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PARTY OF FREE CITIZENS AND THE GENESIS OF THE CZECH LIBERAL-CONSERVATIVE “ANTI-EU” STREAM IN CZECH POLITICS¹

Ladislav Cabada*

ABSTRACT

Euroscepticism became one of the prominent themes of political actors' research in the last decades based on the strengthening position of Eurosceptic parties within the EU and national political arenas. Such development was further strengthened by the EU-enlargement in 1995, 2004 and 2007 and also with the recent development (global and European financial crisis, migration crisis). The aim of the article is to analyse the development and programme standpoint of the Czech liberal-conservative political stream. We use the concept of Euroscepticism, presented in the works of Szczerbiak and Taggart, and Kopecký and Mudde as the theoretical framework, and develop this concept based on Petr Kaniok's new typology. In the first part of our analysis we discuss the development of the Eurosceptic faction within the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), and changes in the party's position towards the EU. We also understand the Eurosceptic faction within the ODS, with Václav Klaus as its supporter and think tanks related to him, as the incubator for the establishment of the Party of Free Citizens (SSO) in 2009. In the second part of the analysis we focus on the party's programme and its position within the European political arena. Our analysis also includes a discussion about most visible proclamations of the party leaders, against the EU and the European integration process. Our analysis is framed with the general debate about the liberal-conservative party family and its development at the EU level.

Key words: Party of Free Citizens; Euroscepticism; Eurogovernmentalism; anti-EU parties; Conservatives and Reformists Group; Civic Democratic Party; Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy

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Introduction

The Czech Republic is among the countries often understood as “problematic” within the institutional framework of and ideological debate about the prospects of European integration. As, for example, the “contrastive” analysis of the Czech and Slovenian EU presidencies showed, the Czech Republic might be understood as a “foot-dragger” and “trouble-maker” within the EU (cf. Drulák – Šabić et al., 2010). Similarly, Kaniok (2014, p. 1) assumes that “the Czech Republic is by many commentators, politicians, but also political scientists considered one of the most Eurosceptic in the contemporary EU. Partly, such opinion is grounded in the behaviour of some leading Czech politicians, as **Václav Klaus** was, partly in the positions of some most influential political parties, such as the Civic Democratic Party (*Občanská demokratická strana*, ODS) and related behaviour of Czech governments”.

Naturally, the continually deepening “anti-EU” position of **Klaus**, former chairman of the ODS (1991-2002) and former Czech President (2003-2013), as well as his contacts and common position with the Irish Eurosceptic **Declan Ganley**, his provocative equations of the EU with the Soviet Union, and other similar steps, contributed to the Czech Republic’s Eurosceptic label. As well as **Klaus**, two important think tanks should also be mentioned and included in the analysis of Czech Euroscepticism. These are the Centre for Economics and Politics (*Centrum pro ekonomiku a politiku*, CEP) and also the Institute of Václav Klaus (*Institut Václava Klause*, IVK), both directly connected with Klaus.

We may mention, too, some Czech political parties as the most important Eurosceptic players alongside those mentioned above. Analysing the issue in long-term perspective, the ODS should be mentioned in the first place, and above all its Eurosceptic – or in its own words “Eurorealist” – faction. Basically, it was the ODS that started to build up the Eurosceptic image of Czech politics within the European Parliament; its contribution to the establishment of the European Conservative and Reformist group within the EP after the 2009 elections will be analysed deeply in the first part of our contribution. Next to this permanent “trouble-maker”, the conservative and nostalgic ultra-left Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (*Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy*, KSČM), which has been in the EP continually since 2004, should also be mentioned in this context. However, we decided to limit our analysis, for reasons that will be mentioned later, to only the liberal-conservative Eurosceptic stream of Czech politics, and so the KSČM is not included in the analysis.

As regards the general framework for our analysis, we should not forget the activities of the representatives of political movement “Independents” in the EP in the 2004-2009 electoral period. Last but not least, we should mention **Petr Mach**, the chairman of the “new” ultra-liberal and anti-EU Party of Free Citizens (*Strana svobodných občanů*, SSO), which contributed to the establishment of the strongly Eurosceptic faction Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy. Mach was the only SSO MEP after the 2014 elections, and in the first year in his role he presented himself as a provocative, anti-EU politician, bringing with him provocative analysis of the prospects for Ukraine and so on.

We believe that the analysis of development of the SSO and its position within the Czech and European political debate presents an important step towards better understanding of the development and personal and ideological background of Czech Euroscepticism. Our analysis consists of two main parts. In the first part we present and discuss the development of the Eurosceptic stream of Czech liberal-conservative politics within the Civic Democratic Party and in direct connection with **Klaus**. The analysis also includes a discussion about the important personal and programme changes that moved (part of) the ODS from a pro-EU stance to a reserved “Eurorealist” position. In the second part we present and analyse the establishment, programme and practical political steps of Party of Free Citizens. In this part we will pay specific attention to the activities of the party at the European level, that is, to **Mach**’s proclamations and stated goals. Indeed, the first and second part of the analysis create a coherent unit, as many important individual players might be observed in both, the ODS and the SSO, and related think tanks. While **Klaus** and **Mach** are the most important players, the mutual ties between the (former) anti-EU faction within the ODS and the new anti-EU party SSO will be presented as deeply rooted and long-term. It is precisely the analysis of the continuation of this personal and programme interconnectedness that will prove or disprove our main thesis.

We use academic books and articles, analytical materials, and party programme documents as our main source material. For the first part, devoted to the dominant player in Czech (right wing) politics after November 1989, there is sufficient academic material available. The SSO, though, is a new player, so far irrelevant in the domestic political arena, and therefore not subject of such comprehensive research. On that account we will use as the main sources for the second part of our article the party’s official documents, media announcements by its officials, and similar public sources.

1 Operationalisation of General Terms

As regards terminology, there is not enough space in this article to develop operationalisation of the plethora of terms that are related with the issue. We consider “Eurosceptic” to be the most complicated term, so we will try to discuss at least this, and to present a more precise typology of “Euroscepticism” in this brief introduction.

For our analysis we will use the terminology presented by the Czech political scientist Petr Kaniok (cf. 2005, 2006, and 2014). Kaniok does not accept the label “Eurosceptic” for all political players who criticise the contemporary development of European integration. In his opinion, there should be differentiation between two basic groups of such critics. On one hand, we have those who reject only the contemporary manner of European integration, and would propose a different approach (to simplify, these players criticise the transnational and pro-federal development of European integration and would suggest a return to a more, or purely, intergovernmental nature of integration), while on the other hand, extremely Eurosceptic players understand the process of European integration as defective and suggest its termination. To describe the first group, Kaniok introduces the term “Eurogovernmentalists”, and for the later he uses the label “Eurosceptic”.² In the presented typology, the term Eurogovernmentalist might be more or less equivalent to the term “soft Euroscepticism”, and the term “Eurosceptic” with the term “hard Euroscepticism” as we might find these terms used in the typologies of Kopecký and Mudde (2002) or Szczerbiak and Taggart (2003). Kaniok promotes the thesis that so-called “soft Euroscepticism” – in his terminology Eurogovernmentalism – should be recognised as an alternative stream promoting a different form of integration, but which does not reject the project of European cooperation as such (Kaniok, 2006, p. 7). Fiala, Mareš, and Sokol (2007, p. 183), using Kaniok’s typology, propose the use of the term “anti-EU”, instead of the imprecise, journalistic and “labelling” term “Eurosceptic”.

