



DIVIDED BY EUROPE



**Czech Society 20 Years
After Joining the EU**



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Authors Anna Urbanová, Martin Kratochvíl, Martin Buchtík, Filip Hanka, Paulína Tabery
Essays Vladimír Špidla, Věra Jourová

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Project co-authors at Czech Radio Lucie Žáčková, Ondřej Suchan, Martin Samek, Jakub Grim
Translation by Jan Hokeš
Translation Editor Nikola Bartová

Graphs by Petr Kočí
Illustrations by Toy Box

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BACK TO EUROPE.
The accession to the European Union was celebrated throughout the Czech Republic on the night of 1 May 2004. Eight years have passed since the application process began.

Credit: CTK/Štěrbá Martin



Introduction by René Zavoral

Dear and honoured friends,

2024 is a so-called super-election year influenced by the November presidential elections in the USA as well as the June elections to the European Parliament, for which members of the Czech Republic are also running and in which Czech citizens can vote. What's more, many first-time voters, for whom the EU has always been commonplace, will also have the opportunity to cast their vote.

The EU and its institutions have been an integral part of our lives since 2004. How is the EU perceived in our society? Is there awareness of its institutions? To what extent is Czech society divided in its opinion about the EU, much like it was split in its evaluation of the developments after November 1989? Is there a direct correlation between trust/distrust in the political institutions of our country and those of the EU? To what extent is this opinion influenced by age, education or wealth?

We asked ourselves these questions at the beginning of 2023, when we created the important project *2024: European Elections Spotlight*. The first logical step was to look for the answers across society. At the end of last year, we approached Martin Buchtík, Director of the STEM Institute of Empirical Research, Paulina Tabery, from the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Science and sociologist Daniel Prokop with the opportunity to build on years of successful collaboration and together we carried out a survey of Czech society and its perception of the European Union with a special focus on young adults. You are now holding the results of this survey.

This publication, third in a series of large sociological surveys conducted by Czech Radio, is a foundation for the entire aforesaid project and an opportunity for us to inform the public, both professional and lay, about the current state of affairs and to put things into a broader context. We see this as an integral part of our public service. The first in the series was *Divided by Freedom*, in which we looked back at the evolution of society since the Velvet Revolution, followed by *Divided by Climate?*, in which we asked how opinions on climate change and environmental initiatives divide our society.

The results of this research have been featured in Czech Radio broadcasting since February and on our news server iROZHLAS.cz. We have covered the topic of the European Parliament elections and the European Union in general in various formats and range of content (podcasts, news series, interviews and debates with experts, pundits, politicians and candidates), so we have an offer for everyone as a public service media.

René Zavoral

Director General of Czech Radio

20 Years Since the Right Decision

Vladimír Špidla

1 May 2004 crowned the long process that resulted in Central Europe joining the European Union. That process had not been easy and for the Czech Republic it was commenced by Prime Minister Václav Klaus's government applying for EU membership in 1996 and stating the reasons.

The government declared in its statement that, among other things, it *“realises the beneficial effect and the irreversibility of the European integration process,”* appreciating the process as something that *“guarantees the citizens of the member states peace, political stability, correctness of international relations, unprecedented freedom and economic prosperity.”* Furthermore, the government declared that it also accepted the non-economic aspects of European integration and even though *“after regaining full sovereignty as a state only recently, it was not easy to accept the idea that it would be necessary to give up certain parts of that sovereignty in the future,”* it conclusively decided that *“in the modern European development, the exchange of certain parts of national sovereignty for a share of transnational sovereignty and of joint responsibility is inevitable both for the benefit of one's own country and for the whole of Europe.”*

I think that now, twenty years later, this statement does not need to be changed in any way.

After the application was submitted, work was begun whose basic part was done in 1998–2004 under the government of Prime Minister Miloš Zeman and under the government led by me.

It was not an easy process and it required a lot of effort. Of the numerous people that contributed to it – some of them crucially – I would like to mention Pavel Rychetský, who was responsible for adapting the Czech legal system to that of the EU. We called it a “legislation flurry” and it was an enormous technical and clerical task.

However, what should not be forgotten is the fact that the Czech Republic's accession to the European Union was primarily a political process and it was essential for the government and the Parliament to reach an agreement. A referendum was not necessary from the point of view of the Constitution but the government decided to propose and organise one. In our opinion, it was obvious that such an important decision required the participation of all citizens. All the political parties agreed to it. Therefore, the government submitted a proposal to hold a referendum, which the Parliament approved. The result of the referendum was really convincing. For me, and probably for many others, it was also the moment when the country definitively broke free from the sphere of Russia's power.

When the talks started, the Czech Republic had already become an associated country (in 1991), so in fact the work on its accession lasted more than ten years.

For all those years we were in close contact with the European Union and its individual representatives. There were dozens of consultations and preparatory discussions and, very importantly, that particular work, done jointly with the European Union, enabled us to establish a number of contacts and personal relationships. It also helped us to understand how the European Union works internally, which was useful after the accession because we could get our bearings and engage quickly.

For me personally, the accession process consisted mainly in working in the area of social policy and eventually in my capacity as Prime Minister, which included general coordination and top-level political negotiations. There were so many things happening that the individual moments and memories often blend into a single colourful current.

However, what has really stuck in my mind the most is the time when I was waiting for the result of the referendum. I felt an extraordinary tension because, for example, the result of the Slovak referendum was tight. The result of the Czech referendum definitely cannot be said to have been expected with certainty.

I think that it is right to realise that the European Union is a remarkable political innovation, probably the greatest in European history, and that it was established as a logical political response to the disasters of both World Wars. We can hardly imagine how significant a step the founders of the EU made in 1950, when many cities were still in ruins and one could hope that his or her mother would return, deciding to work on future peace together with the defeated. The fact that this idea could be accomplished is a miracle.

Viewing the accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union from a longer historical perspective, we can say that throughout its existence, the Czech state has always been part of an integrated area. The Czech king was a prince-elector of the Holy Roman Empire, in which the Kingdom was integrated. In the times of the Kingdom's greatest power, the Czech king was also the king of Hungary and Poland. That means that we integrated Central Europe ourselves. Then the country was part of the Hapsburg Empire, and, after all, the first Czechoslovak Republic was based on integration because Slovakia was integrated in it.

Therefore, the crucial question of our history was not whether or not to be integrated but what kind of integration it should be and what our position in it would be. The “Back to Europe” slogan had its deep meaning and deep historical reasons.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the willingness of the European Union to accept us created opportunities that we used in 2004.





How Was the Research for “Divided by Europe” Created?

The relationship of the Czechs to the European Union 20 years after the Czech Republic’s accession to the EU – a summary of the research

In the first years after the fall of the Communist regime in November 1989, the Czechs shared several great narratives stemming from the new energy and helping the society to maintain its enthusiasm after the Velvet Revolution. Apart from economic transformation and the restoration of democracy, one of the most powerful stories was the country’s return to the West. After all, the “Back to Europe” slogan pervaded the Czech Republic’s efforts to enter the two most important Western organisations, i.e. the NATO and the European Union. This narrative was seemingly crowned on 1 May 2004, when the country became an EU member state after the unequivocal results of the previous year’s referendum.

However, international relationships are like marriage: neither the courtship nor the wedding means that the hard work is over. During the twenty years of the co-existence of the Czech Republic and the other EU

member states within the same organisation, there have been several crises of different extent and seriousness. As a result, more sober views and more realistic expectations have come to the fore while the countries continue getting to know each other better. An important change is the fact that the European Union itself and the relationship to it have become more important for most Czechs. For one part of the society, the EU means an important framework of the country’s safety and prosperity while the other part considers it to be an oppressive foreign power preventing the Czech Republic from developing its potential fully.

This research is largely based on the knowledge gained by the STEM Institute for Empirical Research successively in history as well as in the recent years of intensive survey of the Czechs’ opinions on the European Union. It is focused on the Czechs’ view of the EU membership and on distinguishing different groups of society in terms of their attitude to the EU. Analysing the basic attitudes to the EU leads to a more varied social stratification than a mere division into fans and opponents: a total of six characteristic segments have been identified, of which three have anti-EU attitudes of different intensity and represent two fifths of the public. Two other segments disapprove of the EU to a large extent and represent another two fifths of adult Czechs. The remaining fifth is a group

whose view of the EU is ambivalent: in certain respects, a positive opinion prevails while in some other respects it is negative.

Apart from dividing the society into segments, the research deals with issues related to the position of the Czech Republic in the world. Should the country steer to the East or the West? Should it cooperate with someone in doing so or should it be completely independent? Should it cooperate within the European Union? And are the Czechs proud of being Europeans? Another question was whether the Czechs would prefer to reform the EU, preserve its current state or leave it. Since people’s opinions are often based on their knowledge or lack of knowledge of the subject, the public were also asked how much they were interested in what is happening in the EU and their awareness of the EU and its functioning was examined as well.

Focused on young Czechs

Various levels of the analysis show that the attitude of younger Czechs is generally different from that of the rest of the public. Younger people view the European Union more positively than the older generations in most respects and what they have in common above all is the fact that they were born in the European Union or have spent most of their adolescence in it. A substantial part of the research is focused on young people between eighteen and twenty-nine years of age, so it is possible to see how strong their pro-European stance is, in what respects they are not very different from the older citizens and whether they know more about the functioning of the EU than the rest of the society.

HOW THE RESEARCH WAS DONE

The research into the Czechs’ attitude to the European Union and the results presented in this publication were prepared for Czech Radio by a team of the STEM Institute for Empirical Research consisting of Martin Buchtík, Martin Kratochvíl, Filip Hanka, Tereza Masopustová and Eliška Votavová. The survey was done online and in person by STEM/MARK on a sample of 2034 respondents in November 2023. The resulting aggregate is representative of the adult Czech population of eighteen and more years of age from the point of view of all standard socio-demographic indicators. It was also balanced so as to be representative from the point of view of the respondents’ behaviour in the 2021 Chamber of Deputies elections and in the second round of the 2023 presidential election.

The main research also included an extended survey focused on young Czechs between eighteen and twenty-nine years of age, i.e. those who mostly grew up after the Czech Republic had become a member of the EU. A total of 660 people of this age group were asked. This aggregate is also representative of the surveyed population, i.e. adult Czechs aged 18–29.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

Martin Buchtík is the Executive Director of the STEM Institute for Empirical Research. He focuses on subjects related to the dynamically changing society in a wider context as well as the formation of public opinion, quality of life, social cohesion and inequalities.

Martin Kratochvíl works mostly on STEM’s political and pre-election polls. He also specialises in researching the relationship of the Czech public to the EU.

Filip Hanka manages a project called “Czech Interests in the EU” and is a communication expert focusing on international and state institutions. He also clarifies EU-related subjects to the Czech public and formulates the Czech Republic’s priorities as part of its EU membership.

Tereza Masopustová is the chief analyst of the “Czech interests in the EU” project. She contributes to formulating Czech priorities in the EU, makes EU affairs easier to understand for the public and organises communication channels through which information becomes publicly available.

Eliška Votavová made an extensive secondary analysis and contributed to data visualisation in this research. She is finishing her Bachelor studies in sociology at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague.

OTHER PARTS OF THE PROJECT

The project was also contributed to by the teams of sociologists of the Public Opinion Research Centre and of the non-profit PAQ Research. The Public Opinion Research Centre team, led by Paulína Tabery, created an extensive database of the EU member states’ citizens’ responses to different EU-related questions asked by Eurobarometer in 2004–2022. The database allows users to study the development of opinions in individual countries in time, compare the level of opinions in different countries and view everything in clearly arranged maps. The PAQ Research team, led by Daniel Prokop, used its unique longitudinal panel, in which it had asked the same set of respondents different questions throughout the previous years. Based on an analysis of this panel’s data, it was possible to show the connection between the changes in the respondents’ everyday life and their attitude to the European Union.

Czechia 20 Years After Joining the EU

The Czech Republic has been in the European Union for twenty years. How is the society reflecting it and what is it getting out of it? This unique research for Czech Radio shows that the public can be divided into six groups according to how they view EU-related subjects. STEM's data shows how the Czechs' relationship to the EU is affected by the crises that they have gone through in the past two decades and what they have gained thanks to the membership.

Initial optimism and good mood in relation to the European Union were followed by many setbacks. The Czechs are currently viewing the EU through this filter: am I a winner or a loser? For some, the Union has become a symbol of allegiance to the West while for others it represents disappointment the post-1989 development.

Divided by Europe - a unique project of Czech Radio and STEM describes the Czechs' moods and attitudes not only to the European Union. Essential questions were answered by more than 2,000 respondents. The data for the project was collected during November 2023 by means of online and personal surveys (CAWI and CAPI, ratio: 85:15). It provides a detailed view of the Czech Republic's twenty years in the EU.

"Twenty years after accession, we are well aware of the different risks that the European Union may bring. However, we are also aware of the advantages. Although the Czech public generally do not understand the EU very much, the feeling that our country should be its member state still prevails," comments one of the researchers, STEM's sociologist Martin Kratochvíl.

The sense of belonging to the European Union is not deeply rooted in Czech society with only a minority of

people considering themselves to be its part. The Czechs think of themselves as Europeans rather than citizens of the EU. The European Union is regarded as a problematic brand by the Czechs.

The reason is its political characteristic, which can divide rather than unite society. By contrast, the term "Europe" is more neutral and seen by the Czechs as geographical or philosophical values and concept. They feel historically proud of it. In connection with the Union, subjects emerge that do not have positive connotations. That is apparent especially in relation to the green transformation, which has not become very popular, and Green Deal is almost a swear word.

The legacy of Václav Klaus

The accession to the European Union was supported by over 77% of voters in June 2003 and as a result, the Czechs achieved a goal set in the 1990s and became part of Western structures. The positive impression of the first years in the EU was also contributed to by the prosperity of those times.

However, the role of the Czech Republic in the EU began to be questioned soon after that. The Union's internal operation changed with the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon, which gave more powers to the European Parliament and established the post of President of the European Council - a body consisting of presidents and prime ministers, which has had a permanent head since then. Until that time, it had always been headed by a representative of the Council Presidency country. The Czech Republic became the Council Presidency country in the first half of 2009 through the rotational system. After that, the feeling that politicians in nation states could directly influence EU affairs started vanishing.

However, that was not the only reason. "The key figure who came up with criticism and challenged the fact that

we should cooperate within the European Union was then President, Václav Klaus," says analyst Kratochvíl. As the head of the state who was not in favour of the conception of the European project, Klaus left an indelible mark on the Czechs' attitude to the EU.

At the same time, the U.S. financial and debt crisis came. In the EU, it affected the Eurozone countries first but eventually it had an impact on all member states. The financial crisis is connected with the first significant decrease in trust in the EU.

The following years undermined Czech society's trust in the European Union and resulted, for example, in the persisting reluctance to adopt the euro. That can be regarded as the main consequence of the financial crisis and the related political rhetoric. The essential reason is the fact that due to the interconnected markets, the crisis influenced not only the Eurozone but also the Czech Republic and its economy.

