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## INTERNATIONAL SCHOLARLY CONFERENCE: “SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT VIII – EUROPE IN TIME OF REFORMS”

Jiří Dušek\*

On the 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> March there was an international scholarly conference called “*Sustainable Development VIII – Europe in Time of Reforms*” held in České Budějovice under the patronage of representatives of the South Bohemian Region – Governor of the South Bohemian Region Mr. **Jiří Zimola** and Mayor of the City of České Budějovice Mr. **Jiří Svoboda**. This conference followed the previous conference held in 2016 called “*Sustainable Development VII – 30 Years after The Single European Act – The Four Freedoms of the EU*”. Thus, the conference followed for the eighth time the tradition of conferences and discussions focused on sustainable development in the context of significant and current European topics:

- in 2015 “Sustainable Development VI – 30 Years after the Schengen Agreement – Europe without Borders”,
- in 2014 “Sustainable Development V – Sustainable Development 10 Years after the Czech Republic’s Accession to the European Union”,
- in 2013 “Sustainable Development IV – Regional politics and sustainable development of the European Union in planned period 2007-2013 and perspectives of development in 2014-2020”,
- in 2012 “Sustainable Development III – Function of modern European country: bloom or decline in favour of private sector?”,
- in 2011 “Sustainable Development in Economic Crisis”,
- in 2010 “Sustainable Development in European Regions”.

The organisers' goal in 2017 was to contribute to the debate on the topical issues of the European Union, most prominently the debate on the need for the reforms and future form of the EU caused by the United Kingdom European Union referendum held in June; the European migration crisis; the dissension

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between the “old” and “new” EU member states and other issues. The organisers of the conference aimed also to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of a German politician **Konrad Adenauer** (died on 19<sup>th</sup> April 1967), the first post-war Chancellor of West Germany and the first leader of the Christian Democratic Union, who was at the very birth of European integration at the beginning of the 1950's. Except **Konrad Adenauer's** anniversary, also the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of signing the Treaty of Rome founding the European Economic Community and EURATOM was commemorated.

The title of the conference “Europe in Time of Reforms” reflects the discussions on future form of the EU which had been already held in the previous years, sadly to say almost unsuccessfully. However, the most significant impulse it got in connection with Brexit that many politicians consider to be the result of wrong EU policy and the opportunity to reform the EU at the same time. The conference had stated the four following aims:

1. to evaluate the current situation, issues and challenges of the EU in the half of the programming period 2014-2020 (institutional reforms, different opinions about the future of the EU, worries about the enlargement of the EU and migration, sustainability of fundamental freedoms of the EU, inner and outer security of the EU, regional development of European regions).
2. to identify and analyse the possibilities of future quality and quantity development of the living standard of the citizens of the Czech Republic and other EU countries from the point of view of the current economic development.
3. to involve the basic trends and predict the scenarios of future development of the Czech Republic and other countries within the EU (people's participation in the European integration, Schengen Area sustainability, euro implementation, drawing of financial resources from the structural funds, impacts of Brexit on other EU member states etc.).
4. to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of a German politician **Konrad Adenauer**, the first post-war Chancellor of West Germany and the first leader of the Christian Democratic Union, and the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of signing the Treaty of Rome founding the European Economic Community and EURATOM.

Besides important European affairs and topics, the organisers of the conference decided to commemorate the important Czech anniversaries/topics within one panel as well. In 2014, it was the commemoration of 25 years after

the Velvet Revolution in cooperation with the South Bohemian Museum, which was followed by a thematic panel “Czechoslovakia and the First Free Election in 1990” in 2015. For 2016 the panel called “Czech Towns after 1989 – Public Administration, Politics, Civic Society” was prepared. The series of panels focused on the Velvet Revolution was concluded by a panel called “Czech and Slovak Towns in Velvet/Tender Revolution” in 2017.

