

Divergent Discourses on Social Rights in the Czech Republic, in the EU

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Content of the presentation

- *Nature of communication in public spaces (National and European)*
- *Universal social rights as criteria for policy making*
- *Divergent discourses on social rights at national level (Case: the Czech Republic)*
- *Divergent discourses on social rights at EU level*
- *Core task: to build spaces for effective public dialogues*

Communication in public spaces

- ***Who has ever seen the European public space?***
 - “Has public discourse in fact Europeanized in the last decades? (...) Our results show that national public spheres are in fact quite resilient and that change is slow or halting. (...) The legitimacy of European institutions depends on **Europeanization of public discourse.**”
[Peters – Sifft – Wimmel – Brüggemann – Kleinen-von Königslöw 2005:139]
- ***Most discourses take place at national level***
- ***The fuzzy nature of communication***
 - *There co-exists a dialogic with (increasingly relevant) non-dialogic form of communication, transmitted by media, and independent of physical location: ‘Mediated publicness’ and ‘the space of the visible’.*
[Thompson 2004:195]
- ***The media represent a crucial communication environment shaping the content and quality of communication in public spaces.***
 - *What interests could influence ‘the rules of the communication game’?*

Universal social rights as criteria for policy making

- *UN Declaration on Universal Human Rights (1945)*
- *European Union*
 - 1989 Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers*
 - 1992 Maastricht Treaty with its Annex – Agreement on Social Policy*
 - 1997 Amsterdam Treaty incorporated Agreement on Social Policy into its main body; Open Method of Coordination launched*
 - 2000 Lisbon Strategy*
 - 2010 Lisbon Treaty with its Charter of Fundamental Rights and Basic Freedoms*
- *Czech Republic*
 - 1992 Declaration of Basic Human Rights and Liberties incorporated into the Czech Constitution as a part of the constitutional order, many of them are social rights.*
 - 2002 Czech Republic agrees to accept and implement the EU Lisbon strategy (as part of its preparation to join the EU)*
 - 2009 Czech President and Government decided to exclude the binding power of the Lisbon Treaty's Charter of Fundamental Rights and Basic Freedoms of the European Union for the Czech Republic*

Diverging discourses about social rights at national level (Czech Rep.)

- **Academic discourses:** *Social Doctrine of the Czech Republic (2002) vs. neoliberal view*
- **Administrative Discourses:** *National Action Plan on Social Inclusion (2004-2006)*
- **Political Discourses:** *Coalition Agreement and Programme Declaration of the Czech government (2007, 2010)*
- **Civic Discourses:** *'We are citizens' (2007), ProAlt (2010)*
- **Media?**

Academic Discourse: Social Doctrine of the Czech Republic (2002)

⑩ *Academic initiative, aiming to make discourse about the future orientation of Czech social policy more programmatic, sensitive to long-term consequences of present decisions, and involving other actors (apart from top civil servants and politicians)*

⑩ *Its declared functions:*

- *Orientation function*
- *Function of building up and maintaining a national consensus*
- *Stabilization function*
- *Function of social mobilization*
- *Function of a guarantee to maintain a permanent orientation at alleviating social injustice*

Social rights – a backbone of the Czech Social Doctrine

- *Right to work*
- *Right to satisfactory working conditions*
- *Right to reasonable subsistence level*
- *Right to health*
- *Right to family*
- *Right to social security*
- *Right to free association*
- *Right to education*

The fate of the Czech Social Doctrine; concurring discourses

- *The media discourse was dominated by the neoliberal view of an ... inefficient, cumbersome, wasteful Welfare State...*
- *The Czech coalition agreement between the Social Democrats, Christian Democrats and a small liberal party, that made it possible to the 2002 government to get to power, explicitly mentioned the Czech Social Doctrine as one of its programmatic guidelines, and envisaged further discussion among coalition parties about it. But there was no follow-up (despite urgency call from academic circles): no discussions or political decisions stemming from it.*
- *Thus the academic discourse matched neither with the political discourse nor with the media coverage...*