Furthermore, Kaniok distinguishes between Euroscepticism as a strategy and Euroscepticism as a tenet (Kaniok, 2006, p. 35). Such differentiation seems to us very useful. We assume that we could basically differentiate between the ODS and the SSO, labelling the first as (partly) strategically Eurosceptic

² We should add a third type of player in Kaniok’s typology. We have in mind those who “fully” support the contemporary general course of European integration, whom Kaniok labels as “Europeanists”.

(Eurogovernmentalist) and the second as Eurosceptic by principle.

As well as political Euroscepticism, Kaniok also discusses the economic version. As he shows, “there exist narrow ties between the economic and political-philosophical critics, primarily of conservative character. Namely, the economic critic is in significant measure the critic of the project of common currency. The conservative-liberal critics of the EU understand the sovereignty of currency as one of the basic attributes of a liberal political regime (Kaniok, 2006, pp. 23-24). In our analysis we will also develop this dimension of Euroscepticism, showing the interconnectedness of **Mach** both as a critic of European integration from the economic position, and as a politician developing a broader (ultra) liberal critique of the European integration process.

The next section reflects on the development of the Czech liberal-conservative political stream after November 1989, beginning with the Civic Democratic Party as the pivotal player in this section of the party-political system.

2 Development of the Liberal-Conservative Party-Political Stream in the Czech Republic – from a Pro-European Position towards Eurorealism

There is no doubt that the development of the Czech right wing political camp and liberal-conservative political stream is deeply interconnected with the establishment, development and activities of the Civic Democratic Party (ODS). The party was established within the process of the disintegration of Civic Forum (*Občanské forum*, OF), the ideologically unclear anti-communist movement and main player of the first transitive period after November 1989. The OF won a clear majority in the initial democratic elections in May 1990, and formed both the Czechoslovak (federal) and Czech governments as coalitions of anti-communist powers. Nevertheless, the nature of the OF as a horizontal political party without clear membership or leadership – the formal leader was President **Václav Havel**, and the party was organised by the Coordination Committee and permanent party Congress – did not allow it to proceed in the same manner after this period. At the OF congress in October 1990, **Klaus**, representative of the *Interparliamentary Club of the Democratic Right*, one of many intra-party factions, became the first and also the last chairman. **Klaus** tried to change the OF into a liberal-conservative political party. As the attempt failed, he established on the remains of the OF a new political party – the Civic

Democratic Party (cf. Pšejja, 2005; Šanc, 2005; Vodička – Cabada, 2011).³

Since the very beginning of its existence, the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) was built around **Klaus** as its dominant leader. He was strongly influenced by the political and economic behaviour of British Conservatives and of **Margaret Thatcher** herself. In his speeches and texts, **Thatcher** is often mentioned as a “bearer”, while for **Thatcher** and Western conservatives **Klaus** became, in the first half of the 1990s, the most promising pupil in Central and Eastern Europe. **Klaus**, surrounded by a group of other economists originating often from the Prognostic Institute at the Czechoslovak academy of Sciences, strongly favoured the economic aspect of transition over the others (legal, societal, and so on), and despite many deficiencies he implemented successfully the “shock therapy” that gave the Czech Republic the basics of a liberal economy (cf. Večerník – Matějů, eds., 1999).⁴

As a “one-dimensional man”, **Klaus** concentrated all his powers on the economic framework of transition. In the first year of Czech independence he did not develop a clear “foreign” dimension for the party’s programme. Thus, he basically accepted EU membership as the only conceivable solution for the Czech Republic. The ODS also strongly supported Czech NATO membership. On the other hand, **Klaus** rebuffed attempts at deeper political cooperation within the Central European region (the Visegrád group), preferring only economic cooperation on the basis of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA); such position is fully coherent with **Klaus’** repeatedly declared prioritisation or economic integration above all other types of cooperation.

Analysing the position of the ODS towards economic integration, Krutílek and Kuchyňková (2006) clearly show that it changed rapidly after the party left government in December 1997. Being the strongest coalition party in 1992-1997, the ODS “unconditionally supported” the integration of the Czech Republic into the EC

³ As the second heir and successor to OF, the Civic Movement (*Občanské hnutí*, OH) should be mentioned. OH developed as social-liberal movement, but after its failure in the 1992 parliamentary elections the members dispersed to other parties, above all towards the Czech Social Democratic Party under the new leader **Miloš Zeman**.

⁴ Klaus often defined his main goal as “liberal market economy”, opposing the “continental”/“German” concept of social-market economy and attempting to follow British/Anglo-Saxon models. On the other hand, liberal rhetoric was in some cases not accompanied by acts. For example, in his eight years as federal minister of finance (1990-1992) and prime minister (1992-1997) he did not take necessary steps towards the privatisation of the banking sector. Some observers define such behaviour as liberal-national, and the system as “private recombined ownership” (cf. Mlčoch, 1998).

and the EU. Nevertheless, by 1995 the party had already started to operate with “sovereignty” and “national interest” as key terms in its programme. The programme from 1995 criticised the EU for unity without a “higher idea”, and favouring enlargement before the deepening of integration (Krutílek – Kuchyňková, 2006, pp. 159-163). The ODS explicitly rejected the federalisation of Europe and, as an alternative, proposed a Europe of nation states and “intergovernmentalism” (Jirsová, 2002, p. 30; Cabada – Waisová, 2004).

In our opinion, the ODS vice-chairman and foreign minister, **Josef Zieleniec**, who was also **Klaus**’ strongest internal opponent, played a very important role in the party’s change. In 1997 he resigned from the government and party leadership, and later he had a strong influence on the establishment of an internal faction that created, in January 1998, the basis for a new party – the Freedom Union (*Unie svobody*, US) (Šanc, 2005, pp. 186-187). The “Christian” group within the party, led by **Ivan Pilip**, also played an important role in this process.⁵

Once **Zieleniec** and the generally more pro-European grouping left the party, the ODS developed towards a Eurosceptic position and became a “secular” conservative party. In 1998 the ODS declared that the Czech Republic had to be “realistic, and not naive towards European integration” (Krutílek – Kuchyňková, 2006, p. 165). In the election programme presented by the ODS for the extraordinary parliamentary elections in 1998, the theme of national interest is accentuated, as reflected in the title of the foreign affairs chapter, which was headed “We defend the national interest. Yes for integration, not for dissolving”. The party also moved towards a more nationalist position.⁶

In 1999 the ODS, and above all **Jan Zahradil**, the foreign minister in the ODS shadow government, created the document “Foreign policy: National interests in the

⁵ In 1995, the ODS merged with the small Christian Democratic Party, presenting this as the first step towards the creation of a Czech “CDU”. We can see **Zieleniec**’s influence behind this move, for he opposed “dogmatic” **Klaus** with a programme of “taking a broad stance towards the centre”.