Effects of other crises

If the Czechs are asked what key things they should get from their country's EU membership, besides economic benefits they mention safety. The EU should be an "outer shield" that protects the country on the outside, which brings inner stability to create such working conditions that lead to development and general prosperity.

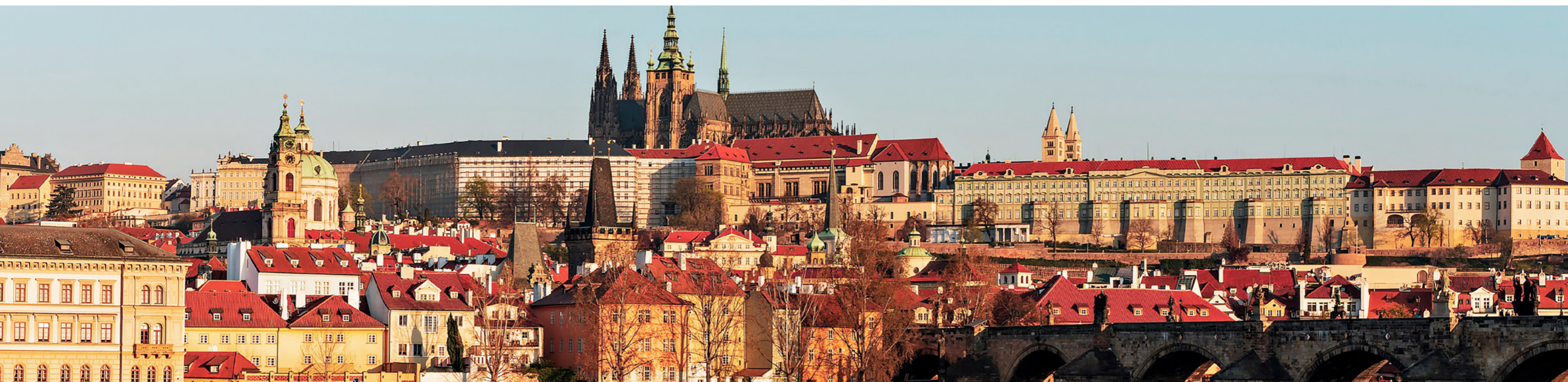
The longest and steepest decline in the Czechs' trust in the EU was caused by the 2015 migrant crisis. It has been said that, in a nutshell, it was the EU's fault. Moreover, people's fears, worries and uncertainty were contributed to by politicians' statements, and the Czechs' attitude was also reflected by the country's unwillingness to accept refugees. There was complete lack of confidence in the EU's ability to cope with the migrant crisis and as a result, for a substantial part of the Czech public the Union's reputation was significantly damaged.

"Previously, the EU had not been perceived as something important; rather, it was considered to be a casual player who would come up with individual, more or less important changes. However, it had become an increasingly discussed subject by the time of the migrant crisis. Even the public now view the EU as an important subject," says one of the researchers.

By contrast, the Covid-19 crisis did not significantly damage the EU's reputation in Czech society. It was viewed neutrally and by part of the public even positively. The society did not blame the European Union for the problems that the Czech Republic had to deal with during the pandemic. In fact, the Czechs appreciated the member states' joint action; for example, in purchasing vaccines. Therefore, even though this crisis contributed to the general polarization of the public, the Czechs' view of EU-related issues remained unchanged.

The country's being anchored in the EU structures proved to be crucial after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. It affected the Czechs deeply, especially because of their experience from the past, which the society generally recalled. Sociologist Kratochvíl mentions the effect it caused: "The public realised that we are a really small country, so we need to be part of a larger whole that can protect us." Immediately after the Russian invasion, the trust in all international institutions, even NATO, increased.

However, since then this conviction has weakened and gaps between the individual groups of Czech society have become bigger. There has also been disagreement regarding further support of Ukraine and sanctions against Russia.



Opinion on the EU Divides Czech Society into Six Groups

Czech society is divided by different views of the European Union. The attitudes that people have to the EU depend on an essential criterion: whether they are doing well thanks to it. This criterion helped the researchers to establish six groups of different sizes: the Euro Enthusiasts, the Supporters, the Tepid Supporters, the Undecided, the Opponents and the Die-hard Opponents. They differ in their trust in institutions, the extent of their criticism and their ideas of future cooperation within the joint European project as well as willingness to contribute to changes.

The STEM sociologists identified two fifths of Czechs who are pro-EU to a certain degree, another two fifths that are anti-EU and one fifth that has mixed feelings about the EU.

Has the Czech Republic succeeded in its efforts after 1989? That is a question that the Czechs ask before beginning to think about their relationship to the EU. The reason is that to them the EU has become a symbol of their country's success in the process of globalisation and modernisation.

The pro-EU part of the society is comprised of the Euro Enthusiasts, the Supporters and the Tepid Supporters. Those Czechs who fall into these groups consider their post-1989 efforts successful and they think of the EU as the symbol of their success. They can also more frequently use the advantages offered by the Union: they travel, do business and communicate with people from other countries.

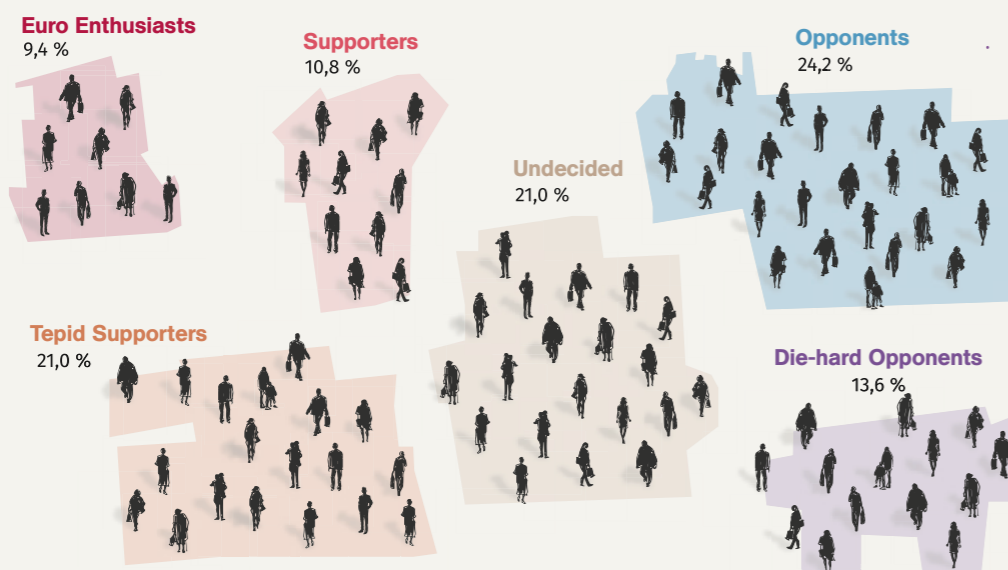
Those who think that the country's EU membership has not brought them much mostly constitute the anti-EU

part of Czech society. In the *Divided by Europe* research they are called the Opponents and the Die-hard Opponents. The Die-hard Opponents in particular blame the European Union for their own failure. "Brussels is to them a kind of centre of all power that behaves like Moscow in the Soviet times," says Kratochvíl. The anti-EU groups do not see many opportunities for themselves in the future. They may feel betrayed or abandoned and consider certain changes to be absurd. The advantages of the EU membership seem abstract to them and they also have limited opportunities to see these advantages. Most of them regard the Czech Republic's EU membership as a burden.

The Undecided are between the aforementioned groups. They can tip the scales in terms of attitudes to the EU. They are not opposed to the EU but they do not look on it with favour either. They are not interested in the EU very much and are defined by their weak interest in public affairs in general. They focus on their own lives and adopt the opinions of the majority regarding crucial matters.

The STEM sociologists' findings show that the Czechs have been "divided by Europe" approximately since 2018. The dynamics of changes across the groups is only slight and there has been no substantial outflow of members from one group to another. However, there have been discernible changes in the anti-EU section: the number of Die-hard Opponents has been increasing. While at the beginning of the survey they constituted 4%, there were 11% percent of them in October 2022 and they currently represent 14% of society.

"The key factor causing this change is the development on the domestic front. And of course, it is related to the degree to which they blame the European Union for the negative or seemingly negative development, which is what has been happening to a large extent in recent years," comments Kratochvíl on the data.



Data source: STEM/Czech Radio | Data visualisation: Kristína Pšorn Zákopčanová, Toy Box

The Euro Enthusiasts

These are proud Europeans who would like the European Union to be vested with more powers. They feel admiration for the EU, at times almost uncritical. The Euro Enthusiasts constitute 9% of Czech society. What defines them?

The Euro Enthusiasts are extraordinarily West-oriented and their country's EU membership is natural and unquestionable. Another characteristic is the degree of trust they put in both the EU and national institutions.

"One of their requirements is that European integration should be deepened. Unlike all the other groups, they think it would be a largely positive act if the Czech Republic adopted the euro and if it was more integrated in the EU and delegated more powers to Brussels," remarks Kratochvíl.

These people are much more open to new ideas, which distinguishes them from the rest of the society. They are also naturally democratic and anti-authoritarian. They consider representative democracy to be the best possible form of government and the only right direction. If one of

the groups could say that its members are cosmopolitan rather than citizens of the Czech Republic, it would be the Euro Enthusiasts.

Their positive opinion of the EU is supported by their direct experience with the Union. And it is usually a good experience. The Euro Enthusiasts are the first and chief recipients of the advantages that the Czech Republic's EU membership provides. They study at secondary schools or universities and/or do business in other EU member states.

The members of this group also travel a lot. As sociologists have realised, a typical aspect of them is the so called Euro weekend, i.e. a short holiday in a European capital, to which they mostly travel by plane.

They are often, though not exclusively, people with a university degree or secondary school graduates. They are usually financially secure and there are more younger people among them than in the other groups. Many Euro Enthusiasts are also students. And more of them live in big university towns.



The Supporters

Eleven per cent of the Czech population is comprised of Supporters. They have reservations about the way the European Union works and they cannot agree on what its priorities should be. However, they consider the country's EU membership beneficial and they support it.

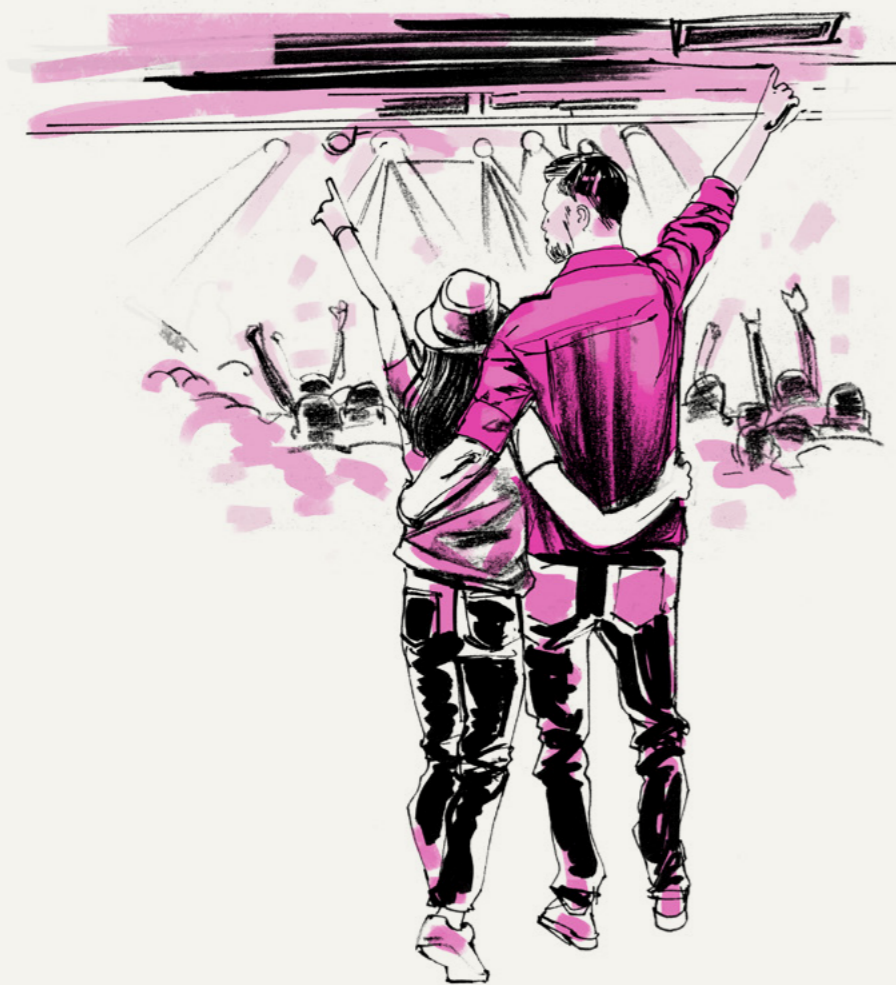
The Supporters have a stable and mostly positive attitude to the EU. What distinguishes them most from the Euro Enthusiasts is the fact that they do not appreciate the benefits of the EU membership as much. Also, their trust in domestic institutions and politicians is lower although in comparison with the other groups it is higher.

They share their expectations in relation to the EU with the Euro Enthusiasts to a large degree. However, the researchers point out that these expectations are not as high because the Supporters do not always believe that the EU can live up to them. They would not make any

essential changes to the EU and would only focus on slight modifications.

"The Supporters and the Euro Enthusiasts are almost like a couple. They have very similar opinions and differ in the degree of criticism or in the intensity of their relationship to the EU. There is also some scepticism in the Supporters' opinions but they definitely do not question the Czech Republic's EU membership," says STEM's sociologist.

The Supporters are the youngest group: a quarter of it is comprised of people between eighteen and twenty-nine years of age. An above-average part of them consists of students, which means that most of them have secondary or university education. Their economic situation is mostly good and even though they have been affected by the rising prices in the recent crises, they currently have no serious financial problems.



The Tepid Supporters

They support the EU but they do not have a very good idea of how it works. That is one of the reasons why the Tepid Supporters, as they can be called, are rather passive in their relationship to the EU. As the results of the *Divided by Europe* research show, they constitute 21% of Czech society.

A more tepid but still positive attitude based on unclear feelings: that is how the Tepid Supporters are described by the researchers. They do not want to secede from the European Union but their opinion is neither solid nor steadfast. In order for them to feel proud of the EU or to come to its defence, something must arouse their interest and provide sufficient motivation.

According to the sociologists, the Tepid Supporters are only sporadically interested in what is happening in the EU. For example, they associate the possibility to travel around Europe without border checks with their country's EU membership far less than the Euro Enthusiasts do. However, they feel a strong sense of belonging to Europe.

"They generally feel that the Czech Republic should be part of a larger structure, belong to the West and be protected by an international treaty. They do think it is right for us to be in the EU but they are more reserved and critical to it than the Euro Enthusiasts and Supporters," explains Martin Kratochvíl.

