joining the EU was also seen to have a symbolic meaning, namely, the unification of Europe. Among the disadvantages of joining the EU were the loss of national sovereignty and identity, but these questions were raised by a minority of respondents and are not considered a major threat or problem. The respondents also expressed their views regarding the possible effects of EU membership on education, the state sector, agriculture, health, the army etc. Subsequent surveys by the CVVM contained more specific aspects of the process of the integration of the Czech Republic into the EU.

Another agency which is intensively engaged in public opinion polls is the STEM which is working on a project called Feedback – a communicative strategy of the Czech Republic before the entry into the European Union. STEM made public the data from the latest Surveys from the year 2001 on its web pages. They are under a heading: “Accession of the Czech Republic to the EU”. The individual studies are concerned with several questions.

One of the main points to measure is the opinion of Czech citizens about the future Eastern Enlargement of the EU. STEM also presents these opinions according to the voting preferences, which shows surprisingly that the most optimistic are the ODS (civic democrats) voters even though this party represents the more sceptical approach towards our future membership in the EU. Left wing voters are traditionally less optimistic towards the openness of the present EU members to the new candidates, and are both convinced of the disadvantages of the claims of the EU for our national interests. People are also afraid of the loss of their cultural traditions and national sovereignty. Approximately half of the respondents are convinced of the negative consequences mentioned above. It is interesting to mention that Czech people connect the entry into the EU with economic advantages, and the improvement of political culture. On the other hand, more than two thirds of citizens do not expect that they will be able to influence public matters.

The pro-integration view is mostly supported by people who support limitations on the power of government and believe that people should take more responsibility for their own circumstances. The policy of a speedy entry into the European Union corresponds more to the liberal philosophy of the right wing oriented respondents. The view towards the entry of the Czech Republic into the EU is therefore influenced by voting preferences. Despite the growing reservations of the strongest right wing party towards entry into the European Union, ODS voters prefer the quickest possible integration.

The entry into the EU is simultaneously perceived as part of a modernization trend, and also as something which fully corresponds with the opinion of a narrowing of the gap between the more modernized western European countries with the eastern European countries. On the other hand, the Czech people view the European Union in the tradition of a social state. In particular, the issue of unemployment and a social support corresponds fully to the EU principles, while one third of the respondents who support expenditure on a social sector fully agree with the integration politics of the state.

The view of the Czech Republic towards the EU countries, as in the case of other countries from the Soviet block, was determined by the global relationship between East and West. The specific aspect of the Czech development was mainly the break up of Czechoslovakia, which as a consequence revived the debate about a Czech nationality and national identity.

There is no doubt in the public perception about the Czech Republic belonging to Europe. The question of EU membership is mostly connected with the profits of such a step. However, these aspects of European identity do not predominate over the ‘national interests’; the arguments in the discussions about the economic advantages of the unified market predominate over any other integration aspects. The impact of the conflicts between the political parties thus influenced the attitude of the public towards the EU, which reflects a certain caution (the Czech Republic has permanently the lowest public support for the EU
among the Central Eastern countries). All of this was caused mainly by the previous negative assessment about the readiness of the Czech Republic to join the EU which did not correspond to public opinion, mainly in relation to the economic level of the Czech Republic within the Central European region. Recently, this attitude has been exacerbated by the reluctance of the neighbouring EU countries to open their labour markets to new members. The before mentioned aspects intensify the conviction to the inadequacy of the membership and suspicion (which also has support in the national discourse) towards the Western European countries (anxieties such as ‘others want to benefit from us’).

Nevertheless, the intensity of the negotiations grew stronger after 1997, while the acceleration in the improvements of legal system, which initiated the process of harmonisation with EU law, was considered especially positive.

6. BEHAVIOUR
6.1. Referendum about membership

In candidate countries, Eurobarometer respondents were asked about a slightly different measure of support EU in peculiar times. Some 2004 member countries had already held EU accession referendums, and heavy campaigns were underway in some others. The research was conducted in March and April 2003, when the people from the Czech Republic, were just gearing up for their May-June referendums.

Looking at the research data, seven in 10 in the CC-13 (72%) say they would vote for their country’s European Union membership, if a referendum were to be held. But as Candidate Countries Eurobarometer has previously warned, the major issue has not been the level of support in the referendums, but the proportion that decides to show up at the ballots. Czech Republic is among the lowest “pro” votes: 57%, and almost the country that has more “against” votes (30%).

But participation rates, are quite low throughout the region. As a result of referendum-related campaigns, citizens are more mobilised than they were last autumn. In the majority of the 2004 member countries, the EU membership referendums had already taken place. Nonetheless, in a majority of countries, the participation rate was quite low, ranging from the pathetic 45.6% in Hungary to 63.3% in Lithuania (55.2% in the Czech Republic).

Looking at current voting intentions in the candidate countries does not provide too much useful information -- as the question itself was quite strange to those who had just voted. This voting intentions signed a participation of only 37% of the Czechs, almost the lowest score of all.

6.2. Image of the European Union

7 Question: If there were to be a referendum tomorrow on the question of (country)’s membership of the European Union, would you personally vote for or against it?
In the Eurobarometer there is a question\(^8\) that provides an indication of people’s emotive stance towards the EU.