⁶ Naturally this is not the only possible system of labelling. Some authors say that, in spite of concrete rhetoric, the ODS is not a nationalist party. This can be shown in the programme and other documents. P. Pšeja says that the ODS understands “nation” in terms of the Anglo-Saxon nation state, and is in fact talking about state interests (Pšeja, 1999, p. 74). Nevertheless, in our opinion, there exist, or existed in the ODS influential groups that were/are close to nationalist positions. We could cite a good example from the election campaign in 1998 – when ODS used billboards with the map of the Czech Republic coloured yellow colour; places behind the border were coloured black. On the billboard was written “The ODS is defending the national interests”. In our opinion this kind of symbolism gives a very clear message to the voters that behind the border only menace could be expected (cf. Cabada, 2000, p. 127).

real world". In this document, the ODS criticised the development towards a more supranational EU and defended the sovereignty of nation states. It promoted intergovernmentalism and the power of veto for each EU Member State. The concept of a Common Security and Foreign Policy was strongly criticised too, as it was said to diminish cooperation within NATO (Krutílek – Kuchyňková, 2006, pp. 166-167). As we see, the national interest is identified again with foreign affairs. In the document, we observe that the ODS wished to orientate primarily on the economic aspect of European integration, while political integration was to be limited. For the ODS, the national interest was primarily about economic welfare – the party was enthusiastic about economic integration and the common internal EU market, which was required in order to dispose of protectionism and "socialist" tendencies. The ODS stressed the necessity of connecting the EU with the NAFTA, which should express the significance of Europe in Euro-American civilisation. The NAFTA is primarily an economic organisation, which shows again that the ODS was not a supporter of political integration.

As regards the position of the ODS towards the EU and the European integration process, the *Manifesto of Czech Eurorealism*, presented in April 2001, is required reading as a groundbreaking document offering an understanding of the "point of no return".⁷ The document "expressed the main deficiencies of the EU, such as the democratic deficit, the increasing amount of *acquis communautaire*, and lobby and corporate pressures. The manifesto rejected federalist or supranational institutions and suggested that the Czech Republic should clearly prefer intergovernmental functioning. The argument was that what was necessary was a bottom-up process stemming from the European nations and citizens represented by their parliaments and governments, instead of the European bureaucratic elites" (Matějková, 2010, pp. 62-63).

Zahradil was the main author of *Manifesto*. For our analysis it is also important that among the four authors was **Miloslav Bednář**, one of the later founders and vice-chairman of the Party of Free Citizens. Although the term "Czech national interests" is not defined in the document, *Manifesto* is constantly informed by it. The authors see Czech national interests as, for example, the validity of former president **Edvard Beneš'** decrees, quick and full membership of the common EU market, revision of the Nice Treaty (more seats for the Czech deputies in the European

⁷ *Manifest českého eurorealismu*, available at http://www.zahradil.eu/assets/files/publikace/manifest_eurorealismu.pdf, accessed 10 March 2015.

Parliament), and more. The authors assert that the EU is a German project, and reject the fiscal union as a step towards the creation of a European federation.⁸ The only thinkable European security structure for the ODS is NATO.

The *Manifesto of Czech Eurorealism* was not ratified as the official party document, but in the rhetoric of the ODS representatives we could observe that, in the party, it has quiet a strong influence. In our opinion, *Manifesto* created pre-conditions for the establishment of a Eurosceptic and partly anti-EU faction⁹ within the ODS.

3 ODS and the Czech Eurosceptic Stream within the European Party System¹⁰

Naturally, the development within the ODS, and more generally within the Czech Eurosceptic stream, has to be analysed in the context of the development of the European party system after the introduction of direct voting to the EP. As we showed, the ODS tried to change itself from a “secular” liberal-conservative party into a more centrist right wing formation with a Christian basis. This attempt did not succeed, and after 1998 the conservative approach was even strengthened. What is more, the ODS joined the already existing group of conservative parties that criticised the “perpetual pro-federal” coalition of Social and Christian Democrats within the EP.

Let us briefly mention that the programme collisions within the European People’s Party (EPP) between the Christian-Democratic and conservative parties and party families could already be observed in the 1980s, and that in the first half of 1990s the EPP started to exclude some parties critical of the development trajectory of the European integration project.¹¹ Nevertheless, the main ideological disputes between the EPP and the international formation of

⁸ Later we will also see this anti-German position in the SSO programme.

⁹ Kaniok (2006, pp. 84-85) as well as Fiala, Mareš and Sokol (2007) present as a specific type of party Euroscepticism the “Eurosceptic faction”, inside the mainstream party, appealing to a specific electoral group. In their opinion the ODS might be understood as such a party, as could the British Conservative Party and Polish Law and Justice. Kaniok places these parties under the umbrella of “Eurogovernmentalism”.

¹⁰ Some parts of this section are based on the article “Central European Political Parties Role in Establishment and Operation of European Conservatives and Reformists Group,” (Cabada, 2011).

¹¹ In the 1990s, Portugal’s Democratic and Social Centre (*Centro Democrático e Social*, CDP) (1993) and The Basque Nationalist Party (*Euzko Alderdi Jeltzalea*, EAJ) (1999) were excluded from the EPP due to their critical attitudes towards European integration (Fiala – Mareš – Sokol, 2007, pp. 25-30).

conservative parties, the European Democratic Union (EDU), were resolved at the beginning of the 1990s, as indicated by their institutional integration within the European Parliament group EPP-ED (1999 and 2004). A number of conservative entities, however, kept their distance from this faction, and some later took part in the creation of the EP group Alliance for the Europe of Nations, with clear ties to the Union for Europe of the Nations. Rather strong tendencies also existed within the ED group to create an independent conservative group, or European political party, and it should be noted that the United Kingdom's Conservative Party played a key role in these talks. The fact that the British Conservatives were drawn to the idea of an independent conservative group within the European Parliament was significantly strengthened with **David Cameron's** election as party leader in 2005 (Fiala – Mareš – Sokol, 2007, pp. 51-61; Cabada, 2011, pp. 8-9).