This group mostly consists of middle-aged people between thirty and fifty-nine. They consider themselves to be reasonably well off, usually have no serious financial problems and belong to the middle and lower-middle classes of Czech society. Most of them have secondary or university education.

The majority of them are more settled people whose interest in the world around them is average. They often get information about the EU from other people around them or from their favourite media figures or politicians, so their EU experience is mostly vicarious.



The Undecided

The Undecided are in between the Czech EU supporters and opponents. In recent years the prevailing opinion among them is that the Czech Republic should remain in the EU. They are neither staunch supporters nor opponents of the EU as they are not very interested in what is happening in the Union. They constitute 21% of Czech society.

This group is defined especially by the fact that its members are much less interested in public affairs and especially in the European Union than all the other groups.

The Undecided do not condemn the EU but neither do they expect it to help them to solve their problems. If there was a referendum on secession from the EU, most of them would vote for staying in it, though not very enthusiastically. However, when they are presented with a critical opinion of the EU, they tend to agree.

"In a way, they stand aside from the public debate but they have a positive attitude to the European Union in some respects. Their relationship to it is very loose. They probably

do not even regard it as something that is present in their lives. They prefer to maintain the status quo, which might be the reason why they would not secede from the EU.

That is one of the key attitudes that distinguishes them from the Opponents," explains Kratochvíl.

What the Undecided want most is stability, security and safety in their lives. Therefore, they only become politically active if there is a society-wide or Europe-wide event that may result in a change of the existing opinion or in a new opinion.

Rather than developing their own attitudes, the members of this group adopt the attitudes of others. Most of them are women, usually over forty-five years of age. They mostly have vocational education and some of them are secondary school graduates. Those who are economically active mostly do blue-collar jobs. They have been significantly affected by the inflation and increase in prices in recent years. As a result, some of them struggle to make ends meet.



The Opponents

The first group of the anti-EU section of Czech society is the Opponents. They mostly have negative attitudes to the European Union as well as to Czech politicians and government. They constitute 24% of the population. They are often disappointed with the post-1989 development and by the current political and economic situation of the Czech Republic.

The Opponents are typically those who have been dissatisfied with how certain things work in the Czech Republic although their dissatisfaction is not always specified. The researchers point out that a large part of this group has lower social and economic capital, which does not allow them to use to a larger degree some of the advantages provided by the EU. And that also influences their stance towards the Union.

"As a result of different crises they often feel that there will not be any better times. They do not see the future as very positive; for instance, most of them do not think that their children might be better off than themselves. That may also form their sceptical view on the world around them and on the EU," says the sociologist, interpreting the conclusion drawn from the data.

The chances that their opinions might become more pro-European are relatively small but unlike the Die-hard

Opponents, who are even more anti-EU, they can see some minor advantages of the country's EU membership. Their attitude to the EU is also more positive as regards securing the safety of the Czech Republic.

"The latter opinion was largely formed after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The shock from the war that had broken out nearby caused even the Opponents to affiliate themselves a bit more with the EU, which they see as a potential guarantor of security. However, in other respects they remain mostly sceptical," says Martin Kratochvíl.

The Opponents are for the most part comprised of older age groups. A slightly larger number of them have elementary or vocational education. A substantial part of them are retired and if they work, they mostly do blue-collar jobs. They usually live in the country or in small towns.

They mostly consider themselves to have average or low income and they hardly ever or never travel abroad. They have been strongly affected by the economic crisis of the past two years and some of them have financial problems. It is generally more difficult for them to cope with financial crises.



The Die-hard Opponents

The most decided opinion is that of the Die-hard Opponents. Their anti-EU stance is firm and they are more willing to show their opposition to the European Union actively. They can speak negatively about the EU in internet discussions and in conversation with their family and friends. And they are the most willing of all the groups to participate in public protests against the EU.

To the Die-hard Opponents, the EU brings mostly or only disadvantages and a large number of them view the EU as a threat. They are disappointed by their country's development up to now and by the current situation. They do not really believe that the future might bring something positive to them.

They do not have much relevant information about EU affairs. In comparison with the other groups, they are not very interested in international politics and neither do they pay much attention to domestic politics.

Of all the groups, they are generally the least willing to identify themselves as Europeans, let alone the citizens of the European Union. Relatively few of them regard themselves as local or Czech patriots.

They are truly dissatisfied. "There are two reasons. The more important one is the development of domestic

economy, which they see as a real problem because they are usually less financially secure. If the economy becomes worse, they are the first to see the consequences," explains Kratochvíl. The other reason is the war in Ukraine and its aspects related to values. "This group includes the largest number of people with a critical view of the Czech Republic's and the EU's attitude to the war, to Russia and to Ukraine," adds the sociologist.

However, the STEM researchers assume that the number of this group's members might not increase as the development of Czech economy is becoming less negative. The potential of its growth over the current 14% of population is rather low.

There are very few young people among the Die-hard Opponents. Most of the group's members are people over forty-five years of age who have vocational education. They are usually employees doing blue-collar jobs as well as retired people. For the most part, they are not financially secure at all. Many of them have or expect to have financial difficulties concerning their household. If they already have financial problems, they have had them for a longer time.



THE CROWN OR THE EURO?
The Czech Republic does not have the common European currency after twenty years. It is a political rather than an economic issue.

Credit: CTK/Sojka Libor

The Czech Republic and the EU

Domestic Politics and Satisfaction with EU Membership

Satisfaction with the Czech Republic's EU membership is currently expressed by 45% of society. In spite of their obvious reservations, the Czechs do not wish to leave the EU. They would like the EU to be reformed but they do not have a clear idea of what the reform should be like. Their views of the EU membership are significantly influenced by domestic politics.

"Now that we are in the EU, let's do something about it." The Czech attitude to the EU shows the potential to make minor or bigger changes to the way it works. Not even half of the society is satisfied with the current situation.

The highest satisfaction with the Czech Republic's European Union membership prevailed shortly after its accession. One of the reasons was a strong domestic economy. In 2009, positive attitudes reached almost 70%. By contrast, the weakest moment came during the culminating migrant crisis, when satisfaction dropped to 35%.

Satisfaction has been around 50% since 2018. According to Kratochvíl, it is important to emphasise that if there was a referendum on the Czech Republic's secession from the EU, majority of people would vote to remain.

The impression that the Czechs have of the country's EU membership and their (dis)satisfaction with the EU divides them into those who are pro-European and those who are anti-European.

The essential thing in this matter is the attitude of the Tepid Supporters and of the Undecided. It is underlined

in their names: the former are characterised by a truly tepidly positive attitude and the latter are wavering, i.e. both groups' responses are less intensive.

Assessment of the post-1989 development

There are slight differences related to the age of the respondents although age does not play as crucial a role as values. However, younger members of society are characterised by being more open towards the EU, which is caused by the fact that they grew up in it and that it is an ordinary part of their lives.

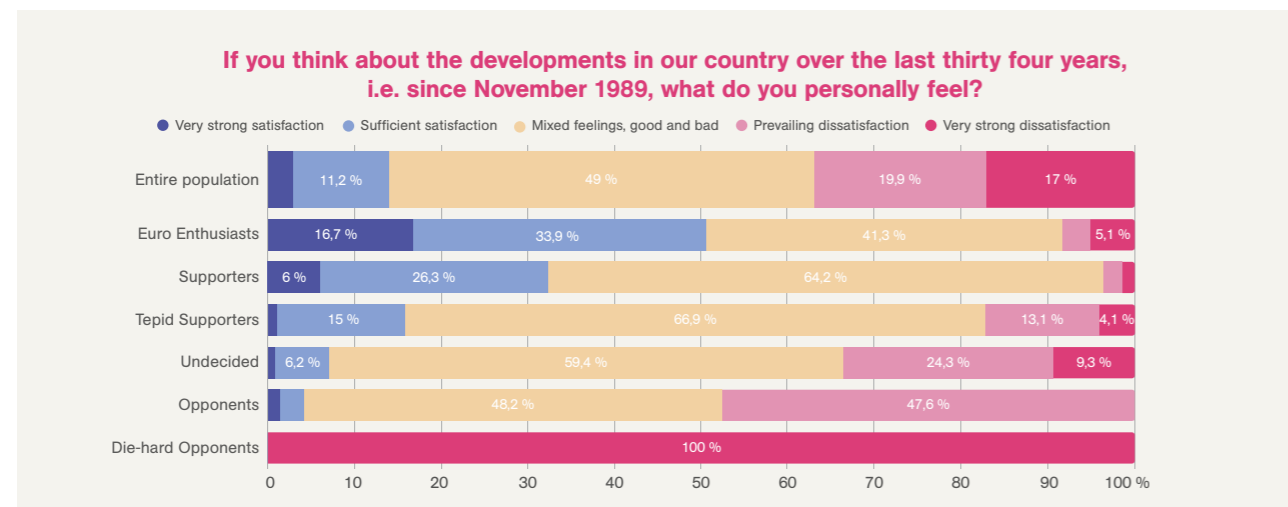
"A symbolic milestone is age 36. The older age groups are dominated by people who are largely dissatisfied with the EU or with their country's membership while the younger ones are predominantly satisfied," says Kratochvíl.

Another fundamental factor is the stance of people in the pre-retirement decade of their lives. People between fifty-five and sixty-five years of age are the most sceptical and critical towards the world around them and especially to the political situation in the Czech Republic, which is also reflected by their view of the EU.

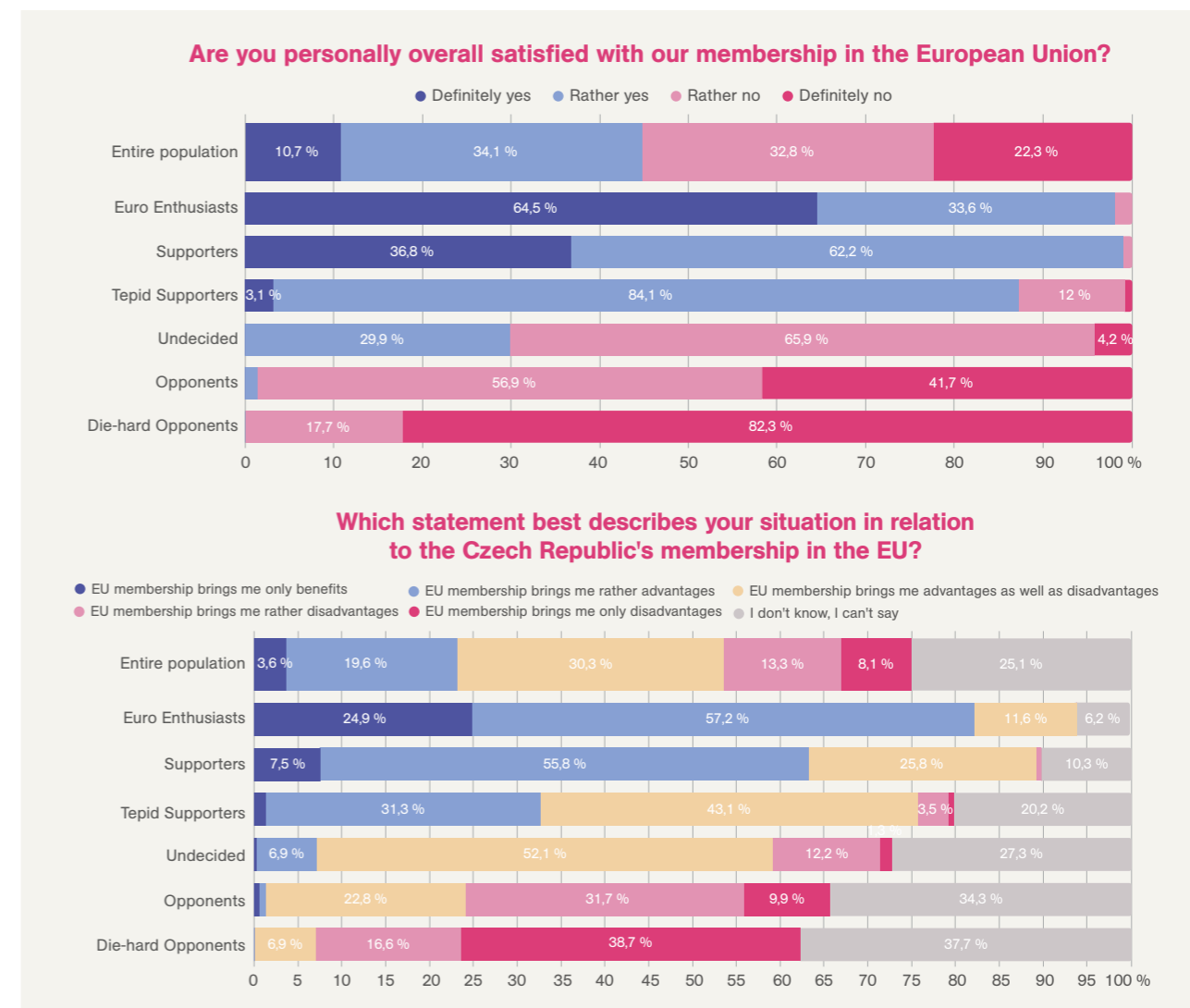
Domestic affairs also determine the way the public view the European Union. The relationship that one builds to the institution is influenced by their personal as well as by the society-wide experience of the post-1989 development.

Kratochvíl mentions three main points that help people to develop their attitude to the Union: international affairs, domestic affairs and personal situation. "The ways of viewing domestic and international affairs have recently become more interrelated. If the Czech Republic is not doing well, people might be more inclined to attribute it to the country's EU membership," says the STEM analyst.

There is another interesting factor: the two groups that are each other's exact opposites, i.e. the Euro Enthusiasts and the Die-hard Opponents, let their opinion of the EU be more influenced by their personal experience;



The Die-hard Opponents are defined by this attitude, so they will show full dissatisfaction with the development after November 1989.



the Supporters, the Tepid Supporters, the Undecided and the Opponents view EU affairs in a less personal context.

Social development

The assessment of the development in the Czech Republic in the almost thirty-five years since the fall of Communism has not always been necessarily negative. However, mixed feelings have prevailed at least since the country's accession to the EU. The long-time atmosphere in the society is expressed by the stance of centrism.

The STEM data shows that the dissatisfied began to outnumber the satisfied in the second half of 2020 at the latest. The year 2019 and the first half of 2020 were the last periods when positive attitudes prevailed over the negative.

Views of domestic politics have been gradually getting worse, which partly determines the people's attitudes to the European Union as well. However, the Czechs do not necessarily attribute their own negative feelings to the EU. They can separate those problems for which they blame the government from those that they think are caused by the EU.

Distinguishing between the crises

An example of a problem addressed by the EU is the migrant crisis. It affected all Europe and the Czechs were startled by it but they largely attributed it to the European Union. "It was predominantly a European problem – the trust in the government increased or stagnated while the trust in the EU decreased," says the sociologist.