The conference was organised by the College of European and Regional Studies in cooperation with Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Prague, The South Bohemian Region, The City of České Budějovice, The South Bohemian Museum and The European Region Danube-Vltava, like in the previous years. It was also supported by The European Information Centre Europe Direct České Budějovice, Eurocentrum České Budějovice, and Oberbank. The conference was listed in the events of National Convention on the EU in 2017 for the first time, which means it was included in the platform for discussion on European issues in the Czech Republic, which links the government and legislative power to professionals. The conference was addressed not only to professionals, but also to students, public institution officers, non-profit organisation workers as well as entrepreneurs. Due to high interest in participation, the conference consisted of a plenary session and nine other panels together, and the organisers needed to arrange other premises outside the Regional Authority of South Bohemian Region:

- I. Local and regional development of the Czech Republic and the European Union in the context of sustainable development – 30<sup>th</sup> March 2017 (Regional Authority of South Bohemian Region),
- II. Socioeconomic development of European regions – 30<sup>th</sup> March 2017 (Regional Authority of South Bohemian Region),
- III. Security and constitutional aspects of sustainable development – 30<sup>th</sup> March 2017 (Slavie Hall and Cultural Centre)
- IV. Juristic and criminological aspects of security – 30<sup>th</sup> March 2017 (Regional Authority of South Bohemian Region),
- V. Current issues on security management - 30<sup>th</sup> March 2017 (Regional Authority of South Bohemian Region),
- VI. The EU at present – its problems and perspectives in 2017 – A, B – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 (Slavie Hall and Cultural Centre),
- VII. Czech and Slovak towns in Velvet/Tender Revolution – 31<sup>st</sup> March (Regional Authority of South Bohemian Region),

- VIII. Historical memory and reflection and current issues on democracy in the Czech Republic - 31<sup>st</sup> March (Regional Authority of South Bohemian Region),
- IX. Sustainable development of the Czech Republic and the European Union in the students' points of view – a special panel for students of bachelor's and master's degree programmes 30<sup>th</sup> March 2017 (Metropol Cultural Centre).

After closing the first conference day dinner for participants was held at 6 p.m., and later on informal meetings of participants were organised at The Secondary School of Tourism, Fráni Šrámka 9/1216, České Budějovice.

More than 100 participants not only from the Czech Republic, but also from Slovakia, Germany, Austria, Poland and Ukraine took an active part in the conference. The following ones belonged to the most important participants of the conference: Mr. **Andreas Erwig** from the Bavarian State Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs, Family and Integration, Ing. **Zdeněk Čech**, M.A., Ph.D., Chief Economic Advisor, the Representation of the European Commission in the Czech Republic, Ing. **Michaela Chrtová** from Government of the Czech Republic - Department of Economic Policy Coordination in the EU, mjr. JUDr. **Juraj Ďorko** from The Border and Foreign Police Office, the Police Board of the Slovak Republic and Ms. **Eva Birner** from the Knowledge Platform "Research and Innovation" of the European Region Danube-Vltava. Besides active participants, there were tens of other, passive participants. Thus, the conference attracted 252 participants, which was the same as in 2016.

The plenary session of the 8<sup>th</sup> international scholarly conference Sustainable Development – Europe in Time of Reforms was opened by vice-rector of the College of European and Regional Studies, doc. JUDr. PhDr. **Jiří Bílý**, CSc. He greeted all the participants and called a moment of silence for a long-time lecturer and sponsor of a study programme prof. PhDr. **Jaroslav Erneker**, DrSc. who had died shortly before the conference. Then rector of the College of European and Regional Studies doc. Ing. **Oldřich Pekárek**, CSc. gave his speech and welcomed all the participants of the conference. He spoke in Czech, English and Russian. He also welcomed the keynote speakers of the conference and speakers in the plenary session.

After that Ing. **Milan Šimůnek**, representing the co-organiser of the conference, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Prague, gave his speech. He welcomed the participants of the conference and introduced the foundation briefly, its objective and reason of its existence. He spoke about **Konrad Adenauer** and

his meaning for uniting Europe. He also spoke about the current political and social situation in Europe, the increase of popularity of extreme right-wing and extremist parties and decrease of election preferences of traditional political parties. He urged to the active commemoration of the legacy of **Konrad Adenauer** – the bearer of the idea of united Europe.