Conservative political parties established themselves in contemporary Europe to the right of the Christian-oriented entities and to the left of the right wing radicals and far right extremists. The inclination of some conservative political parties to cooperate with Christian-Democratic centrists within the EDU and EP group, the EPP-ED, as their logical counterparts, called for the search for an alliance with subjects even more right-oriented than their own conservative family. More important for our analysis is the observation, that the cooperation of conservatives with the right wing radicals, usually offering a mixture of anti-European and nationalist rhetoric (Fiala – Mareš – Sokol, 2007, p. 59) normally indicate these parties as “principally moderately neo-populist” was perceived as very negative by the Euro-optimistic groups (dominantly by the Christian Democrats, along with the Socialists) in the framework of ideological debate. In our opinion, ODS too, as well as many other right-wing political parties from Central and Eastern Europe, were searching for their position within this already ongoing debate. Furthermore, this debate was accelerated with the quick changes to the institutional framework of the EC and EU.

We believe that the Alliance for the Europe of the Nations should be mentioned as a radical group of conservative and populist entities openly expressing disagreement with the dominance of a supranational paradigm within the EU. This disagreement was expressed from a conservative-nationalist, and, naturally, a populist rhetorical platform. This group is important for our analysis because, up to a certain level, it served as an incubator for the development and creation of a conservative group in the EP; Poland's Law and

Justice and Latvia's For Fatherland and Freedom / The Latvian National Conservative Party can be found among its members after 2004. Some other conservative parties, which criticised the way that Christian-Democratic parties enforced supranational principles within the EU, decided in the end to operate within the EPP-ED group in the EP during the election period 2004-2009.¹² They were looking for a platform to found their own conservative Eurorealist group. Three political parties with a strong position in the national political arena played a key role in this search. They were Great Britain's Conservatives, Poland's Law and Justice, and last but not least the Czech ODS (Cabada, 2011, pp. 9-10).

In our opinion, the internal debates within the EPP-ED group led to the logical result that the "pure" Christian-Democratic parties have moved more to occupy centre and supranational positions during the last two decades, while the group of conservative parties moved, or returned, to the right and placed themselves between the EPP and the radical/extreme right that usually uses anti-EU rhetoric. If the creation of the EP group Alliance for the Europe of the Nations after the 1999 elections could be considered as the separation of "anti-European", populist right wing radical parties, which did not play a key role in domestic politics, then the approaching enlargement of the EU to take in Central and Eastern Europe presented a rather different picture.

It was the Czech Republic's Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and Poland's Law and Justice (PiS) that clearly stated in their programmes, rhetoric and alliance preferences their lack of excitement over the idea of inclusion in an EPP controlled by federalist Christian Democrats. Both parties perceived the British's Conservatives as a key partner, and the Conservatives, pushed to the edge by the Christian Democrats bearing the stigma of "Euro scepticism", found in both these strong national parties key partners for a more organised critique of strengthening the supranational paradigm within the integration process, stretching beyond the borders of one state.

In July 2003, in connection with the preparations of the Central and Eastern European countries to join the EU, the Conservatives, the ODS and PiS issued a common declaration of their shared interest in promoting a Eurorealist policy;

¹² Let us add that, despite the conservative, Eurorealist – or, using more critical vocabulary, Eurosceptic – political parties led by the UK's Conservatives within the EPP-ED, a centrist European Democratic Party was founded in 2004. The founders, led by France's Union for French Democracy (*Union pour la démocratie française*, UDF) and the Italian party Democracy is Freedom – The Daisy (*Democrazia è Libertà- La Margherita*), criticised the conservative parties of the EPP-ED group for having rejected the principles of federal Europe (Fiala – Mareš – Sokol, 2007, p. 107).

an alternative to the centralisation and federalisation of the Union. The so-called *Prague appeal* targeted the idea of a constitution for a European super-state and called for the voluntary cooperation of European nations and respect for national differences. The signatories of the appeal were the Conservative leader **Iain Duncan Smith**, ODS Chairman **Mirek Topolánek** and PiS deputy chairman **Ludwik Dorn**. After the EP elections in 2004, doubts arose concerning whether the inclusion of all three parties in the EPP-ED group was suitable. These arose during internal party discussions, as well as in their relationships with the Christian Democratic parties within the EPP, and the parties answered them differently. While the Conservatives and the ODS, despite growing disputes between the EPP and ED, integrated to become the strongest right wing faction of the EPP-ED, Poland's PiS decided to cooperate within the Alliance for the Europe of the Nations (Cabada, 2011, pp. 11-12).

A significant impulse for the completion of the alienation process of the conservative parties from the EPP-ED was the change in the Conservative leadership, and Cameron's appointment. Despite Cameron refusing the immediate foundation of a new EP group, probably because it would be rather difficult to meet the legal requirements for such an action (which call for at least 25 MEPs from at least seven EU Member States), we cannot overlook the necessity of a step being taken towards the creation of a similar base in his own party. Nevertheless, in July 2006 the cooperation between the CP, the ODS and PiS was strengthened by the foundation of the Movement for European Reform (MER), with the CP and the ODS as members. The MER declared itself as a supranational alliance of centre-right conservative parties with a Eurorealist programme. The MER placed strong emphasis on transatlantic relations, including the possibility of a transatlantic free trade area. The MER labelled itself as a preliminary structure, an incubator, from which a new EP group called European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) was to arise after the 2009 EP elections.¹³

All indicators point to the ODS as the crucial energiser of the development towards the new Eurorealist EP group. By comparison, Cameron and his Conservatives seem to have been more careful and passive in this coalition of two conservative parties dominating in their national political arenas (**Cameron**

¹³ *The Prague Declaration of Principles of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group in the European Parliament*, available at <http://www.conservatives.com/pdf/MovementforEuropeanReform.pdf>, accessed 26 October 2011.

and **Topolánek** served as prime ministers of their respective EU countries). One of the closing resolutions of the 19th ODS congress in December 2008, in Prague, stated that the “creation of a new right wing non-federalist faction at the EP ground must be one of the priorities of the ODS election campaign programme for the 2009 EP elections”. It was further stated at the congress that the majority of the leading representatives of the EP showed an inability to listen to ideas for alternative views on the EU, other than the leading Euro-federalist idea. Therefore, the preparations of the CP and the ODS for the 2009 EP elections went hand in hand with the search for new partners for the upcoming project of the new EP group. In March 2009, *The Prague Declaration of Principles of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group in the European Parliament* was finalised and signed in Prague, and this later became the basic programme document of the new EP group, the ECR.¹⁴ After the EP elections of 2009, the CP, the ODS, and PiS, which possessed the highest number of MEPs, became the founders of the ECR group. Let us conclude that, after the EU's eastern enlargement, the Central and Eastern European political parties significantly influenced and changed the ideological debate in the EP. As the most influential ideological stream with a Central and Eastern European “origin” or background, we could observe the so-called Eurorealist (or Eurogovernmentalist) political parties such as the Polish PiS and the Czech ODS. Nevertheless, these parties, and the ECR group in general, should not be labelled as Eurosceptic or even anti-EU.