The opposite happened during the Covid-19 pandemic, when dissatisfaction with domestic development increased significantly. "The dynamics of problems differs. It is obvious that some crises are clearly European and they mean a threat or a problem to us. As a result, the trust in and feelings towards the European Union develop dynamically. The other aspect is that if something is going wrong in the Czech Republic, it may but does not have to be associated with what is happening in the EU as a whole," comments Kratochvíl.

He also mentions the simplistic political rhetoric: if an issue is communicated as "they versus us," it may have a negative effect on the assessment of the European Union and Czech society will never stop taking negative stances towards the organisation whose part it is and whose politics it co-creates.

Being Czech, European, a citizen of the Union

There is general agreement across Czech society: it identifies itself with Europeanism. However, the trouble begins with the question whether people regard themselves as citizens of the European Union. The EU's "political nature" reduces its popularity. "It may be because for many Czechs, the EU has a political tinge to it," says sociologist Kratochvíl. He agrees that rebranding could be a temporary solution but that it is also necessary to work on increasing the prestige of the original brand.

Europe does not equal the European Union, at least from the point of view of Czech society. "For the majority of Czech society, Europe does not have a negative tinge to it. It is something the Czechs are really proud of and think there is a reason to be proud of it," describes Kratochvíl. The term "Europe" means a historical and geographic framework, so politics is laid aside in this case.

However, the same is not true for the EU, which the Czechs associate with political decisions and procedures chosen by the leaders of its 27 countries. But their awareness of the fact that the decisions are made jointly on the EU level is not very high.

The Czechs feel a sense of belonging to Europe according to their current stage of life. It is the strongest with young people, which Kratochvíl explains as a result of the European environment being natural to them. "European identity as well as their sense of belonging to the EU are

definitely more natural to them than to the rest of the society or at least to the older age groups," he says.

However, the differences between the individual generations are small. At each age, the sense of Europeanism reaches approximately 70%. As a result, there is remarkable agreement across society.

There is a certain turn at around the age of 35 but it is not really essential. However, one of the groups is specific: the one whose members are in their pre-retirement decade. They show a large degree of criticism towards the European Union but it is not irreversible. The support of the EU increases with older retirement age. According to the sociologists it may be because there is a larger number of people of this age who are less interested in political issues, which become unimportant to them.

"Those who are at the pre-retirement age go through an uncertain period of several years before they can retire. They may have more obligations; for example, they are going to completely repay their mortgage or their children are leaving home. So, there may be more difficulties in their lives and they do not have the social security and the free time related to being retired," explains Kratochvíl.

Renaming is not enough

In the public debate, the European Union is associated with politics. The Czechs think it reflects success and failure within the international system – which is true from the point of view of national representation – and they apply that to their own (un)achieved goals.

"We know that the European Union is only an instrument of joint European efforts, so if it ever becomes possible to identify the EU as Europe, it may change," says the sociologist. But there have been no suggestions so far that those two attitudes might be merging.

The damage to the EU brand has been noticed by the political representation as well. In an attempt to avoid the problematic "Union," they prefer to use the term "Europe." An example can be the slogan chosen by the Czech government for the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the Czech Republic's EU membership: "Creating Europe."

Such a strategy may work if it is necessary to deal with issues and solve problems quickly but it is not a permanent solution. Since the Czech Republic can be expected to be part of the European Union throughout the EU's existence, it is necessary to deploy another strategy that increases the prestige of the original EU brand.

The missing narrative

The sociologists assume that politicians and state officials should communicate better about what is created in the EU and about the EU membership advantages. They should avoid simplistic phrases and proclaiming that they are helpless and cannot do anything in Brussels.

"It is our country's specificity that political representatives started playing the game of "us," Czech politicians, and "them," Brussels, relatively soon. Václav Klaus, an important anti-EU player, also appeared quite soon. He was reserved and critical towards the European Union not only during the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon but also throughout his presidency. And the political parties that had led us to the European Union, i.e. primarily the Civic Democrats and the Social Democrats, did not turn the capital that was here at the beginning into trust in the EU," observes Kratochvíl.

The turning point in this respect was the migrant crisis in which the Czechs' trust in the European Union decreased significantly – they did not believe that the EU was capable of solving the problem. In recent years, the scepticism is contributed to the EU's climate policies and the Green Deal legislation.

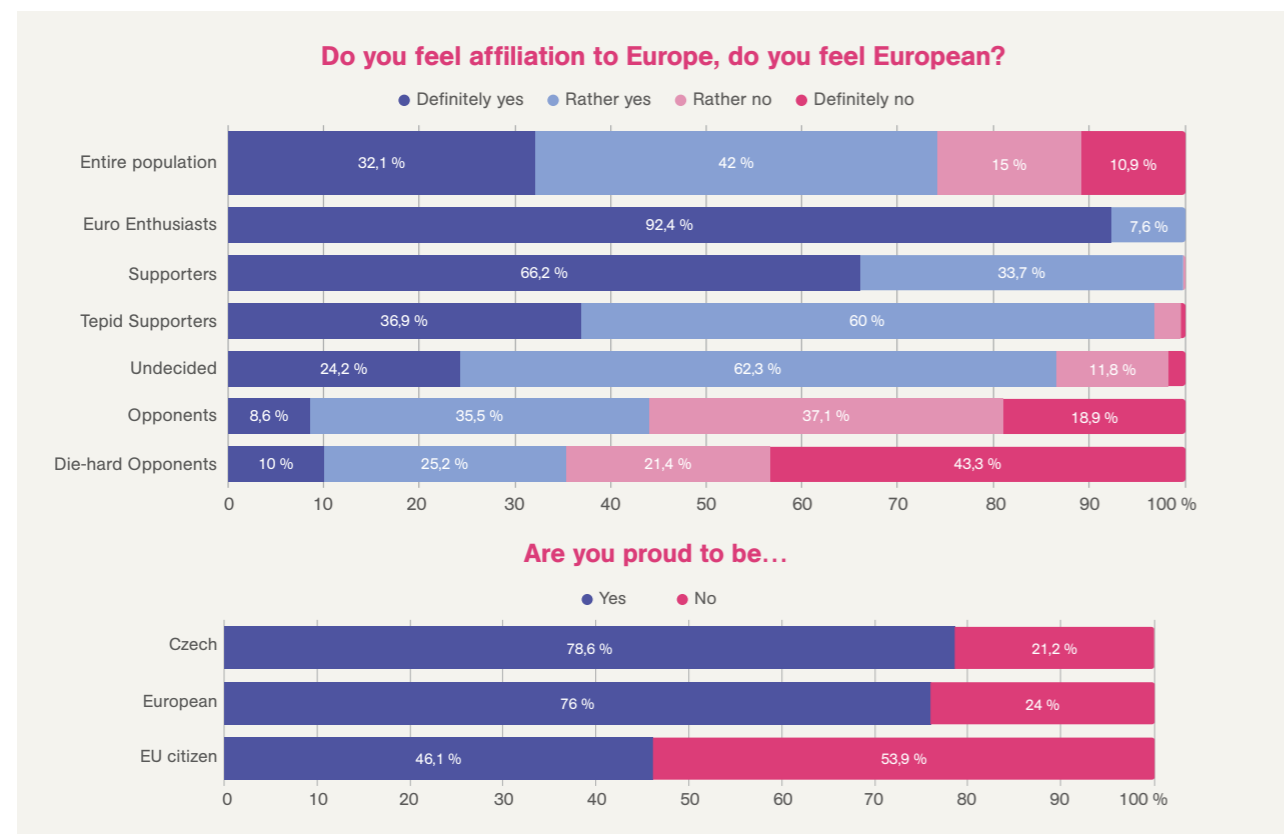
However, the sense of Europeanism is definitely influenced by what is happening in the EU. That is shown by the timeline which says that the Czechs felt as Europeans the least during the migrant crisis. By contrast, the highest percentage was recorded in 2019. The sociologists refer to that year as the "general peak of the Czechs' positive view on the world around them."

"The migrant crisis in the European Union subsided in 2019 and ceased to be one of the dominant subjects of the public debate. At the same time, the Czech economic boom was culminating and a large part of Czech society was doing well financially and in terms of prospects. At that time, Czech society was very open-minded, ready to continue growing and very optimistic," explains Kratochvíl.

Those prospects were, however, disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, the ensuing economic crisis and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The Czechs are currently missing the "crucial narrative" related to their country's EU membership. After concentrated efforts to re-join the rest of Europe after the fall of Communism and to be part of the EU as well as NATO, no further steps were taken. There were no other clear objectives.

"It is like a footballer who has scored one or two goals and is elated but then slows down and does not necessarily help the team any longer," comments the STEM analyst. In his opinion, the crucial step to take in the following years could be to set a target that the Czechs would like to achieve in the EU.



EUROSCEPTICISM AS A PROGRAMME. Jan Zahrádil (Civic Democrats) sat in the European Parliament for 20 years and was a vocal critic of deepening political integration of EU states. Credit: Jan Zátorský/MFDNES + LN/Profimedia

Age or Demography Does Not Matter

Who the Euro Enthusiasts are, what jobs the Undecided have or where the Opponents live – none of these demographic factors plays a crucial role in how the Czechs view the European Union. “We cannot say that all young people are pro-European and all older people are anti-European,” comments Martin Kratochvíl. The results of the *Divided by Europe* research disprove the simplistic ideas of what Czech society is like. The crucial role is played by one’s own experience.

A wide range of personal experiences is more significant than the individual demographic indicators. What matters to the Czechs is whether the EU has given them anything and whether they can use the advantages of the EU membership or whether they feel they have lost something.

A dividing line is drawn by financial security and the ability of the individual groups to cope with the previous financial crises. However, the STEM analyst points out that “we still cannot claim that the Die-hard Opponents are just not financially secure or that the Euro enthusiasts are all well off. That would be too simplistic.”

While 18% of Czechs claim that their financial security is very good, 20% of them consider it to be bad. However, the majority (62%) refer to their financial security as “average.” “Most Czechs try not to consider themselves superior to others or at least to the other members of the same group and neither do they want to belittle themselves,” explains Kratochvíl with regard to the most frequent responses in the survey.

Whether people feel they are doing well or whether they feel they are stagnating or even in need is reflected by what they think of the general success of the Czech Republic as a whole. The Euro Enthusiasts and the Supporters have not had as much difficulty coping with the recent financial crisis as the Opponents and Die-hard Opponents who reported more frequently that they had problems or too many obligations to be able to cope with any new crisis. Another important factor is whether or not the society and its individual groups can see that change and improvement are possible.

Regions as secondary aspects

The *Divided by Europe* data shows that all the six groups are more or less equally represented in all regions. The Euro Enthusiasts, the Tepid Supporters, the Die-hard Opponents as well as the other groups can be found everywhere.

“If there is an obvious trend, it is the fact that those who live in Prague or other big cities are more satisfied with the EU. But again, it is only a difference in intensity; it is definitely not true that everybody outside Prague is anti-EU,” Kratochvíl points out.

Cross-border commuters could be a special category. Those Czechs who cross the border because of work now have less paperwork to do thanks to their country’s EU membership and as a result, they save time and costs. If their experience is positive and if they have had few reasons to be disappointed in life, they are likely to be content with the Czech Republic’s EU membership.

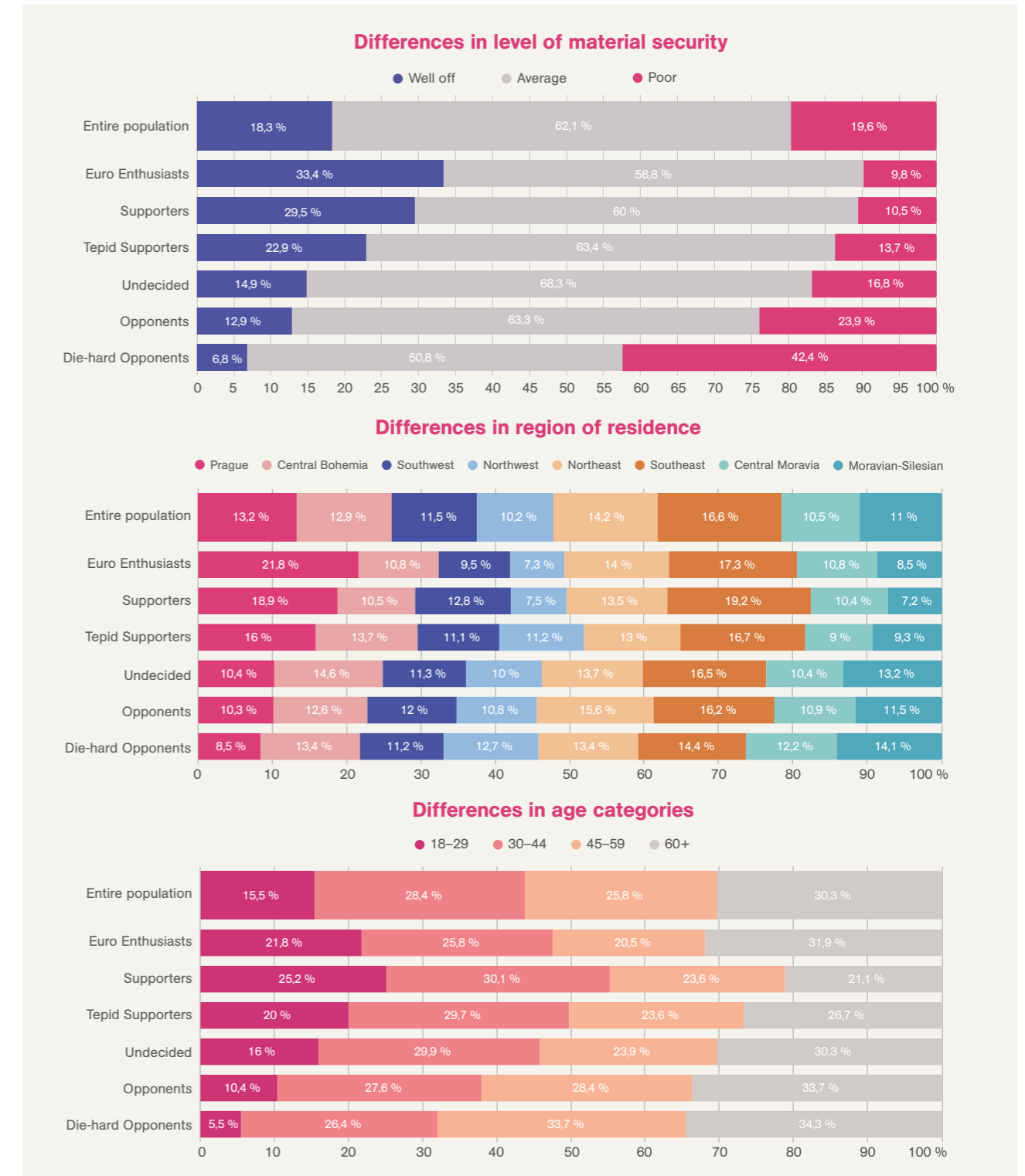
Students have a similar experience. Therefore, more pro-Union Czechs can be found in university towns. Students have some of the liveliest, most intensive and most

varied experiences. Moreover, they rarely say it is a negative experience. Their EU experience is based on the Erasmus programme, international grants or opportunities to explore European cities.