Administrative Discourse: National Action Plans on Social Inclusion

- *National Action Plan on Social Inclusion – NAPSI (2004-2006) ensued from the Joint Memorandum on Social Inclusion of the Czech Republic (2004), a joint document of the Czech Government and the European Commission adopted in December 2003. In accordance with this Memorandum, the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion should project the common goals in fighting poverty and social exclusion into the national policies and programs. The document sums up other valid and prepared policies, action plans, strategies, programmes and governmental decrees that have some relevance to the issue of social inclusion. The soft spot of the document is **the lack of explicit goals, a poorly defined responsibility for implementation, and missing links to the budgetary process.** Significantly, the Ministry of Finance did not participate in the preparation of this document.*
- *National Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion - NSSPSIs (2006-2008, 2008-2010) did not deviate from the course set out in the first Action Plan, resigning namely to the use of the concept of social rights as a key prioritizing criterion for policy making.*

Quantified targets in the NAPSIs of the new EU Member States

Country	Direct outcome targets:				Indirect outcome targets (e.g. boosting employment or reducing the number of persons dependent on social benefits etc.)	Input targets (e.g. boosting help to the homeless, immigrant integration etc.)
	Income/ deprivation	Long-term unemployment/ employment of vulnerable groups	Education	Health		
Cyprus						
Czech Republic					+	
Estonia	+	+	+	+	+	+
Hungary		+	+	+	+	+
Latvia					+	+
Lithuania	+	+			+	+
Malta		+	+		+	
Poland	+	+	+	+	+	+
Slovakia					+	+
Slovenia		+	+		+	+

Source: Report (2005), p. 40.

Administrative Discourse: EU-stipulated strategic documents

Criteria	NAPSI 2004- 2006	NSSPSI 2006- 2008	NSSPSI 2008- 2010
National political support	+	-	-
Matching content and methodological standards	-	-	-
Sufficient institutional framework of strategic management	-	-	-

The manner of processing the Czech National Action Plan on Social Inclusion 2004-2006 reflected the home and foreign policy priorities of the then Czech government. It was an integral part of its effort to successfully enter the EU. However, it was prepared and realized within a public administration system that was neither prepared nor equipped for efficient application of the strategic dimension of management. (Potůček 2007)

Political Discourse: Governmental Programmes

- *After many months of difficult negotiations after the June 2006 general election, a **Czech government** was formed and came into power in **January 2007**. Its two fresh political documents: the coalition agreement between Civic Democrats, Christian Democrats and the Green Party, and the Programme Declaration of the Government, presented to Parliament:*
 - **do not include** any mention of social rights, social justice, social cohesion, the Welfare State, or even the EU Lisbon Strategy;
 - **do include** formulations as: unbelievable increase (even “an explosion”) of social expenditures in the past, excessive tax burden, abundant bureaucratic burden, inappropriately high level of regulation, lowering of some social benefits, and reduction of social and health insurance contributions (explicitly for entrepreneurs).
 - **do mention** respect for human rights, including those of minorities and vulnerable groups. They plan to establish “...an agency that will secure complex services to prevent social exclusion and its eradication and made the use of social support more effective and free from misuse.”
- ***The new government, established after 2010 general election, followed suit, with even more emphasis on cutting social expenditures - with the apparent paradigmatic proximity with neoliberal ideology, coupled with negligence of social rights.** One of its famous official slogans states:*
*„It is well known,
that it is only the commercial sector
which generates the wealth of the nation.“*

Civic Discourses: initiative 'We are Citizens' (2007)

- *The civic initiative „We are Citizens“ was made public in January 2007 (exactly thirty years after famous dissent Charter 77), and called attention to discrepancies between democratic ideals included in the Czech Constitution and real practices that are ever more frequently shaped by neoliberal doctrines:*
 - *There is less and less space for public discourse concerning key societal problems;*
 - *Human rights of ethnic minorities and migrants are neglected;*
 - *The Czech Republic is the only EU Member State that has not yet incorporated EU anti-discriminatory regulation No. 78/2000 into its labour law;*
 - *Women, young and handicapped people, and people above 50 are discriminated against;*
 - *Many people (e.g. homeless) live in material deprivation that is beyond the conditions of human dignity secured by the Czech Constitution, and are deprived of appropriate support.*

Civic discourses: initiative ProAlt (2010)