As regards the ODS, after the strong Eurosceptic period (1998-2006) that should be equated with the period in which the party was the opposition in the domestic political arena, we could observe a development toward **Zahradil** and more pragmatic position at the European level. Firstly, **Klaus**, honorary chairman, Czech president, and the most important critic of the EU, left the party, which made the Eurosceptic faction weaker. Secondly, **Zahradil**, the key person formulating foreign policy opinions within the party, left the domestic political arena and became an MEP from 2004.¹⁵ Thirdly, as the leading government party since 2006, ODS weakened its nationalist tendencies and

¹⁴ Apart from the CP, the ODS and PiS, we can also see Belgium's *Lijst Dedecker*, Latvia's TB/LNNK, and Bulgaria's Order, Law and Justice (*Red, zakonnost i spravedlivost*, RZS) among the parties that joined the declaration.

¹⁵ **Zahradil** was nominated as the leader of ODS list for the EP elections in 2004, 2009, and 2014 and succeeded in being elected in all cases. Nevertheless, his activities within the EP do not have such an influence on the internal party as they did previously.

became more pragmatic. Many observers consider the appointment of the former dissident **Alexander Vondra** as European minister during **Topolánek's** second government (2007-2009) as a key turning point in the party's relationship towards the EU. Instead of the aggressive Euroscepticism of **Klaus**, **Vondra** offered "a middle way between assertive 'euro-realism' ... and blanket enthusiasm for European integration. A similar pragmatism formed **Topolánek** and **Vondra's** approach to the Lisbon Treaty." (Bale – Hanley – Sczerbiak, 2001, p. 92) Later, we will show that this change in party behaviour accelerated the establishment of a political party with a clearly anti-EU programme, the Party of Free Citizens.

To conclude this section, let us mention that Czech Euroscepticism was not represented only by the ODS in the European party arena. In 2004, the extra-parliamentary formation "Independents" (*Nezávislí*), led by **Vladimír Železný**, the popular and populist former director of the biggest private TV company (TV Nova), succeeded in the EP elections. From 1998, **Železný** and TV Nova had developed "special relations" with **Klaus**.¹⁶ After being elected to the EP, **Železný** joined the Independence/Democracy faction. More important is that **Jana Bobošíková**, the party's second MEP, later became one of the prominent critiques of the EU and established her own anti-EU party. This party got direct support from **Klaus** before the 2013 national elections, but did not succeed.

4 Party of Free Citizens – a Successful Czech "Anti-EU" Political Party

As mentioned above, after entering government in 2006, the ODS changed its Eurosceptic position in favour of a more realistic approach. In our opinion, such a change was fully in accordance with the general tendencies in Czech society. The main problematic points of European integration discussed in the Czech public mainstream include the Euro (the majority of Czech citizens

¹⁶ During the government and the ODS intra-party crisis in 1998, TV Nova repeatedly reported on ODS' allegedly hidden financial sources and **Klaus'** large house in Switzerland, but was unable to present evidence for these claims. TV Nova later apologised to **Klaus** and the sides reached an out of court settlement. TV Nova became, next to the main Czech tabloid newspaper *Blesk (Lightning)* and *Super*, **Klaus'** main supporter in internal political discussion, accepting the majority of his stances towards the EU. **Jana Bobošíková**, moderator of the main political discussion in broadcast media, became a symbol of such support for **Klaus**. In 2004, he was also elected to the EP for the "Independents", and in the next decade he became one of the most visible "anti-EU" politicians in the Czech Republic.

oppose the adoption of the Euro) and “strengthening of decision competences of non-elected EU-institutions/bureaucrats”. The ODS, but also many other important Czech players, including the Czech National Bank, seemed to take no concrete steps towards the adoption of Euro. The ODS also criticised contemporary development within the EU. Nevertheless, for some influential hard Eurosceptic figures, with Klaus at the forefront, such a position was too conciliatory.

As Kaniok mentions, the founding of an anti-EU party was expected a few years before the SSO came into reality. “After the departure of **Václav Klaus** as the party leader, **Mirek Topolánek** became the new chairman of the ODS, being more conciliatory towards European integration than his predecessor. Simultaneously, in the ODS there permanently existed a Eurosceptic platform that had stressed its interest already in 2001, in the document *Manifesto of Czech Eurorealism ...* Contradictory tendencies escalated at the 19th Congress of the ODS in December 2008.” The basic bone of contention was the Lisbon Treaty (LT), which the Eurosceptic faction proposed rejecting the LT, but the leadership enforced the declaration that the decision be left to the ODS MEPs (Kaniok, 2014, p. 5).

Such a Janusian position irritated the hardliners not only within the ODS, but also in the radical think tanks and other civil society institutions with “anti-EU” programmes. Alongside the think tanks (with the Centre of Economics and Politics at the forefront) let us also mention groupings such as “D.O.S.T.” (*Enough*, the acronym of words *Důvěra*, *Objektivita*, *Svoboda*, *Tradice*, meaning Trust, Objectivity, Freedom, Tradition), an ultra-conservative formation criticising the EU as a “socialist and immoral structure”.¹⁷ Often, the same figures might be observed within these structures. Integrated around rhetoric that was (ultra) conservative, nationalist, anti-German, partly anti-Semite,¹⁸ pan-Slavic and pro-Russian (and also anti-Western), anti-gender, “anti-LGBT”, and so on, they criticise the environmental movement and so-called “post-democracy” and

¹⁷ The most visible person within the D.O.S.T. was **Ladislav Bátor**, candidate for the extremist National Party, and holding clearly anti-Semitic views. After 2010 he was chief advisor at the Ministry of Education under minister **Josef Dobeš**, and had clear support from Prague Castle. Under public pressure, including demonstrations, he resigned.

¹⁸ Including both the traditional anti-Semitic of ultra-Christian groups, but also modern forms related to the “conspiracy theories”. The most influential person was **Klaus’** secretary **Petr Hájek**, who repeatedly stated that the terrorist attacks against the U.S. in 2001 were the “most effective manipulation of the modern period”.

“NGO-ism”.¹⁹ Such a mixture naturally produces critics of the EU as a structure that promotes all the above mentioned “negative” trends.