Also, for the twenty- and thirty-year-olds it is only natural that the Czech Republic is part of the European Union. It is completely normal for them. They have grown up and come of age in the EU and have encountered it at school, which is a very strong factor of their EU awareness.

Divided by Europe shows that 45% of the Euro Enthusiasts have a university degree. However, the fact must not be ignored that 12% of the Die-hard Opponents have a university degree as well.

Age is not necessarily an important factor in the division of the population into groups. “To put it very simply, the number of those dissatisfied with the EU (the Opponents or the Die-hard Opponents) increases with age. And with higher education, that number decreases,” explains the sociologist.



Referendum is Not a Concern

Restrict European integration or terminate cooperation? The Czechs want neither of these extremes in the European Union, as shown by the data of *Divided by Europe*. Although nearly a half of the society identifies itself as supporters of European integration, the majority regard it as an abstract term, which they might not have even thought about. On the other hand, a referendum on seceding from the EU is not relevant either. If it took place, 60% would vote for staying in the EU.

The Czechs do not want to leave the European Union. That is confirmed by a long-time trend that has been over 50% since 2018. The development has definitely been affected by the individual crises. The Czech public inclined to secession just after the European debt crisis. The biggest decline is connected with the migrant crisis. The current frame of mind of Czech society could be defined by the expression “in a safety zone” with the EU supporters clearly predominating.

“It is important to realise that we are asking the whole public but not everybody would come to the referendum, so voter turnout would be decisive like in any other elections,” comments Kratochvíl.

If the referendum were to take place, an essential role would be played by the campaign. At present, none of the Czech political parties is leading such a campaign although for the SPD (Svoboda a přímá demokracie – Freedom and Direct Democracy) it is one of the cornerstones of its programme.

NO to the referendum, YES to the EU

Divided by Europe shows that the Czechs are not in favour of the referendum. Only 36% of them would like it to take place and 50% are against it. If it were to take place, almost 60% of the population would vote for remaining in the EU.

What do the individual groups think of the possibility of a referendum? Attitudes are clear with the Euro Enthusiasts and Supporters as well as with the Die-hard Opponents. The Tepid Supporters are more in favour of remaining in the EU while the Opponents would opt for seceding.

“It is interesting that the Undecided, who are on the borderland between the two stances, show low intensity of their attitudes. At present, most of them would vote for remaining in the EU but their attitude is more centrist. At the moment they could tip the scales, depending on how the public debate would develop and who would influence them,” comments Kratochvíl.

Their hesitation is obvious in the decision process as such: whether or not to organise a referendum on the Czech Republic's secession from the EU. One of the possible explanations is that the question is too abstract for them.

It might be something unimportant to them or something they have never thought about very much. Therefore, their attitude is not completely formed.

Among the anti-EU groups, the Opponents and the Die-hard Opponents, there is always about a tenth of those who would vote for remaining in the EU in the referendum. However, researchers point out that this group is very small. “They could be thought of as those who would prefer to stay in the European Union, which they would possibly reform from within. That means they have not written off the EU so far,” describes the sociologist. In their views, they go back to what the EU was like previously. They do not want politics to play a very important role in it and they would like it to be a purely economic organisation.

Joining the Eurozone?

No secession but no closer affiliation either. There are 45% of supporters of European integration among the Czechs, which approximately corresponds to those who are satisfied with their country's EU membership. The STEM researchers put emphasis on this aspect because it helps them to define the Euro Enthusiasts segment of society.

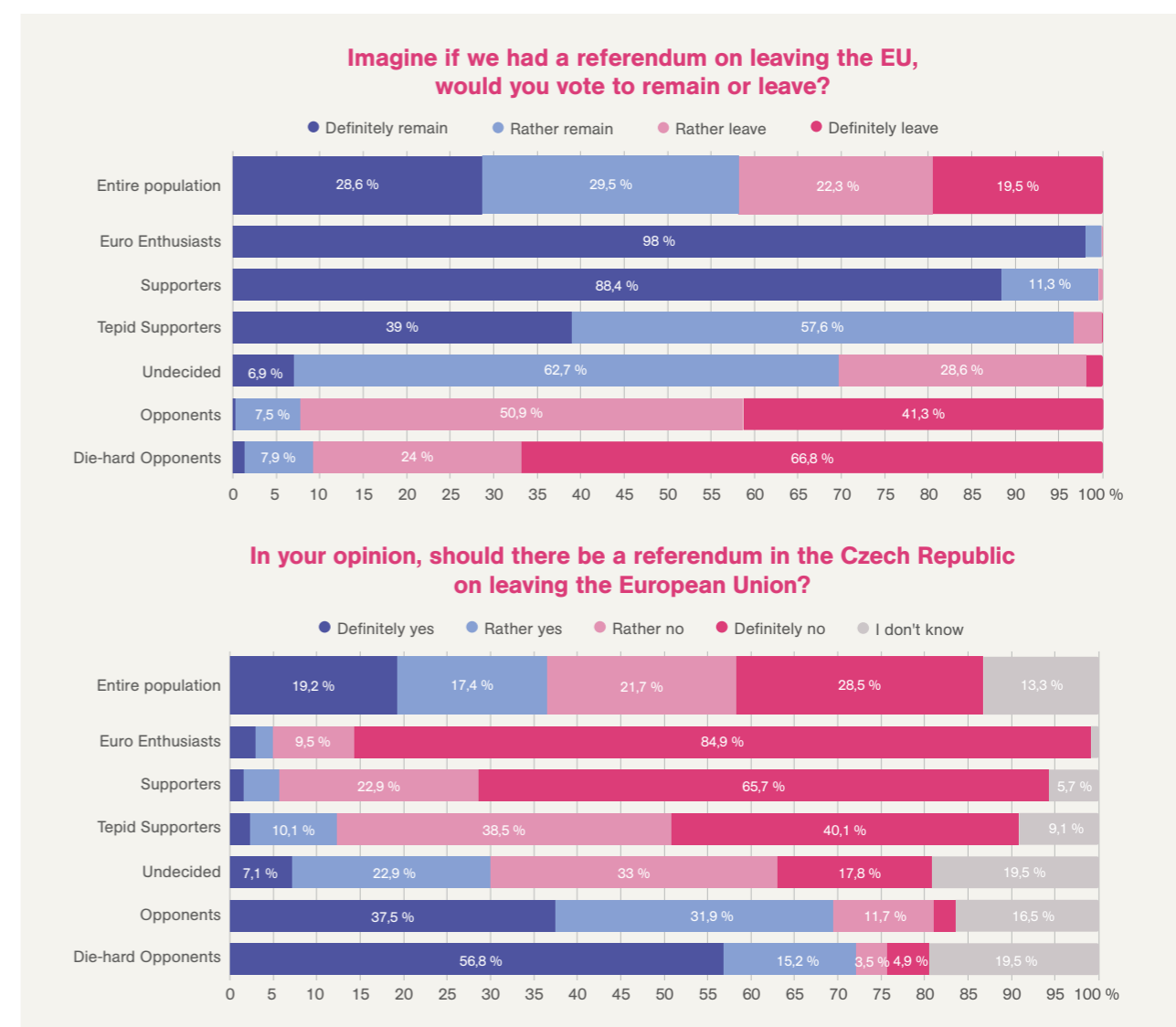
All three pro-EU groups defined by the research are in favour of European integration. More scepticism starts with the Undecided. However, integration is not completely rejected by the anti-EU groups.

Again, the reason could be the fact that it represents a rather abstract term for them or a subject that they have not thought about very much

People's opinion of deeper cooperation within the EU structures is also influenced by their not believing that their nation's voice would be heard on the EU level. Not even after twenty years in the EU do the Czechs believe that their country would be able to assert itself considerably.

The only exception was the initial period, when the proportion of those who thought that the Czech Republic could play an active role in the EU was 50%. The public were also positive during the Czech Republic's first EU Presidency in 2009. The attitude to the second Presidency two years ago was more lukewarm. Even though the Czech Republic's 2022 EU Presidency aroused the Czechs' interest in European issues, it did not leave the impression of the Czech Republic having gained a better position within the EU.

“The government and the state officials who participated in it met with positive response and the public appreciated the way they had managed the Presidency as such. However, whether it is a result of crises or of long-time scepticism, a year or more after the Presidency, the positive effect is very limited or non-existent,” remarks the STEM sociologist.



How Much Do We (Not) Know About the EU

After twenty years in the European Union, the Czechs would not do well in an imaginary graduation exam. Only 44% of people say they understand the way the EU works. Is the Czech Republic represented in the European Council, European Commission or European Parliament? There were only a few correct answers to this question, and not only in the anti-EU camp or among the Undecided. The Euro Enthusiasts failed the test as well.

About 56% of people declare that they do not understand the way the EU works. The crucial thing is the respondents' prevailing uncertainty, as shown by *Divided by Europe*. They rarely give a clear answer – whether positive or negative – regardless of which of the six groups they belong to.

There is more intensity in the answers of the Die-hard Opponents. Two fifths of them resolutely say that they definitely do not understand the EU. “That may be an ostentatious way of expressing the fact that they are not interested in the European Union very much and that they do not want to have much in common with it,” assumes Martin Kratochvíl.

And what about the public's real knowledge of the EU? The STEM researchers asked people a set of questions trying to find out how versed they were in history and how much they knew about the Czech Republic's current representation in the EU. The results are not very encouraging.

A knowledge quiz

The Czech Republic is represented in all EU bodies but awareness of that fact is rather low. About half of the public know about the country's being represented in the European Commission (nowadays by Commissioner Věra Jourová).

The public's knowledge of the Czech Republic's representation in the European Council, i.e. the supreme executive body, whose summits are regularly visited by the Czech Prime Minister, who is now Petr Fiala (Civic Democrats), is worse. Only about a third of respondents answered this question correctly. Not even the Euro Enthusiasts stood out although they did a bit better than the rest of the public: fewer than 50% of them answered correctly.

The Czechs did best in answering questions about the European Parliament. Approximately 70% of them know about the Czech Republic being represented in it. There are two possible explanations for that: firstly, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are elected directly, and secondly, the June election is drawing nearer and the institution's name is easy to grasp. However, only 39% stated the number of MEPs correctly.

“Asking about those bodies whose names may sound ‘exotic’ or ‘cryptic,’ such as the European Council and the European Commission, we can see that people's certainty decreases,” explains sociologist Kratochvíl.

The researchers conclude that for the Czech public debate there are too many EU institutions of various functions. Moreover, the Czechs do not have a very clear idea of who is responsible for what. That could be a suggestion for improvement in the future: provide better

explanations so that it is clear which body is responsible for which European legislation or regulations.

The public do not even feel that the EU legislation bears any Czech traces. The feeling that the EU is a joint project does not currently prevail in the society.

According to Kratochvíl, that could be a significant problem in the future: “If we are to be a functional part of the EU, we need to have a good idea of what we get from our membership, knowing that it is beneficial.”

Interest in politics

The Czech Republic's relationship to the European Union and its EU membership are still pre-eminently viewed as foreign affairs. Not even after twenty years of membership has the barrier between “us” and “Brussels” been overcome, so the EU remains to be referred to as a kind of external entity. That is also stimulated by the rhetoric of some politicians who have not abandoned the aforementioned ways of criticism.

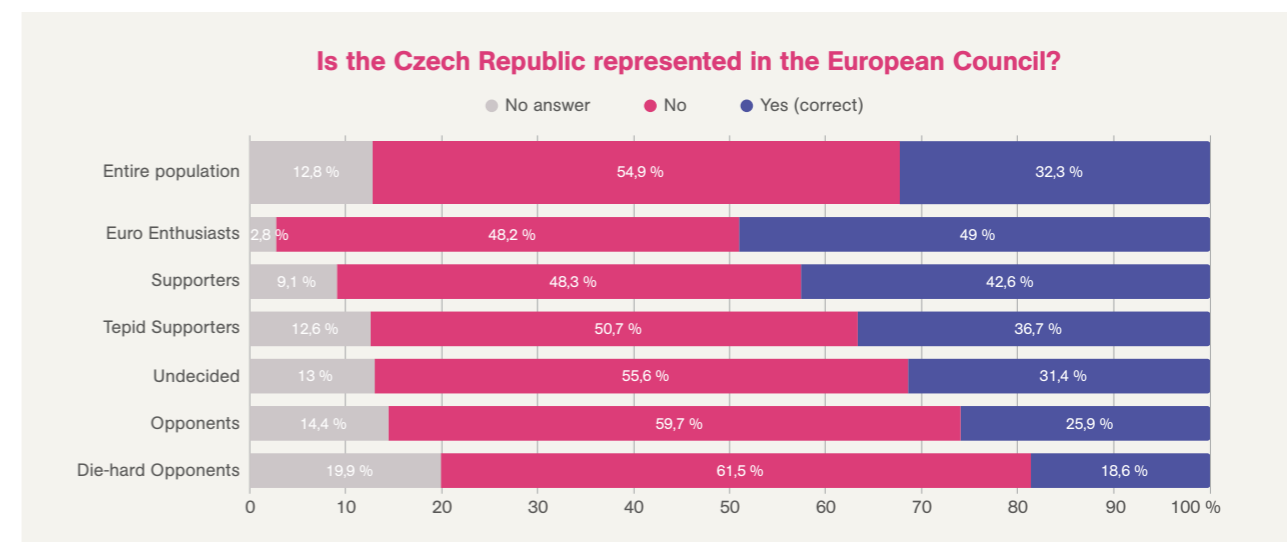
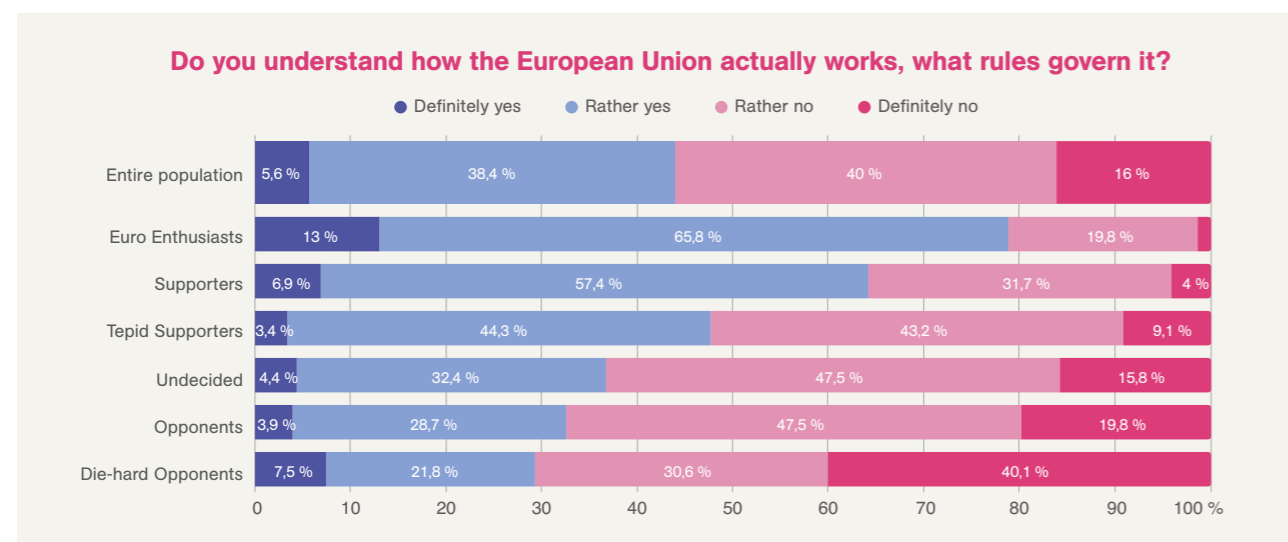
A closer look at the *Divided by Europe* data shows that of the six groups, the Euro Enthusiasts stand out. Their interest in both domestic and EU affairs is interrelated.