- *It started to operate in the Czech public space with the following **preamble in its Manifesto**: „They call it a “government of fiscal responsibility,” but they are actually implementing policies that are irresponsible to nature and to society. It is incumbent upon us, the citizens, to take responsibility back. We shall therefore raise our voices in protest, and stimulate a broad discussion of alternatives. We will galvanize public action to show that society cannot be left out of economic calculations and political strategies.“*
- *It calls itself **Initiative for Critique of Reform Measures and Supporting Alternatives**. „Society cannot be cut out.“ Unlike the previous initiative, it has been able to gain a broader public support. It gets full use of ICT. Some of its actions and representatives have been noticed even by mainstream media.*

Diverging discourses about social rights at the EU level

- *The European Union does not speak in a single voice to its members:*
- *One of its two Janus faces speaks about further trade liberalization (including the services of general interest), fiscal discipline, flexible labour market, the need to make the **European economy the most competitive in the world...** whereas the **EU's other Janus face** speaks about social justice, **social rights**, fight against poverty and social exclusion, and nurtures its own child - **the European Social Model.***
- *The original 2000 Lisbon Strategy (as amended in 2001) tried to conceptualise sustainable development as consisting of three equal pillars: economic, social and environmental. The 2005 European Commission redefined the Lisbon Strategy by prioritising economic growth, education, research and development, and fighting unemployment. [We learnt that dialectics in the period of Communism: all (people, pillars) are definitely equal, but, at the same time, some (people, pillars) are more equal...]*
- *The Europe 2020 Strategy (as passed in 2010) stressed even more the priority of economic growth: it wants „**the EU to become a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy** through high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion.“*

Core task: Building spaces for effective public dialogues

- *There are obvious obstacles in nurturing public discourses on social rights (and other relevant societal issues) at the national and EU levels:*
 - *Differentiated, often sharply conflicting economic, social, institutional, and national interests;*
 - *Different modes of communication in academic, administrative, political, civic, and media discourses;*
 - *Underdeveloped and fragmented European public space.*
- *Tasks ahead:*
 - *How to cross borders between particular discourses (e.g. between ‘economic liberalization’ and the ‘social justice’ discourse)?*
 - *How to encourage “twin” discourses: political-administrative; academic-political; political-civic, academic-civic, etc.*
 - *What are the appropriate languages and modes of communication fit for cross-border dialogue?*
 - *How to engage the media in the realization of the above-mentioned tasks?*
- *More questions than answers...*

Resources

- *Jsme občané. (We are Citizens, in Czech) 2007.* See www.jsmeobcane.eu
- *National Action Plan on Social Inclusion 2004-2006. (2005) Prague, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.* http://www.mpsv.cz/files/clanky/1103/NAPSI_eng.pdf
- *Peters, B., Sifft, S., Wimmel, A., Brüggemann, M., Kleinen-von Königslöw, K.: National and transnational public spheres: the case of the EU. European review, Vol. 13, Supp. No. 1, 2005, pp. 139-160.*
- *Potůček, M.: Czech National Action Plan on Social Inclusion 2004-2006: Did it Matter? Paper prepared for the conference "Changing European Employment and Welfare Regimes. The Impact of the Open Method of Coordination on National Labour Market and Welfare Reforms". University of Bamberg, February 23 and 24, 2007.*
- *ProAlt. 2010.* See www.proalt.cz
- *Programme Declaration of the Government. Prague, Office of the Government 2007.* See <http://www.vlada.cz/scripts/detail.php?id=20832>
- *Report on Social Inclusion. An Analysis of the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (2004-2006) submitted by the 10 new Member States. (2005) Brussels: European Commission, Commission Staff Working Paper, SEC(2004)256.* http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/docs/sec256printed_en.pdf
- *Sociální doktrína České republiky. (Social Doctrine of the Czech Republic, in Czech.) Sociální politika, 2002, No.1-2, pp. 7-11. Available in English at* <http://martinpotucek.cz/download/socialdoctrine.pdf>
- *Thompson, J.B.: Média a modernita. Sociální teorie médií. Praha, Karolinum 2004. (In English: The Media and Modernity. A Social Theory of the Media. Oxford, Polity Press and Blackwell, 1995.)*