Behind the establishment of the Party of Free Citizens we might also observe this, often partly obscure, “epistemic community”. Nevertheless, we cannot overlook or ignore the fact that these groupings were shielded by **Klaus**, a generally respected authority with the support of around two thirds of Czech society. In the last part of our analysis we will not follow all the anti-EU players within this very colourful group. Rather, we will focus only on the establishment and development of the Party of Free Citizens.²⁰

Starting the analysis of SSO, we have to present the CV of its founder and chairman, **Petr Mach**. **Mach** was a student of statistics and econometrics at the University of Economy in Prague, also the alma mater of **Klaus**. He was active in the Young Conservatives (*Mladí konzervativci*, MK), an NGO related to the liberal-conservative political parties. Seemingly, he inclined towards (ultra) liberal political and economic thought, founding in 1998 the ultra-liberal review *Laissez Faire – časopis pro svobodu jednotlivce (Review for the Freedom of the individual)*.²¹ From 2003 he started to co-work as an external advisor to Klaus, the newly elected president, and at the same time was acting chairman of the pro-Klausian and Eurosceptic think tank the Centre for Economics and Politics (CEP), established by **Klaus** in 1998. The CEP is one of the most visible and active Eurosceptic players, organising sets of conferences and workshops and publishing dozens of books and volumes, all of which share a common theme of Euroscepticism; in author’s opinion, we could observe in this a strengthening of Euroscepticism, developing from a soft form to a hard version. Under **Klaus’** supervision, a new generation of active, intelligent and dogmatic Eurosceptics emerged in the CEP, including not only Mach, but also **Marek Loužek**, **Tomáš**

¹⁹ **Klaus’** most successful book, translated into 20 languages (including Russian, with the financial support of Lukoil), is called *Blue Planet in Green Shackles: What Is Endangered, Climate or Freedom?* (*Modrá, nikoli zelená planeta*).

²⁰ Basically, some of the mentioned groups and persons infiltrated the party. Nevertheless, by the time the party had stabilised its personnel structure, it was able to exclude the most visible “trouble-makers” and extremists.

²¹ The review is accessible at <http://www.nechtenasbyt.cz>. If we look at the homepage (accessed 15 March 2015) we can see that **Mach** is still an active contributor of papers. Next to this, as the main headline, is the statement “Petr Mach: How to leave the EU” (*Petr Mach: Jak vystoupit z EU*), basically the title of Mach’s new book. This shows that the review is deeply interconnected with the SSO and with Mach personally.

Munzi and Robert Holman.²²

If we look at the most visible players within the CEP, they all have economic background. As Kaniok shows, Mach developed his critiques of European integration from economic positions. In 2003, he published a book called *Pitfalls of European Integration (Uskali evropské integrace)*,²³ in which he presents two basic ideas. These are that the EU creates an environment that is oriented against competition, and redistributive. Such redistribution might be politically expedient in the short term, but in the long-term perspective it is disadvantageous. **Mach** finishes his criticism with a sentence about the “unhealthy roots” of European integration. He sees “preservation of national sovereignty” as an alternative to EU membership (Mach, 2003; cf. also Kaniok, 2006, pp. 24-26).

In our opinion, this position, and **Mach’s** personal development next to **Klaus**, shows that the CEP became the most important “incubator” of Czech hard Euroscepticism after the split between Klaus and the ODS. As we showed earlier, the hesitant position of the new ODS leadership towards the Lisbon Treaty can be seen as the symbolic moment of emancipation of this new, independent political stream. **Topolánek’s** pragmatic and rational pro-European orientation was understood by the “hardliners” as a sign of inconsistency and “weakening”.

Thus, in 2009 the Party of Free Citizens (*Strana svobodných občanů*, SSO) was established. According to Kaniok (2014, p. 1), “many commentators understood the new subject as a Eurosceptic alternative to the ODS”. Many of the leading players of new party had in the past been in the ODS. The party got strong support from **Klaus**. In the first months of its existence, the SSO rejected the LT and a plebiscite about adopting the euro. Nevertheless, while the possible withdrawal of the Czech Republic from the EU, or even the dissolution of the Union were not the themes, the party manifesto for the EP elections of March 2009 stated explicitly that the Czech Republic could exist without the Brussels institutions. The SSO rejected the LT and the redistribution principle on which European integration is functionally based (Kaniok, 2014, p. 5). In Kaniok’s opinion, the SSO’s programme was unambiguously Eurosceptic, and in real terms it tended towards hard Euroscepticism.

For the planned extraordinary elections in autumn 2009, the party prepared

²² www.cepin.cz, accessed 15 March 2015.

²³ With a preface by **Klaus**.

its first comprehensive programme. The implementation of a European agreement was declared as the most important foreign policy goal in a document that was presented as an appendix to the programme, and was inspired by an article from the *Daily Telegraph*, reflecting the failure of the so-called Constitutional Treaty. In October 2009, Mach also declared that, should the LT be adopted, the SSO would demand that the Czech Republic leave the EU (Kaniok, 2014, pp. 6-7).

The SSO was not successful in the parliamentary elections, neither in the Chamber of Deputies (2010), nor in the Senate. Nevertheless, we could observe that the party was able to strengthen its position within the domestic political arena. Whereas, in 2010, the party got only 0.74% of votes, it gained 2.46% three years later in the extraordinary elections to the Chamber of Deputies. Although this result did not take the party beyond the 5% threshold, it was nevertheless enough (more than 1.5%) to secure the right to financial support from the state budget, therefore allowing the SSO to organise more effective electoral campaigns, as was the case in the 2014 EP elections.

The party also tried to nominate its own candidate for the newly established direct presidential election in 2013. In intra-party voting **Ladislav Jaki**, Klaus' secretary, was nominated.²⁴ However, the SSO failed to collect the required minimum 50,000 signatures on a petition supporting **Jaki**, so the attempt failed.

Finally, the party succeeded in the 2014 EP elections, winning 5.24% of votes and one seat in the EP, for its chairman **Mach**. It must, however, be noted, that the Czech Republic was among the countries with the lowest turnout (only 18.2%), so in reality the SSO succeeded only in the "second order" elections. On the other hand, as party with a strong anti-EU profile, the SSO welcomed this result as an opportunity to become even more active in the development of themes related to European integration.

Between 2010 and 2014, before these elections, the party had refused proposals of cooperation from smaller Eurosceptic, nationalist or other parties. In 2013, the SSO also refused appeals from **Klaus** to join the anti-EU grouping "Cheer up" (*Hlavu vzhůru*) led by **Jana Bobošíková**, the chairwoman of party "Sovereignty" (*Suverenita*) and MEP from 2004 to 2005, representing the Eurosceptic movement "Independents". **Mach** continues to reject cooperation with any other political party, including the ODS. Nevertheless, an anti-EU

²⁴ **Jaki** presents similar opinions as Klaus, and is a member of board of directors of the Institute of Václav Klaus *think tank*.

faction that supports strengthening cooperation with the SSO still exists within the ODS.²⁵ As regards the European/international level, the homepage of the SSO website states that the party rejects the establishment of “Euro-parties”, but mentions the United Kingdom Independence Party, the Slovak SaS (Freedom and Solidarity), and the Polish KNP (New Right Congress) as allied parties. We can see that, while at the national level the SSO strongly promotes the (ultra) liberal orientation, at the EU-level the party is prepared to cooperate also with (ultra) conservative and nationalist parties such as the KNP.

