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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
CZECH REPUBLIC

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The Eurobarometer report describes climate of opinion in the European Union member and candidate states. This report provides an overview of Czech public opinion on various aspects of the EU and their own lives and compares them with the typical attitudes of other EU citizens. In addition, it points out the most important international differences. It is the tenth successive report since the Czech Republic joined the EU. The public opinion survey, on the basis of which this report was elaborated, took place among 1,094 citizens of the Czech Republic between 13th and 26th of June, 2009.

Review of the situation of the Czech Republic

Czech citizens regard the current situation of their national economy very negatively. Only a fifth (19 %) would describe the situation as quite good, whereas 81 % describe it as bad. The results are comparable to the average attitude in the other European countries; however, the decrease in positive judgements is more prominent in the Czech Republic than in other EU states.

The view of the European and world economy is also negative, as well as that of the employment situation. Public opinion in the Czech Republic has become negative in all those regards since the last survey. In the last 8 months, the impact of the world financial and economic crisis could be felt in the country, which was not the case, unlike in other EU countries, in the autumn of 2008. GDP fell from a 3.1 % growth rate to the recession of -3.4 % in the first quarter of 2009, and the unemployment rate increased from 5 % to more than 8 %.

People's judgments on the economic situation are often based on these macro-economic indices, which come to them from negative news and pessimistic forecasts in the media, rather than on personal situations. **The financial situation of respondents' own households and personal job situation are judged quite positively in the Czech Republic:** in the case of the household's financial situation, positive views outweigh the negative ones by a ratio of 57% to 18%; in the case of the personal job situation, it is 64% to 35%. **Views only got slightly worse in the last 6 months.**

Expectations regarding the future

People in the Czech Republic are afraid that the economic situation in their country will become even worse in the coming year. Such is the opinion of 41 % of Czech citizens. The same proportion of people thinks that the situation will be the same in the next year and 17 % of the poll believes in improvement. The overall view in the whole EU is slightly more optimistic. Improvement is expected by a quarter (25 %) and a setback by a third (34 %) of the European public; the largest proportion thinks that the situation will remain the same (36 %). In the western parts of Europe, which were affected by the crisis earlier than the eastern parts, people were more sceptical in autumn of 2008, whereas, now, they tend to be more optimistic about an improvement in the economy.

As for expectations regarding the development of the European and world economy, pessimistic views also prevail in the Czech Republic. However, the largest proportion of people thinks that the European and world economy will not change in the coming year.

The worse prospect is that of the employment situation. Three times more people expect a worsening in the coming year than those who expect an improvement (47 % to 15 %). The remaining 37% think that the situation will remain the same in the coming 12 months.

Expectations regarding the development of the macro situation may, again, be compared to expectations on personal level.

Views of respondents' own situation at work and the financial situation of their own households have remained relatively stable since autumn 2008. A major part of the Czech population does not expect this situation to change substantially.

Issues facing the Czech Republic

The economic and employment situation are regarded as bad in the Czech Republic and people expect a worsening in these areas. This is reflected in the issues respondents identify as facing the Czech Republic. **The two issues indicated as the most serious are unemployment (half the poll - 50 %) and the economic situation (by nearly half of them - 45 %). These two issues were regarded distinctively less seriously 6 months ago.** The economy was regarded as the major issue by a quarter (25 %) and unemployment by only 17 % of people. **Other problems facing the Czech Republic are rising prices (23 %), healthcare (18 %) and crime (17 %).**

The increase in the fear of unemployment and of the development of the economic situation is an issue across the whole of Europe. Unemployment (49 %) and the economic situation (42 %) are seen as the most important issues facing the EU.

A new dimension of this Eurobarometer consists in integrating the Europeans' longer-term perspectives. This refers to the consideration of issues, which will be topical in about 20 years' time, i.e. in 2030. **As opposed to the issues which worry people now (unemployment, rising prices, healthcare) retirement pensions (27 %), immigration (20 %) and environment (19 %) are named as issues in the long term,** i.e. the areas which are now regarded as not very important. The **economic situation (20 %)** will also continue to be, according to Czechs, an important issue in the future.