Then Mr. **Andreas Erwig** from the Bavarian State Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs, Family and Integration, the keynote speaker of the conference, gave his speech. First, he greeted the participants of the conference on behalf of the Bavarian State Minister of the department mentioned above. He spoke about the Bavarian integration policy whose principle is to live and let live. Bavaria is a federal state, which has got lots of citizens and big economic power nowadays. Nevertheless, there are still worries about future. According to Mr. **Erwig** the need for safe society is growing. Therefore, the fight against Salafism is essential. Consequently, it is important that there are volunteers involved in neighbour's help. Then Mr. **Erwig** mentioned two crucial mottos of Bavarian asylum policy: 1) humanity, and 2) sending back the people misusing the law. Mr. **Erwig** closed his speech with the following words: "Tolerance cannot tolerate intolerance."

After the keynote speaker finished his speech, Ing. **Zdeněk Čech**, M.A., Ph.D., Chief Economic Advisor, The Representation of the European Commission in the Czech Republic, was given the floor. He spoke about the economic and monetary union. The challenges that the EU currently faces are as follows: 1) socio-economic: ageing population, migration, security; 2) structural: economic and monetary union, Brexit; 3) economic: low increase, low investment rate, low research and innovation investment rate. Public sources are limited in any political interventions. Then Mr. **Čech** got the listeners familiar with the "5 Chairmen's Report" which contains the proposal for the reform of economic and monetary union. There are four following parts of the reform: 1) system of organisation of competitiveness; 2) European Fiscal Board and its supervision of implementing fiscal rules; 3) consolidation of Eurozone representation in International Monetary Fund; 4) finalisation of banking union.

The next speaker in the plenary session was Ing. Mgr. **Michaela Chrtová** from Government of the Czech Republic - Department of Economic Policy Coordination in the EU, and her speech was highly topical as well. She spoke about the United Kingdom's leaving the European Union. She called for maintaining as close cooperation with the United Kingdom as possible.

After the representative of Czech government, mjr. JUDr. **Juraj Ďorko** from

The Border and Foreign Police Office, the Police Board of the Slovak Republic spoke. He focused on the security and protection of outer borders of the EU. He mentioned that the biggest problems are in the Mediterranean. They are caused mainly by Turkey pressing Greece. Mjr. **Ďorko** emphasised that the protection and security of outer borders of the EU is crucial. Unfortunately, Greece and Italy did not manage their tasks and did not manage to protect outer borders of the EU.

The last speaker in the plenary session was Ms. **Eva Birner** from the Knowledge Platform "Research and Innovation" of the European Region Danube-Vltava. At the beginning, she mentioned that the European integration has an impact on lives of individual families, too. After that, she introduced the institution that she represents. She got the listeners familiar with the group of regions neighbouring with each other and being situated in a triangle among three cities – Munich, Vienna and Prague. The European Region Danube-Vltava involves seven regions altogether; Ms. Birner introduced the organisational structure of the institution; she mentioned seven platforms for seven regions, i.e. one platform for each region. In her speech, Ms. **Birner** focused on the platform of research and science, and the innovations within it. She concentrated on four evaluation criteria within innovations: 1) establishing network among enterprises; 2) support of SME's; 3) creating joint strategy for innovations; 4) initiating research projects.

The entire plenary session emphasised the importance of joint method of dealing with political, social and economic issues within the European Union. Regional cooperation is to be stressed mainly because neighbouring regions are connected with joint history and current problems. Within the development of Europe-wide society, it is essential to concentrate on technical education and its investment.

Within other 9 panels and multidisciplinary points of view of other participants of the conference – political scientists, economists, security and other experts, the current state was evaluated, future prospects of the Czech Republic within the EU were assessed, but inspiring discussions concerning EU reforms, migration, the Schengen Area, democracy and social values in Europe or economic and market, ecologically-oriented economic system, integrated into the structures of mutual inner EU market took place as well. These discussions reflected other topical issues due to Ukrainian participants as well, e.g. Ukrainian and Russian mutual relations etc.

The closing output of the conference is to be 3-5 thematic collective monographs and conference proceedings containing contributions of app. 150 authors, being published in the autumn 2017. The publication output is aimed to be one of valuable contributions to dealing with practical issues on the Czech Republic's EU membership, and other EU member states as well. Relating to positive responds of participants and partners, the term of next conference (5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> April 2018) has already been announced. The preliminary title of the 2018 conference is "Europe of Countries – Europe of Regions".

In general, the conference, having been held this year, can be considered to be very beneficial because of its extent, significance and importance of discussed topics to active participants, but also passive participants, which is confirmed not only by permanent interest of participants, but also by their feedback.