In the second half of 2014, active in the EP, the party developed its programme positions. Based on the actual programme that was adopted in December 2014, and on other official party documents, we will now present the SSO’s basic programmatic basis. The party pays great attention to the “political philosophy”²⁶ behind their programme. The party manifesto and other documents basically arise from the central term and “most important value”, freedom. The basis of the party’s political system is fair and free competition. The (ultra) liberal position is visible also in ethical questions. For example, it states that “the SSO does not oppose, for example, the legalisation of marihuana, abortion or euthanasia”. We can see from this that the SSO does not integrate the abovementioned (ultra) conservative anti-EU streams,²⁷ although the party does, in some cases, invoke conservatism.²⁸

The basic starting point for the SSO programme from 9 December 2014 is sovereignty. On this it states that “The foreign policy of every state is obliged to take all steps for the preservation of sovereignty”. In NATO, the SSO observes “consistent respect for sovereignty”, thus the party prefers NATO over the European Union. The party gives “unequivocal priority to bilateral policy”, while

²⁵ For example, **Jaroslav Kubera**, highly visible member of the Senate representing the ODS, declared that “the programme of the SSO is in fact the programme of the ODS with small modifications”.

²⁶ The party sees Czech thinkers and politicians **František Palacký**, **Karel Havlíček Borovský**, and **Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk** (generally liberal thinkers) as the traditional sources of its political philosophy.

²⁷ At the very beginning of party’s existence, two streams could be identified. These were the conservative-national vs. the conservative-liberal and classical liberal. As Mach often mentions, the latter succeeded in the intra-party clashes. This means that the SSO is now libertarian or ultra-liberal, but also promotes selected (national) conservative programme points. People such as **Bátora** were forced out of the party.

²⁸ For example in the discussion about law: “The SSO struggles for a return to the pre-socialist legal traditions”.

multilateral policy is understood as a “supplement to bilateral relations”. The SSO also “supports deep reform of the UN, and reduction of complementary activities and its separation from the core of the Security Council.” The party “rejects the demand to establish the position of the EU as new permanent member of UN Security Council. With such a step the representation of non-democratic members would only be strengthened, due to the non-democratic institutional nature of the EU”. The SSO sees the WTO as a prospective multilateral organisation.

Chapter 7 in the programme is devoted to European integration issues. Based on the party position, the “contemporary attempt at the integration of European states is a blind alley. The contemporary democratic deficit... presents an intentional attempt to eliminate the traditional European values such as freedom, democracy, human dignity, plurality of opinion, and responsibility of politicians towards the citizens. Institutions such as the European Parliament and the European Council have only one goal: to camouflage this matter of fact... As far as the contemporary attempt at integration in the European framework, which produced stagnation and disabled the competitiveness of its members, must sooner or later fail, it is necessary to minimise the adverse impacts on the Czech Republic ... It is necessary to prepare the timely separation of the Czech Republic from the Union, and also an alternative form of cooperation. Therefore, the SSO proposes a plebiscite about withdrawal from the EU, and definitely recommends that the Czech Republic leaves the EU. Subsequently, voluntary cooperation between states is the solution for the SSO, as we could observe for example in the founding documents of EFTA... After leaving the EU we could decide whether to continue as part of so-called Schengen area”. We can see that the SSO not only promotes a Czech exit from the EU, but understands the dissociation or collapse of the EU to be unavoidable.

In terms of our analysis, Chapter 8 (on relations with neighbouring countries) is also important, especially because of its anti-German character: “The SSO rejects the contemporary leading role of Germany within the EU. The Czech-German Declaration did not bring about the intended result and is not a sufficiently solid starting point for bilateral relations, thus the past might be resuscitated as a political theme”. Similar formulations were included in the *ODS Manifesto of Czech Eurorealism*. The anti-German position is here shared by such different players as the ultra-liberal SSO, the liberal-conservative Klaus, and the weakly reformed nostalgic and conservative Communist Party of

Bohemia and Moravia.

Let us add to end this presentation of the party programme that the newest manifesto includes “European agreement”, as Appendix 2.

Based on the party programme, the SSO’s hard Eurosceptic position seems to be clear. The official speeches and comments of party leaders, with **Mach** at the forefront, also display their anti-EU perspective. In an interview given in November 2014, with the “symbolic” title *In the Brussels the democracy is only simulated (V Bruselu se demokracie jenom předstírá)*, **Mach** says the EU is a “bureaucratic institution where the democracy is camouflaged in the European Parliament... Parliamentary debate in the real sense does not exist in Brussels... Everyone votes only based on his faction”. Such a situation, says **Mach**, is in accordance with the interests of federalist powers within the EU and its institutions, and he states: “the EP is overruled by the machinery of the Euro-People’s Party and the Eurosocijalists (*eurolidovci a eurosocijalisté*)”. On his main goal within the EP, **Mach** declares: “I would like to achieve voluntary acceptance of the Euro currency. By the way, if it is voluntary for the UK or Denmark, why this approach cannot be broadened to all members?” He denies that he and his party would be extremist in asking to leave the EU, saying “withdrawal from the EU is not something extreme... It means withdrawal from the system of donations, regulations and directives on all kinds of things. We would like to have free market and not the permanent regulations”.

It is also important to note the SSO’s repeated claim that the party is not oriented towards the European level, but rather the national one (“Our main goal are the national parliament elections”).

In the EP, **Mach** joined and helped to establish the Eurosceptic /anti-EU group Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD). Yet the group was hampered from the beginning, as it met only the minimum requirements for legitimacy. During the EFDD crisis in October 2014, when Latvian MEP **Iveta Grigule** left the faction, Mach blamed the EP leadership for coercing **Grigule** to take the step, with the promise of a position in the leadership of one of foreign delegations. Nevertheless, the EFDD group survived, bringing in **Jarosław Iwaskiewicz** of the Polish KNP as a new member. In this sense, **Mach** stressed the important role of his assistant, who visited the KNP congress and secured **Iwaskiewicz**’s signature.²⁹

²⁹ “Farageovu frakci v Evropském parlamentu zachránil asistent českého poslance Petra Macha,” *Reflex*, 21 October 2014, available at <http://www.reflex.cz/clanek/zpravy/59796/farageovu-frakci-v>

Within less than a year as an MEP, **Mach** had become “famous” for his provocative acts and proclamations. During the performance of the EU anthem during the first session of the newly elected EP, on 2 July 2014, he joined a group of deputies that turned their backs on the orchestra.³⁰ **Mach** commented on his action, saying that the EU did not respect the fact that European citizens had rejected these quasi-symbols in the plebiscite.³¹

More provocative was a declaration of the SSO party leadership at the end of August 2014, labelling Ukraine as an artificial state that had to collapse. In the party’s opinion, Ukraine had failed as a state after the dissolution of the USSR, and external players (Russia and the EU) had taken advantage of this weakness to enforce their own interests.³² Such an opinion, equating the EU with the aggressive politics of Russia, might be understood as provocative.³³ Basically, **Mach** uses all opportunities to criticise the EU. As we showed in the analysis of the SSO programme, the party understands the EU as a non-democratic institution, a belief that presents a “meta-position” for all other statements and opinions.