On average, 54% of candidate country citizens have a positive image of the EU (of whom 15% view it very positively). This is seven percentage points higher than the level Eurobarometer found within the current members EU (47%). Only 18% say that the EU conjures up a negative image, of whom only 5% feel very negatively.

The Candidate Countries Eurobarometer did not find any country in which the majority view of the EU is negative. Between the three countries with the lowest percentage of positive image is the Czech Republic (45% positive image, and 22% negative image, one of the highest negative score).

6.3. Meaning of European Union

What EU membership will have brought for its citizens 10 years from now

When presented with a list of benefits that EU membership may bring over the next 10 years, people in the candidate countries agree that it will be much easier to move around the member states (66%), the quality of life will be better for most people (66%), and there will be a single currency, the euro (58%). The 2004 members mentioned the same things in a different order, as they are much more likely to expect freedom of movement (74%) and the introduction of the euro (69%).

A bit more than half agree that EU membership will have brought more job opportunities (53%), about four in 10 count on less discrimination (40%) and more equality between men and women (41%) over the next 10 years.

Less than third of the CC-13 think there will be more difficulty in making decisions (28%), more social problems (17%) and higher unemployment (16%) in 10 years. Only a very small minority believes that the EU will be scrapped in a decade (2%).

So, there are more positive prospective views than negative.

7. THE FUTURE:

7.1 Fears related to the building of Europe

In another set of questions\(^9\), the Candidate Countries Eurobarometer tested the prevalence of several common fears related to the building of the EU, in order to measure the extent to which the public is concerned about the ongoing process of European integration.

People in the candidate countries are most likely to fear that the building of Europe will lead to increased drug trafficking and international organized crime, that the accession will cost their country too much money and, will mean more difficulties for farmers.

For the Czech Republic, the three most widespread fears connected to the building of Europe are more or less the same: Problems for farmers (66%), accession expensive (66%), and transferred jobs (57%).

Looking at the “average fear level” in each candidate country, the average percentage of respondents saying they are currently afraid of things related to building Europe is the highest in the Czech republic (47%), followed by Estonia (47%), and by far the lowest in Bulgaria (26%) and Romania (26%).

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\(^8\) Question: In general, does the European Union conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative, or very negative image?

\(^9\) Question: Some people may have fears about the building of Europe, the European Union. Here is a list of things that some people say they are afraid of. For each one, please tell me if you -personally- are currently afraid of it, or not?
7.2 The European Union in the coming years
The expected and desired role of the European Union in five year’s time

Almost one half of people living in the candidate region believe that in five years’ time, the EU will play a more important role in their daily life, 27% believe it will play the same role, and only 13% believe it will play a less important role.

Country-by-country analyses reveal that there is an opposite dynamic behind this steady regional average. In seven of the 13 candidates countries, respondents expect the EU to have a greater role in their lives for the next five years. The Czechs are the last in the line (only 36% of them expect a better daily life in five years).

When we look at the role that CC citizens would like the European Union to play in their daily life in five years’ time, in general, more than half of the population want the EU to play a more important role in their lives. One of the exceptions to this trend is the Czech Republic (41%, one of the lowest scores). However, there is no country in the candidate region where those who want the EU to play a less important role outnumber those who desire the same or a more important role.

CONCLUSIONS

We have seen how the Czech Republic is one of the Candidate countries with less interest, with less knowledge, with more negative views, and with more fears about the EU between the countries that will be part of the EU in this year 2004.

It is taken for granted that the Czechs are to join the EU and that they will enjoy the benefits and will overcome the challenges. It is taken for granted that there is no other option than to join the EU. But for the Czechs the crucial question is not how to cope with the challenges, but whether to join.

We have solid grounds to think that the preparation process, under way, involves serious problems and institutional barriers which to some extent will limit the ability of the Czech Republic and its citizens to benefit from EU membership in a comparable way to other countries. The discussed problems will seriously damage their ability to use as much as possible from the accession and membership for development of the country and quality of life of its citizens. Awareness and correction of these risks and active removal of barriers are required and they are worthy of deeper consideration, debate and, above all, decisive measures. Attract interest for higher efficiency and effectiveness of the approximation process and EU membership itself, this will require changed political behaviour and approach, particularly of central authorities. Concerning quality of the preparation process and entry in the EU, any citizen depends on competence, diligence and abilities of policy makers to “finalise” their tasks regarding interests of the country and life quality in the country. Therefore we speak about “an expertise” (policy paper) treating the change of politics and political behaviour, not about an analytical study.

Because the preparation process is reduced to the central level of public administration, the role of regional and local self-administration is undervalued. These levels of public administration have not been adequately involved in the process. But just these levels will bear the main responsibility for the actual implementation of the new, harmonised legislation in all relevant areas of public administration. Analyses results show, however, that most institutions and organisations at the regional and community level lack integrated and specific information about changes that will occur in their area of activity because of practical implementation of EU standards and EU membership. Towns and communities, agrarian and industrial enterprises, NGOs and lower tiers of public administration are lacking clear perspective, some “scene ready for battle”, and there is a big challenge, and we hope they will be able to exceed it.

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