For a long time, the Czechs have had an idea of the Czech Republic as a small country that has little power. This feeling is also reflected in their believing whether or not their political representation is capable of including the “Czech interests” in EU regulations. In fact, the Czech Republic, with its economy and population, belongs among medium-sized EU countries.

“There might be no information about one of our politicians having actually achieved something great,” assumes Kratochvíl. “And if that happens, it quickly

becomes relativized or it gets lost in the political debate,” he adds.

The Czech Republic seems to lack a “transmission mechanism” that could provide the public with information about Czech politicians' or officials' success. If there is hardly any basic awareness of the fact that the country has its representatives, for instance, in the Council of the European Union and if many people do not know what the Council of the European Union is, the result is, naturally, worse understanding of what can be achieved in it and what consequences it may have.



Where Do We Look to Steer: Preferably the West, Ideally Centre

Preferably the West, definitely not the East and the best option is centrism. Fifty-seven per cent of Czech people think that their country should remain somewhere in between in the future. Czech society feels comfortable in the Western structures and resists further European integration but would like to reform the EU. How? They only have a vague idea about that.

The most attractive tendency for the Czechs is centrism. That is meant both geographically – they mostly regard their country as Central European – and from the point of view of bridging the gap between the opposed worlds of the West and the East and providing a communication channel.

The future tendency of the Czech Republic should be “somewhere in between,” as the majority of its citizens think. However, for a long time there have been 40% of those who would like to “go farther West.” The option of going East is preferred by a mere 4%.

The Euro Enthusiasts generally assume that the country should go further into the Western structures and think about the continuation of European integration. The Supporters also have strong pro-Western tendencies and the Tepid Supporters are also inclined to the West. The majority of the Undecided and of both groups of opponents think that the country should be neutral and centrist. Pro-Eastern tendencies are not dominant with any of the groups – not even among the Die-hard Opponents, who are the most critical to the EU project.

The roots of the centrist attitude

What is the dominant centrist attitude of the Czechs based on? The sociologists find the explanation in the conflict of different kinds of motivation. One of them is the feeling that the Czech Republic is a small country that should not embark on any big international adventures.

“Also, nobody should interfere in our domestic affairs; we should be independent,” explains Kratochvíl. He refers to the unwillingness of the majority of Czech society to deepen the European integration.

Czech historical experience plays another role. Memories of the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia are still deeply rooted in society. “The negative experience with the Soviet Union, or Russia, is an imaginary part of the barrier. It is one of the explanations why going East is not attractive,” comments Kratochvíl. The results of *Divided by Europe* also reflect Russia’s invasion of Ukraine more than two years ago. One of its impacts is that the Czechs’ pro-Western attitudes are slightly stronger while the dislike of Russia has increased again.

The Swiss ideal

Most Czechs like to be “in the centre.” That is shown not only by their preferences in terms of geopolitical tendencies but also by the popularity of different nationalities. The sociologists point out that after the Slovaks, who the Czechs still regard as brothers, the most popular nationality for them are the Swiss.

However, that does not mean that the Czechs have a particularly good knowledge of how the Swiss system works or that they have much personal experience with the Swiss society. What attracts them is Switzerland’s famous neutrality that is demonstrated, for example, by the fact that in spite of being in the middle of Europe, the country is not an EU member.



Nevertheless, as the previously presented *Divided by Europe* data shows, the Czechs feel comfortable with their country’s EU membership and definitely would not like to secede from the Union.

Kratochvíl interprets the centrist tendency as follows: “A large part of the society says, ‘we are already far enough in the West, so let’s not integrate further, let’s not establish any deeper connections. This is sufficient.’” Furthermore, there is an appeal for independence and self-sufficiency. That is meant both in terms of international politics and in terms of economy.

The society’s view remains consistent regardless of what the government is like. The STEM timeline begins before the last Chamber of Deputies election in 2021. That means that the Czechs’ world view was the same under the previous government, headed by Andrej Babiš (ANO – Action of Dissatisfied Citizens), as it is now, under the Fiala government.

The need to form alliances

The Czech Republic is rooted in Western structures through international institutions, especially the EU and the NATO. The need to form such alliances and to be part of a multi-state whole is felt by 70% of people. Most of them are the pro-EU section of society; this belief begins to be weaker with the Undecided.

The desire to cooperate prevails but the particular form of subsequent cooperation is not defined and there is no clear agreement in the society as to what it should be like. However, the more dominant view is that the Czech Republic should cooperate with other countries, even at the cost of some compromises. On the other hand, 46% of the society would prefer its own way in spite of everything.

So, the prevailing opinion is that it is beneficial for the Czech Republic to remain within European organisations, which should, however, be reformed. Only 5% of Czechs are completely satisfied with the EU but there is no agreement as to what kind of changes should be introduced.

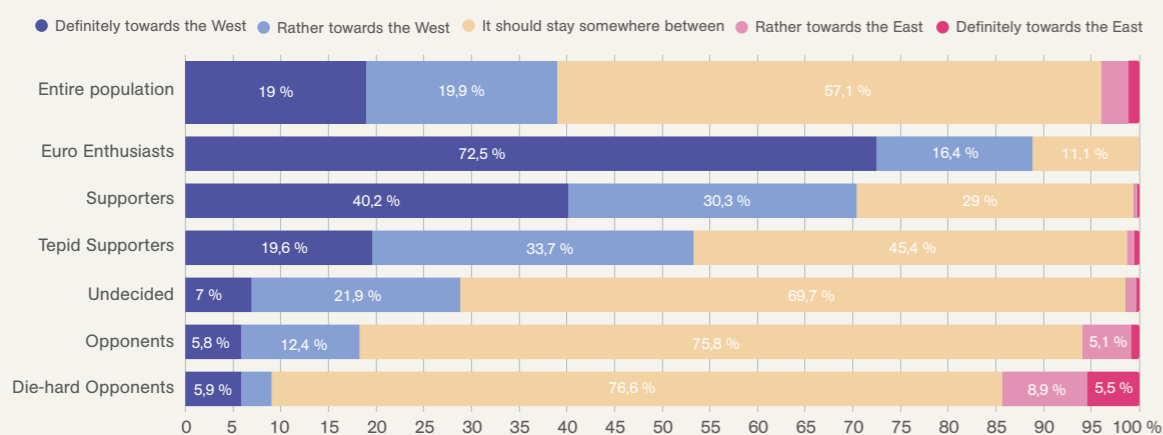
General examples include less bureaucracy and acceleration of certain processes. Specific requirements for changes differ in the pro- and anti-EU parts of society. The Euro Enthusiasts and the Supporters would be content with minor changes, such as clearer functioning of the EU, and they would be willing to deal with changes to the veto power in certain areas.

The issue that has been addressed in the past two years is focused on unified and fast procedures of the EU, especially in foreign policy. The *Divided by Europe* data shows that just over 50% are in favour of the option of unified procedures.

Therefore, a stronger EU, using unified procedures, enjoys more support even if it could mean that some member states might disagree at times. That is preferred by 53% of the Czechs. Another slightly prevailing opinion is that rather than the approval of all the twenty-seven EU countries, the approval of the majority should be sought. However, this attitude is only supported by 51% of the public.

“Interestingly, neither the Euro Enthusiasts nor the Die-hard Opponents have as clear opinions as they usually do. That proves that the debate of these issues is not over,” explains sociologist Kratochvíl.

Where should the Czech Republic be heading in the future?



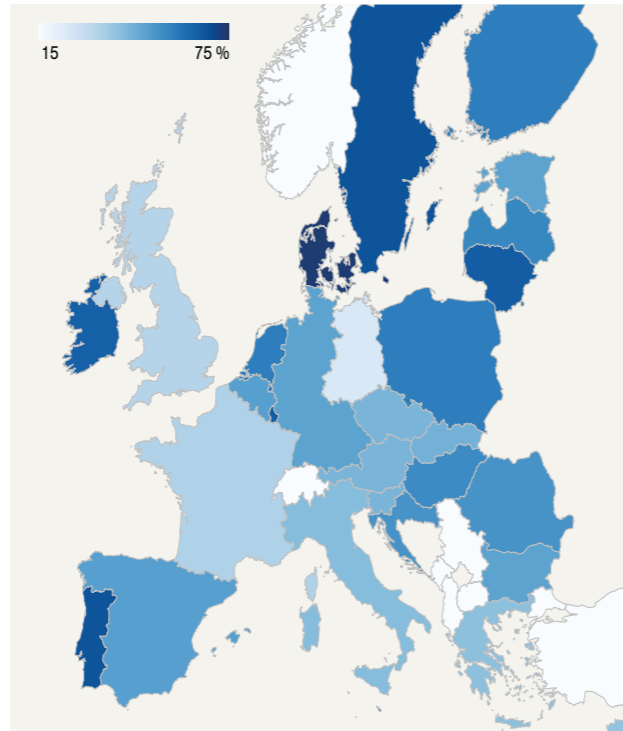
Back to Europe?

Attitudes towards the European Union

The data source for the following maps is Eurobarometer, a regular opinion poll initiated by the European Commission for the first time in 1974. The Eurobarometer regularly examines EU citizens' attitudes on various issues concerning the EU and allows the evolution of opinions over time to be tracked. It covers permanent as well as current issues. Primary data archived in the GESIS archive and reports published on the Eurobarometer website have been used in particular.

Confidence in the European Union¹

The lowest level of trust in the EU is found among residents of the former East Germany, where only around a quarter of the population (24%) trust the EU. Around a third of the population trust the EU in the UK (33%) - a former EU country - and France (34%). In the Czech Republic, just over two-fifths of citizens trust the EU (43%), the same as in Slovakia, Austria and Slovenia, and comparable to Greece (40%) and Italy (41%). Less than half of the trust is in Belgium (48%), as well as among citizens of the former West Germany (48%) and Spain (48%). We see higher levels of trust in the Northern European countries, with Denmark (72%) and Sweden (67%) having the highest share of trust. Among the Western European countries, we see comparatively higher trust only in Portugal (67%) and Ireland (63%).

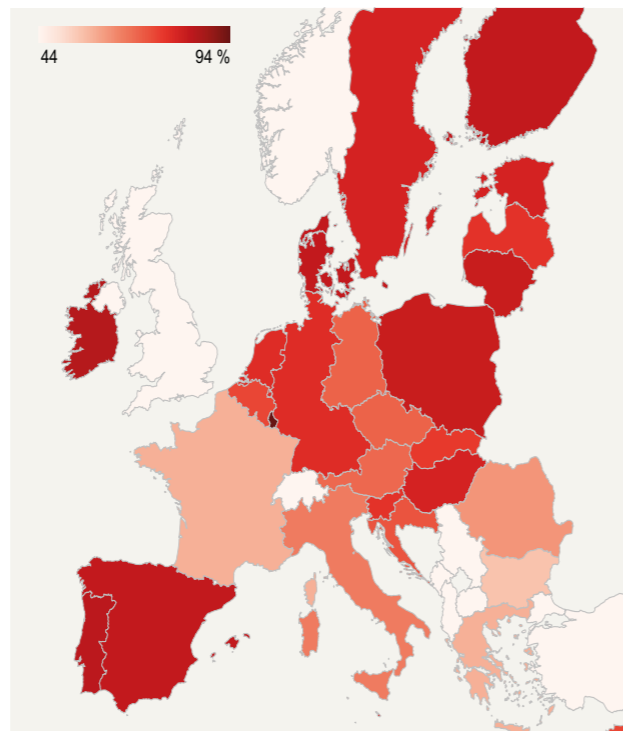


Source: Eurobarometer 99.4, June 2023

¹ Full question: I would like to ask you how much you trust certain media and institutions. Please tell me about the following media and institutions, whether you trust or distrust them. More likely to trust; more likely to distrust. Battery q., item 6) European Union.

Feeling like an EU citizen²

The extent to which people feel like EU citizens does not differ as much between European countries as their trust in the EU. The lowest proportions of those who feel themselves to be EU citizens are in Bulgaria (55%), Greece (58%), France (58%) and Romania (62%), but this is still a relatively high proportion. In the Czech Republic, 70% of the population feel they are EU citizens. Comparable proportions are also found in Austria (69%), the former East German countries (70%) and Croatia (71%). The proportion of those who feel they are EU citizens is above average in all Northern European countries, i.e. the Baltic and Scandinavian countries, and in other Western European countries such as Portugal, Spain and Ireland.

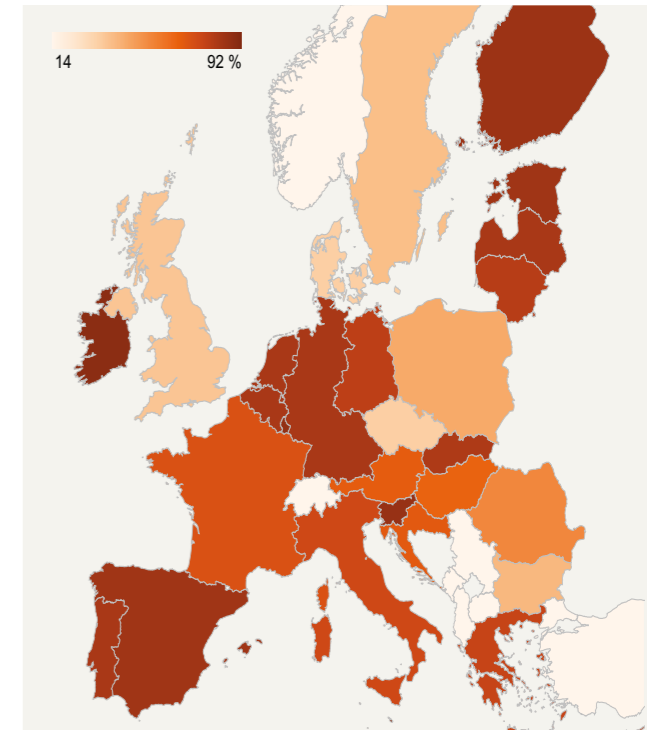


Source: Eurobarometer 99.4, June 2023

² Full question: For each of the following statements, please tell me how much it does or does not correspond to your own opinion. Definitely yes; yes to some extent; not quite; definitely no. Battery q., item 1) I feel I am a citizen of the European Union.