On the other hand, the SSO and **Mach** do not present an anti-Western and pro-Russian position, as might be said of some other Central and Eastern European politicians, such as **Klaus** or **Viktor Orbán**, or, from Western Europe, **Marine Le Pen**. **Mach** supports deeper economic cooperation with the U.S. and North America based on the TTIP agreement, as well as a deepening of liberal economic measures. He rejects multilateralism that is, for him, weakening state sovereignty. Nevertheless, based on the party’s first steps in the EP, and its new

evropskem-parlamentu-zachranil-asistent-ceskeho-poslance-petra-macha.html, accessed 13 March 2015.

³⁰ A member of the ECR faction for the ODS, Jan Zahradil remained seated saying that the “EU is not a state and it does not have an anthem”.

³¹ “Mach zády k hymně EU. Je to neúcta a buranství, tvrdí politici,” *Lidovky.cz*, available at http://www.lidovky.cz/mach-zady-k-hymne-eu-je-to-neucta-a-buranstvi-tvrdi-politici-p4d-zprav-domov.aspx?c=A140702_111904_in_domov_jzl, accessed 15 March 2015.

³² “Ukrajina je uměle vytvořený stát, rozpadne se, tvrdí europoslanec Mach,” *Idnes.cz*, available at http://zpravy.idnes.cz/ukrajina-je-umele-vytvoreny-stat-rozpadne-se-predvida-mach-po4-domaci.aspx?c=A140901_160351_domaci_kop, accessed 15 March 2015.

³³ On the other hand, it is still more “balanced” that the position of Klaus, who blames only the EU and the U.S. with their support of anti-Poroshenko demonstrations. In Klaus’ opinion, Russia was dragged into Ukrainian affairs, Putin had to react in the way he did, and he behaves rationally. For more, see *Klaus*, “K tragédii na Ukrajině přispěly USA a EU. Putin jedná racionálně,” *Idnes.cz*, available at http://zpravy.idnes.cz/Klaus-o-situaci-v-rusku-a-na-ukrajine-dv4-domaci.aspx?c=A140306_145211_domaci_max, accessed 15 March 2015.

manifesto, from December 2014, we argue that the Euroscepticism of the SSO has strengthened to the point of becoming a clearly anti-EU position.

Conclusion

In his original analysis of the development and position of the SSO, Kaniok assumes that the party is not a single issue anti-EU party as far as “its Euroscepticism or the critics of European integration do not present such a ‘single issue’ theme. The position towards the EU in the programme of the SSO is the consequence of its libertarian orientation, and not the cause.” (Kaniok, 2014, p. 7) Later, he discusses the SSO based on the concept of a niche party. According to his analysis, the SSO accentuates the EU themes twice as often as mainstream parties (Kaniok, 2014, p. 9). From this, we could derive that the SSO’s development in the domestic political arena will be very important as a next step. As mentioned above, **Mach** sees Czech domestic politics as more important than the European level. On the other hand, with SSO’s prolonged period of irrelevance at the domestic level, the importance of the European political arena might grow for the party. As Fiala, Mareš and Sokol (2007, p. 235) mention, “anti-EU parties usually succeed above all in the EP elections, and not at the national level”. This is also the reason that the SSO will surely develop a more structured political programme based on (ultra)liberal political philosophy.

In the first part of our analysis we discussed the development of the ODS, and the ECR group within the EP. Alleged Euroscepticism was the strongest argument for criticism of the ECR. Such criticism was mainly based on emotions, and completely lacked an analytical framework and rational reasoning. We personally believe that such a statement is false, that calling for greater reflection on intergovernmentalism, one of the two main paradigms of the European integration process, cannot be presented as negative using political and media stigmas and clichés.³⁴ The ECR promotes itself as a

³⁴ Should we look at the foundation of the ECR from beyond an ideological standpoint, then we can see the creation of a rather comprehensive EP group with inner coherence, willing to carry out pragmatic politics (for example, supporting the creation of the second **Barroso** Commission). Slowing down the accelerating pace of integration, a flexible standpoint on some processes (such as the issue of a common European currency) and possibly even launching reverse processes are all part of such pragmatic politics. These ideas correspond closely with the ideas of *Europe à la carte*, or a multi-speed Europe. If such concepts can be part of professional typologies and debates, then we should not perceive them as unacceptable in everyday politics and

conservative political formation with two main ideological pillars, liberal conservatives and conservative nationalists. These parties come from “politics where the boundaries between the right and the far right are admittedly sometimes more blurred than in Western Europe” (Bale – Hanley – Sczerbiak, 2010, p. 97).³⁵

The establishment of a new anti-EU group, the EFDD, made the distinction between the conservative Eurorealist party family and the group of hard Eurosceptics more visible. On one hand, we now have a “conservative family of political parties that represents a traditional and important group within the European political environment, which had and still has a significant say in political events in the continental, or union, context, as well as in the majority of the European Union Member States” (Cabada, 2011, p. 16; cf. Cabada – Hloušek et al., 2009). On the other hand, a group of political parties that believe that European integration is damaging in itself has been created. The SSO belongs to this group wilfully, and in full harmony with its political programme. It is difficult to predict further developments. In our opinion, the SSO does not have the potential to force the ODS (despite the fact that ODS lost almost 80% of its voters compared to 2006) from its position as the most important Eurosceptic party within Czech politics and society. One of the possible scenarios is that there will be defections between these two parties, making the distinction between the “Eurorealist” and “anti-EU” positions clearer.³⁶ Should the ODS keep losing voters, cooperation between the parties cannot be excluded. Nevertheless, only a deep crisis in the European integration process can bring more voters to the SSO, in as much as some mainstream parties in the Czech Republic as well as a large part of society are very half-hearted in promoting the EU in the domestic arena.

stigmatise them as “Eurosceptic” (Cabada, 2011, pp. 15-16).

³⁵ Nevertheless, the same statement about blurry boundaries between the political mainstream and the edge of the party sphere is of course true in cases of other party families, including the Christian-Democratic and the Socialist. Also present in Italy and Austria, this is not limited to the Central and Eastern European countries (Cabada, 2011).

³⁶ Naturally, such a scenario might be fully valid also for the European level, not only between the ECR and EFDD groups.

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