Attitude towards single currency³

We do not see similar trends as for trust or feelings of EU citizenship in the case of attitudes towards single currency. Scandinavian countries do not all automatically have more favourable views towards the single currency. On the contrary, people from Northern European countries where the euro is not established as a currency have a reserved attitude towards it. People have a more favourable view in European countries where the euro is in place. Denmark (33%), the Czech Republic (33%) and Sweden (37%) have the lowest proportion of people in favour of monetary union with a single common currency, the euro. Less than half of the population is also in favour of the single currency in Bulgaria (40%) and Poland (44%). In the other EU countries participating in the Eurobarometer survey, more than half of the population is in favour of the single currency. Very high support is observed in Western, Central, Southern and Northern Europe. The highest shares are in Malta (92%), Ireland (89%), Luxembourg (87%) and Slovenia (86%).

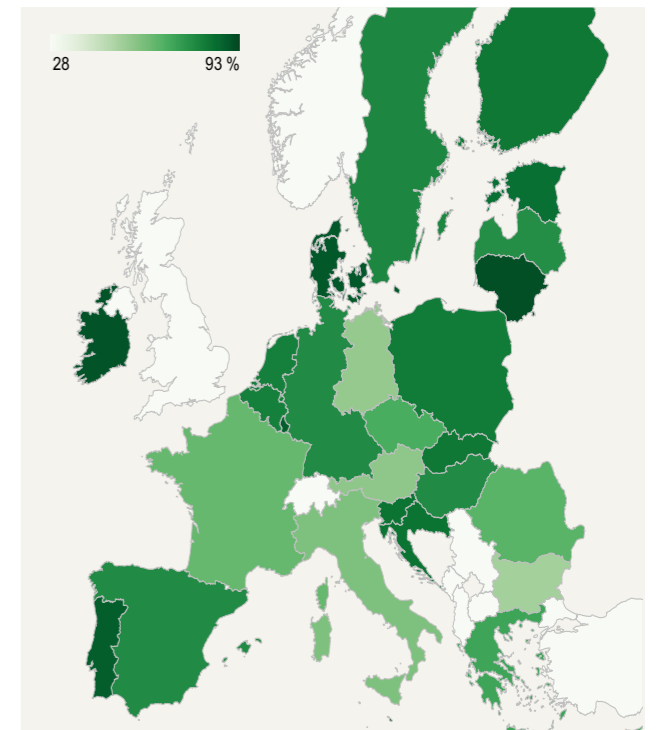


Source: Eurobarometer 99.4, June 2023

³ Full question: What is your opinion on each of the following statements? For each of them, please indicate whether you are for or against that statement. For; against. 1) European Economic and Monetary Union with a single common currency, the euro.

Country's benefit from EU membership⁴

There is an overwhelming majority of those in all member states who think their country benefits from joining the EU. The lowest share is in Bulgaria (52%), among residents of the former East Germany (56%) and Austria (56%). 68% of citizens in the Czech Republic hold this view. Among citizens of the former West German countries, this figure is more than three quarters of the population (77%), as in Hungary (77%) and Spain (77%), and similarly in the Benelux countries. This opinion is strongest in Portugal (88%), Denmark (89%), Lithuania (90%) and Ireland (90%).



Source: Eurobarometer 101.1, June 2024

⁴ Full question: Considering all the context, would you say that your country has or has not benefited and benefited from joining the European Union? Yes, it does; no, it does not.

Generation U(nion)

They have lived in the non-Communist Czech Republic all their lives and spent most of their years in the European Union. Czech people of up to twenty-nine years of age can be referred to as “the democratic EU generation.” They differ from the rest of the society in many aspects, so the *Divided by Europe* research pays special attention to them.

The Czech Republic as an EU member state is a standard for the young generation. It is a natural part of their lives. The Czech Republic outside the Western structures is history to them.

They regard themselves as EU citizens and do not think of any other options. This view means that they would be less willing to change the status quo than other age groups, who can compare the current situation to the previous periods of their lives. Therefore, young Czechs are more positive towards the EU than the majority of society. People between 18 and 29 are more pro-European, as STEM’s data confirms.

Divided by Europe revealed that in terms of attitudes to the EU, Czech society can be divided into the aforementioned six groups: the Euro Enthusiasts, the Supporters, the Tepid Supporters, the Undecided, the Opponents and the Die-hard Opponents. And the sociologists divided the young generation in the same manner.

“Two fifths of the Czech population are pro-European. With the young it is three fifths, which is almost 60%,” explains Martin Kratochvíl.

However, the Euro Enthusiasts group has not become bigger. There is approximately the same number of Euro Enthusiasts among the young as among the rest of the public. The group that has grown the most is the Tepid Supporters; there is about a third of them among the young generation. Less represented among the young are the Opponents and Die-hard Opponents.

Kratochvíl comments with: “If we had based the segmentation on the sub-group of the young, we probably would not have arrived at the conclusion that it was necessary to distinguish the group of the Die-hard Opponents because it is very small and its attitudes are not very

different from those of the other Opponents. The differences are not as marked as in the whole society, so we would probably have merged these two groups into one.”

The advantages and the disadvantages

The young generation is well aware of both the advantages and the disadvantages of their country’s EU membership. However, with regard to its typically pro-European stance, the pros outweigh the cons.

The most frequently mentioned advantages include travelling freely around Europe and opportunities to study and work abroad. Another important aspect to them is the guarantee of peace and international security. They also appreciate the single market, EU subsidies and zero roaming charges.

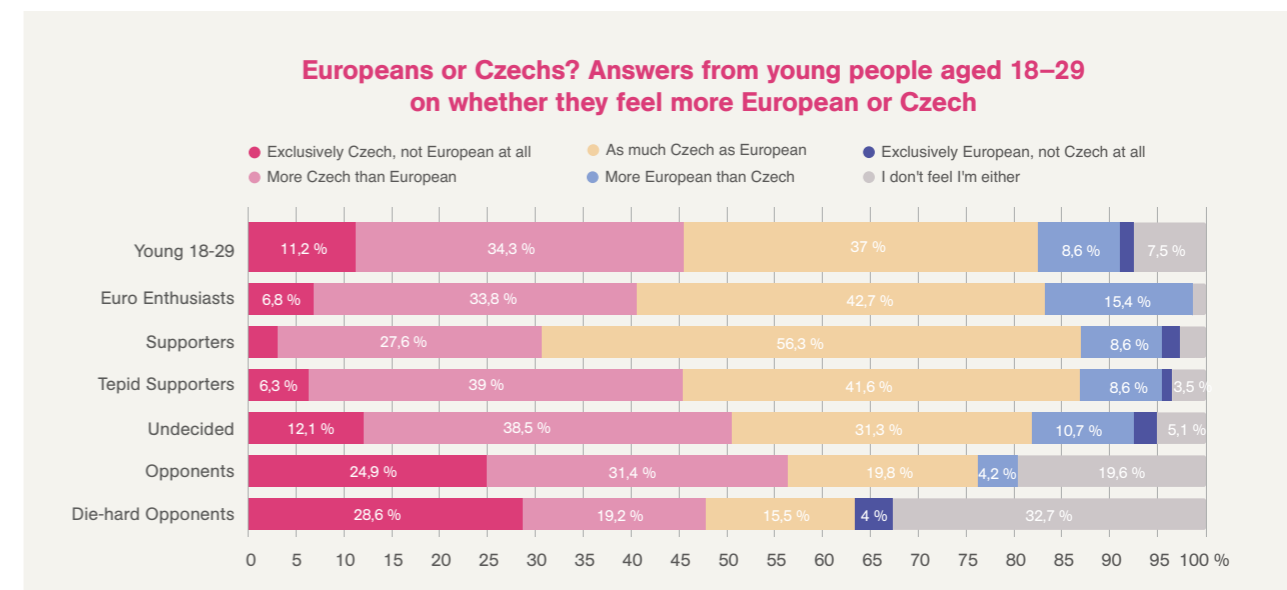
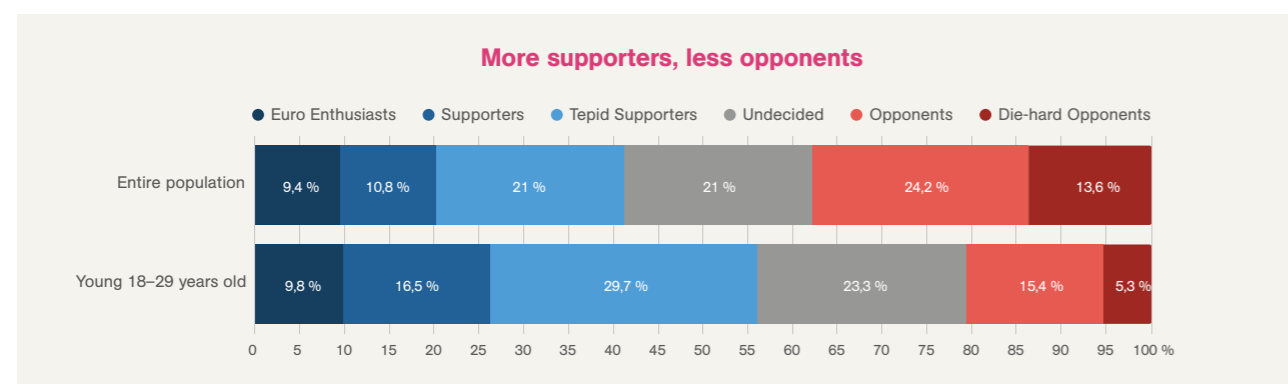
The general experience, which they absorbed while they were coming of age, is enhanced by the fact that they can travel easily, experience other cultures, countries and languages. That is what makes the young generation different from the rest of the society.

The disadvantages that the young perceive are of symbolic character. What they are afraid of most is the pressure on adopting the euro. That means that Czech society shares a positive attitude to the country’s own currency (almost) regardless of age.

“There are gradually more and more possibilities of not having to exchange currencies, such as credit card payments or transfers through certain banking services. As a result it is almost unimportant what currency I have although my money is in fact being converted,” says the sociologist, commenting on the current situation.

Security is emphasised not only as a benefit of the EU but also as a downside, particularly in terms of illegal migration. Another important subject mentioned by the young is environmental policy.

“We know that the environment is more important for the young generation than for all older people or for the whole society but if there was too much pressure, the young would evidently not be satisfied either,” predicts Kratochvíl. The subject is substantially affected by the ongoing debate, which is happening in a tense atmosphere.



The EU as an ordinary part of identity

Young Czechs are predominantly satisfied with their country’s EU membership. While 45% of the whole society is satisfied, the proportion of the young generation having a positive attitude to the EU membership reaches two thirds although the anti-EU groups of the young have different views. In total, 34% of the young express dissatisfaction with their country’s EU membership.

The feeling of being European is dominant in the young generation. The members of the “adult generation” rate their pride in this succession: they feel to be Czech in the first place, then European and then citizens of the EU.

This succession does not apply to the young. They are significantly prouder of their Europeanism. In fact, living in the Czech Republic is as normal a part of the youngest Czechs’ identity as living in the European Union. Therefore, declaring whether they feel like Czech citizens or citizens of the EU is basically the same to them. Sixty-nine per cent of them identify themselves as proud Czechs and 67% feel proud of being part of the EU. The strongest sentiment among them is the sense of being European: it reaches 84% and surpasses local patriotism by 10%.

“If I feel that I belong to the European Union as much as I belong to the Czech Republic, it may support the feeling that my voice is valid and appropriate. The sense of belonging may result in the sense of participation, i.e. the awareness of the fact that we are capable of participating and that we can have our say,” emphasises Kratochvíl.

Lack of practical knowledge

The young generation’s sense of belonging to the EU is based on experience. That does not mean that the young know significantly more about the EU. They only excel at answering school-type questions, such as when the Czech Republic joined the European Union. As far as the knowledge of other subjects, focused on the EU’s procedures, the whole society does better.

It is particularly obvious in the knowledge of Czech representation in the European Commission. While 50% of the whole society say correctly that the country is represented in the Commission, only about a third of the young do so. That reflects the aspect of an “intangible” institution about which this part of society knows less. The affiliation with the EU felt by the young has its limits. They would not always fight for the EU and defend all its attitudes.

Referendum? No!

However, the young do not think at all about the possibility of the Czech Republic not being part of the EU. Their country’s EU membership is an absolutely natural thing to them, which most of them cannot imagine being disrupted even though 20% of them are still opponents of the EU.

The demand for a referendum on seceding from the EU does not prevail in Czech society in general, let alone among the young. In the case of the young, it does not even reach a quarter and is only supported by the groups of opponents.

If the Czech Republic were to organise the referendum, a vast majority (76%) of the young would opt for staying in the EU. Nevertheless, this clear attitude might not remain unchangeable, the sociologist points out. It could be changed by a crisis hitting Europe in the future. “This initial position is really strong. This generation would have to be affected really intensively by a crisis in order to weaken the support of staying in the EU,” remarks Kratochvíl.

For the younger generation it is more important to remain in the EU than live in an isolated country. To them, seceding from the EU would mean a loss of power and strength to deal with problems.

However, this positive attitude towards the EU has not been transferred into willingness to adopt the single

currency. In this respect, the young generation is of the same opinion as the majority of society. The Czech crown represents a value that they would like to preserve. The total support of the adoption of the euro among the Czechs is 20%. The young want it a bit more but the difference is only 6%.

What about the future?

Entering the Eurozone would mean more interconnectedness and deeper integration into the EU structures for the Czech Republic. There are 55% of the young who support further integration, which may, however, have multiple forms.

Possible reforms of the way the EU works have recently been mentioned in the public debate. According to the generation of young Czechs, the Union should act outwardly more in unison. This opinion is held by 60% of them. Nonetheless, they are more indecisive if they are

asked whether the manner of voting should be changed so that instead of maintaining the right of veto (which is now only applied in certain policies), agreement would be reached by qualified majority.

As a result, the Czechs cannot decide whether it is better to wait for unanimity, which is sometimes difficult to achieve, or to vote somebody down so as to make debates faster and less cumbersome.

The young Czechs' idea of the future tendencies of the EU includes several essential issues: internal and external security, including digital security and protection against hybrid threats.

“According to the young, the “ideal” European Union of the future is more self-confident, safe and more agile. It is not necessarily as cumbersome and its internal processes work faster and more smoothly. Like the rest of society, the young want the EU to provide especially a safe framework for their own development,” concludes Kratochvíl.

What Is Next for Czechia in the EU?

Reflection by Filip Hanka and Martin Buchtík

What is next for the Czech Republic in the EU?

In its twenty years as an EU member state, the Czech Republic has proved its worth. It has managed two presidencies of the Council of the European Union, has approached the economic average of the EU and is expected to become a net contributor to the EU budget. The attitudes of the Czech society have also been undergoing a development, as described on the previous pages. So, let us imagine what awaits the Czech Republic in the EU in the next twenty years.

It is impossible to predict what exactly will happen in the future. In twenty years, the European Union might be totally different: it might be governed by different rules and include new institutions. So, instead of striving for a perfect prediction, let us try to define some challenges and explain how the Czech Republic should approach them if it is to be a constructive part of the EU.

There is interest in our opinion but we are not taking advantage of it

The Czech Republic's attitude to the EU is currently best defined as a feeling of helpless (dis)trust. In our eyes, the European Union is a juggernaut that often has great power and encroaches on the people's everyday life. If the Czechs approve of what the European Union is doing (which means especially whether they do well financially, have a job and can fulfil their potential), they have no reason to object. If not, their attitude, also influenced by the feeling of helplessness, their relationship towards the EU is likely to become worse. Making the Czech voice be heard in Europe should not be only an election campaign slogan; rather, it should be a long-term goal of the Czech Republic's approach to EU politics.

Such an activity does not prevent the country from looking for compromise and from cooperation. The Czech public view cooperation and pragmatism as positive values and those who are proud of their country, town or region are, in essence, more pro-European. In the future, it will be crucial to raise public awareness of the opportunities to influence EU affairs. It will be necessary to engage efficient spokespeople, who should ideally be Czech political representatives, representatives of Czech companies and other famous public figures from all areas. These efforts should also be reflected by the education system and, as a result, by reality.

For a long time, Czech companies have been under-represented in the public consultations organised regularly by the European Union as part of the preparation of European policies. The public have declared their long-time

indifference to the European Parliament by low voter turnout at the European Parliament elections, and the Czechs are one of the least represented nations in European institutions. Thus, if they want to feel that they are able to influence EU affairs, they must gradually change that.

Security as the last pillar

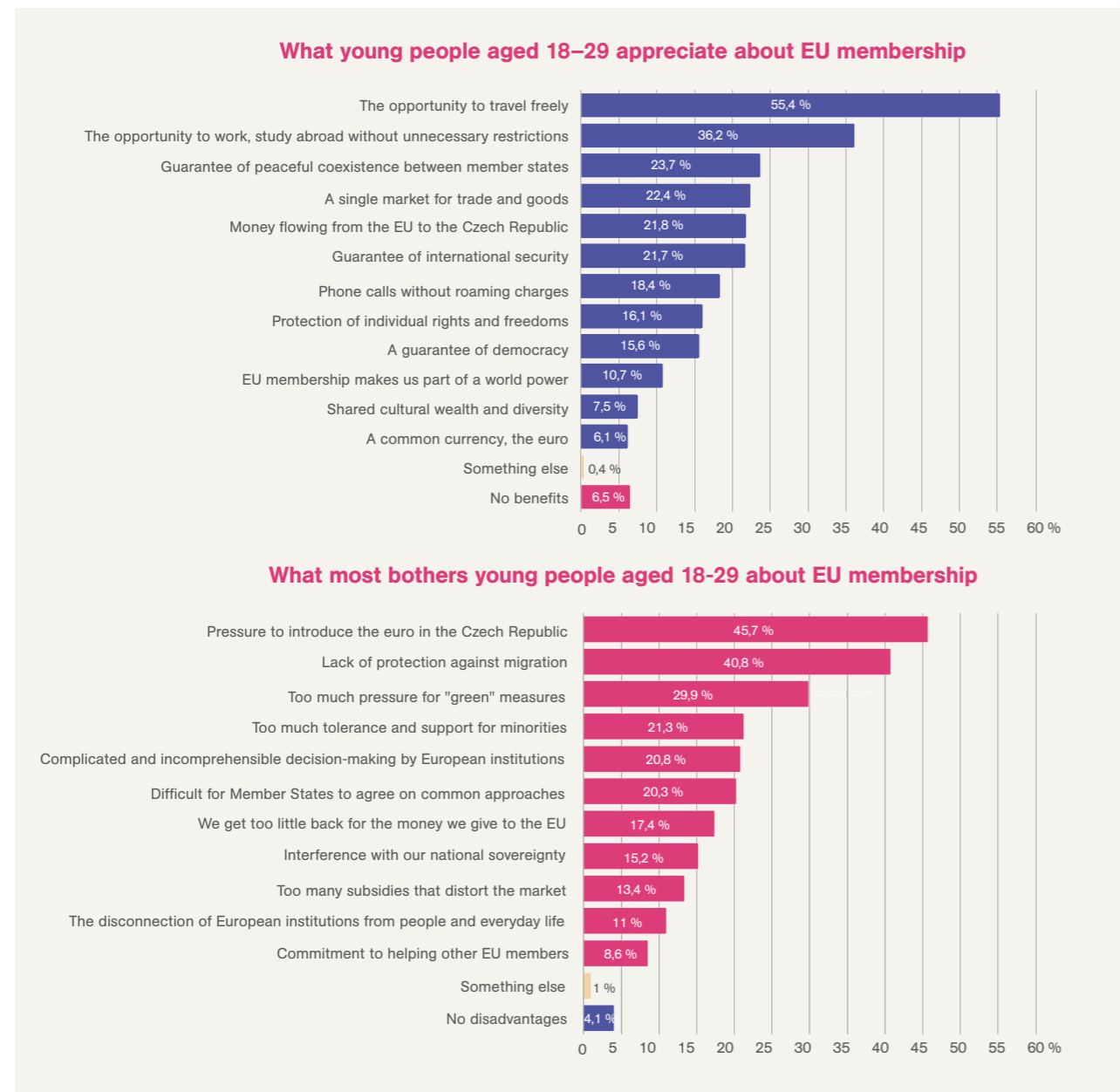
The European Union used to be a source of the feeling of security and economic prosperity for many years. However, since the debt crises of the end of the previous decade, it has been regarded as a much worse guarantor of prosperity by the public. These days it remains, at least for some Czechs, strong in the area of security.

That concerns security in a wide extent, not only in the military sense. It means the EU's internal security, safety of our towns and homes, safe and available medicine, high-quality and cheap food, and, last but not least, the security that goes beyond the borders of the European Union. This topic is the more urgent with regard to the current political situation. Whether and how the European Union responds to the security challenges will also affect the (so far positive) attitude of the Czechs.

Prosperity has been knocked off its pedestal but the fight for its importance is not over. The current discussion about the European Green Deal can be viewed as a substitute battle for prosperity. Because the European Union aims to become climate neutral by 2050, this subject is not likely to stop being discussed by 2044. Moreover, the complexity of the whole decarbonisation process, which is to ensure energy security, economic growth and a better environment, cannot be communicated easily – and neither can the process be easily carried out. Achieving these goals will be the biggest challenge for the Czech Republic in the near future. And if the green transformation is not considerate of different social classes, it will not happen at all.

The Czechs are already justifiably afraid of the speed of the green transformation as the carbon intensity of the country's economy belongs among the highest in the world. And regions based on such an economic model are heavily dependent on using fossil fuels. Also, it is typical of the Czechs that they expect simple and cheap solutions and hardly ever tolerate mistakes.

It is the fear of making mistakes and of the impact of changes that makes the Czechs paralysed in terms of decision making. They regard the mistakes of others, who are at least trying to do something, as a confirmation of their “wise” wait-and-see attitude. It would help the Czechs if they changed their attitude, learn from mistakes, fought their fears and get closer to solutions (or at least to learn something new). Doing nothing is usually the worst option in an ever-changing world. The urgency of this situation should be taken into account by the political representation in Prague as well as in Brussels.



Politicians must show that they do not ignore the young

Today's young generation (between eighteen and twenty-nine years of age) will inherit the country and fill at least some of the decision-making posts in the state authorities and as a result, the society's views of the European Union will change. Nevertheless, it is important to realise that nowadays, the young are not extremely pro-EU and do not deviate from the majority of society in this respect. However, there are fewer Die-hard Opponents among them.

Another important fact is that the length of a country's EU membership is not directly proportional to the Union's popularity. Young generations do not always remain enthusiastic. The chief example of that is the United Kingdom, which seceded from the European Union after having been a member for forty-seven years.

In order to remain relatively positive towards the EU, the young need, first of all, their livelihood to be secured. If they are faced with financial problems and problems related to unemployment and to the feeling of not being able to fulfil their potential, it will be a threat for both domestic politics and the European Union.

A generation full of hopes as well as difficulties

The data on the young provides a different picture than the one distorted by social networks. With a slight overstatement, the young can be said to be completely normal. There are no radical left- or right-wing activists among them. They are interested in values such as democracy and human rights, which do not mean much to certain segments of society (often because they face difficulties related to livelihood), and they want to have good jobs and do something interesting in their free time. They are aware of the unstable security situation and climate change. Like the previous generations, they must cope with the stereotypes about themselves. According to older generations, they are hypersensitive, do not work much or complain excessively.

Labelling the young generation as incompetent and oversensitive does not contribute to good coexistence and results in a response consisting in blaming the older generations for the state of the planet and economy or for other factors that have negative impacts on the lives of the young. People often perceive their identity according to what they oppose.

However, not using and simply ignoring labels is not enough. It is necessary to come up with other labels instead. If the older generation can change something now, it is the way it talks about and to the young.

A better story and better arguments

Most young Czechs belong among the Tepid Supporters, who like the European Union but with reservations. One of the reasons is that they do not live and breathe politics and public affairs on a daily basis. They know that the Czech Republic's EU membership is positive for the country as a whole but they usually do not see any advantages of it for their own lives. It is necessary to come up with more convincing stories and arguments to change that. The young often notice especially the negative news about the EU in the media, which is more effective and easier to remember. That is one of the reasons why they lack arguments to explain their largely positive attitude to the EU in discussions. As a result, they prefer not to engage in discussions.

In the future, it will be necessary for politicians to respond to the needs of the young and deal with subjects that the young are interested in. They should also come up with a better narrative of the Czech Republic's role in the European Union, explain the benefits of the country's EU membership to the individual and present a long-term vision, which is where they mostly fail these days.

Having a say and contributing to safety and prosperity

It can be said almost with certainty that the Czech society, as well as other societies, will continue to consist of various groups that view the European Union differently. What is going to change is the world in which people live and therefore the challenges that Europe will have to respond to. And such challenges will help them to form their relationship to the EU as an institution. They will continue feeling both Czech and European, appreciate cooperation and pragmatism and have a positive attitude to their own landscape.

The question is whether the Czechs' trust in their own ability to influence European affairs, which is essential for their perception of it, will change. Will they manage to improve the image of Europe as the driving force of their prosperity and preserve the feeling of safety that is often associated with the European Union? If so, the Czech Republic could expect a happy future in the European Union.

20 YEARS AND WHAT'S NEXT?

The referendum on leaving the EU is not an issue for the Czechs. If it were to happen, a majority would vote to stay.

Credit: Radek Vebr/MFDNES + LN/Profimedia



I Believe the EU Does Not Acutely Divide Us

Věra Jourová

Dear readers,

do you think studies like this help us better understand how Czech citizens view the European Union, how they feel in it and how they perceive their role? On an imaginary scale ranging from “definitely not” to “not interested” to “definitely yes,” I would choose the last option. I am happy that STEM has done this research. I would also like to thank Czech Radio for making it public and offering it to listeners. I regularly read the *iROZHLAS.cz* website, where the data was published as part of the *Divided by Europe* project.

I believe that Czech society is not divided by the EU in any significant way. There are representatives of all the attitudes among us. However, as the graphs and numbers show, it is largely caused by socioeconomic factors. It makes me happy that the young generation is basically pro-European and aware of the advantages resulting from the Czech Republic's EU membership because it can and will use such benefits the most.

Healthy scepticism is a characteristic Czech feature. It is not necessarily negative if it leads to critical views and provides protection against manipulation and blind acceptance of narratives imposed on us. Our experience from history has taught us to question statements coming from the outside, from transnational authorities. We take the same stance to what the wind brings from Brussels even though we know that the wind has been blowing from the other side for many years and we are participating in the decision-making process. After all, the Czechs are viewed in the EU as down-to-earth realists. The Czech common sense can be seen as a way to face problems, I am surprised at how many colleagues have now, after my ten years with the European Commission, told me that I have always epitomised it.

Throughout the twenty years of our membership, our relationship to the EU has naturally evolved. It has significantly been influenced by the politicians in power. The EU has been blamed for many things and everything is its fault. I would look for the roots of that Czech Euro-scepticism which does not have much in common with the healthy, critical scepticism; rather, it has built a hostile barrier between “us” and “them” and affected the way the Czechs view the EU for a long time.

I understand criticism if it is expressed by those who know something about integration. There are many things to improve but what annoys me is when the EU is being ridiculed. Prosperity and security in Europe have been achieved thanks to the hard work of those who know the EU and are willing and able to look for solutions and

compromises. What would be achieved by those who only arrogantly sneer at the EU if they were in power and had our lives in their hands? Trading in goods in a limited area from the Šumava to the Beskydy Mountains and queues at passport controls on the border?

We have gone a long way in the past 20 years. This research shows how the Czechs' satisfaction with the EU has developed. From the accession until 2009, we were mostly enthusiastic despite the fact that some of our representatives felt like giving Europe a hard time during the first Czech EU Presidency. After that, enthusiasm began to decrease especially due to the economic crisis in the Eurozone related to the Greek government debt. When satisfaction started rising again, the 2015 migrant crisis came and it dropped even lower. In recent years, it has been oscillating between 45% and 50%, which – viewed with the right dose of the healthy Czech scepticism – is not surprising.

More importantly, the Czech Republic has become a trustworthy and reliable partner and our accession slogan, “Back to Europe,” has come true. The second Czech EU Presidency confirmed that for many politicians, diplomats and state officials, as well as for me, the EU is a project worth being worked on intensively. If there is anything we blame it for, it is its slow and imperfect response to crises even though the EU overcame the economic, migrant, as well as Covid crisis. But it coped with them and came out stronger. These difficulties have helped us to develop mechanisms and rules of how to respond to such situations in the future. Europe has become better prepared. We are currently going through a war and the EU, which is not a military organisation, is again dealing with it in many areas: ordnance for Ukraine, help for refugees, the restructuring of the energy system in the EU, etc.

Not surprisingly, what the Czech society now expects from the EU most is that it will ensure security, especially internal, related to migration. They want bigger defensive power, which is sure to become an important subject for the European Parliament. The maintaining of economic stability, which is their third priority, is considered to be a more or less regular duty of the Union.

Let me conclude with what amused me in the research. The supporters of integration see themselves as realists, clever and patriots while EU opponents regard themselves firstly as patriots, secondly as clever and thirdly as realists. Therefore, it might not be as important which group of supporters or opponents you belong to. The European Union makes us, Czechs, clever and realistic patriots. Let us hope that it will remain the same and that in this role we will cleverly and realistically work on the European Union developing in such a way that is beneficial to us and to all Europe.



KEY SIGNATURE.

As Prime Minister, Václav Klaus handed over the "application" to the EU, as President he signed the Accession Treaty. Would the persistent critic of the EU rather retract his actions?

Credit: CTK/Veís David