Citizens of the Czech Republic are critical of the Czech social security system. Only 15 % of Czechs think that their social security system could be an example for other countries, while two-thirds (68 %) refute this suggestion. The Czech system is considered to be very expensive (59 % : 24 %) and a majority of people (55 % : 33 %) are convinced that it does not provide sufficient coverage. **On the other hand, most people in Western Europe view their national social security systems positively.** Most people in the EU 15 (56 %) think that their own social system could be an example for other countries and also expenditures on their social system and its coverage are viewed more positively.

Attitudes towards EU membership

The opinion that EU membership is a good thing prevails in the Czech Republic. This view is held by 42 % of the Czech population, 13 % is of the opposite opinion. 43 % hold the view that EU membership is neither a good nor a bad thing. There has been a slight fall in the proportion of positive attitudes towards EU membership in the Czech Republic over the last 3 years. Since spring 2006, it has fallen from 52 % to the current 42 % and most people hold a neutral attitude. However, average values across the EU have been fairly stable since spring 2006, at 55 % and are even slightly higher in the new EU member states. Thus, the Czechs are among the nationalities that are more critical in pan-European terms.

Different opinions are expressed when reviewing advantages and disadvantages of EU membership. **Almost two-thirds of Czech respondents (63 %) think that their country has benefited from being a member of the EU.** Only 29 % have the opposite opinion. Benefits of EU membership are valued the most in Slovakia (80 % of the population).

EU membership is appreciated especially by those who can experience benefits of it themselves: it is mostly the younger and more educated segment of the population, managers, students and the self-employed by occupation. Czech membership in the EU is liked the least by pensioners. The political affiliation has also an important influence on opinion. **Right wing voters have a distinctively more positive approach to EU membership, whereas the approach of left wingers is significantly more critical.** Also, this wave of Eurobarometer confirmed that Czechs have views that differ from those of their political representatives. Right wingers value the membership of their country in the EU, although the leading right wing party, ODS, is much more euro-sceptic than the leftist ČSSD.

Situation in the EU

Czechs most often associate with the EU the freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the Union (this was cited by 53 %). **The second most frequent association is the single currency, the euro, cited by 28 %.** Other frequent meanings associated with the EU by a quarter to a fifth of the population are democracy (24 %), a stronger say in the world (24 %), bureaucracy (23 %), a waste of money (22 %), and more crime (20 %). Negative associations are often cited by older people and those with leftist views rather than younger people and those with right-wing attitudes.

As regards the influence of the Czech Republic in the EU and the taking of Czech national interests into account, the Czechs' views are somewhat sceptical. **Most people think that Czechs' say in the EU is not strong enough (50 % : 45 %) and that Czech national interests are not sufficiently taken into account (56 % : 37 %).** This sceptical view is often shared with all new member countries and it seems that the feeling of a strong membership is a question of time. Countries with a strong European self-confidence and awareness of their role include Sweden, Germany, Denmark, France and the countries of the Benelux.

Public opinion in the Czech Republic remained relatively unchanged in this respect, even after six months of the Czech presidency of the EU Council. People perceived the presidency as a leading role in representing the EU in foreign affairs (e.g., more people now associate the EU with "a stronger say in the world") rather than a process of strengthening its role within the EU.

Future of the EU

Czechs see the future of the EU positively: two-thirds of Czechs (67 %) are optimistic, whereas less than a third (30 %) is pessimistic in this regard. Optimistic expectations prevail in all of Europe and the Czech Republic is to be found near the European average, which is 64 % : 29 %.

As to prospects in a more distant future, the prevailing opinion in the Czech Republic is **that, in 50 years' time, the EU is likely to be the leading diplomatic force in the world.** This is the opinion of 44 % of people, while 40 % disagree with this view. **Czechs also believe in the economic power of the EU:** a majority disagrees that it will be just a secondary economic power in 50 years (55 %), while less than a third would agree. Interestingly enough, **a considerable majority of the Czech and European public thinks that the EU will enlarge beyond the limits of European continent. This opinion is shared by 43 % of people both in the Czech Republic and the EU as a whole, 38 % and 37 % respectively disagree.**

Trust in institutions

Czechs have traditionally a low level of trust in national political institutions. **Only 28 % of people trust the Czech government while 70 % distrust it. Distrust was even more prominent in respect of the Parliament: 78 % : 20 %.** In contrast to several previous surveys, trust in the Government and Parliament increased this year (by 8 percentage points as far as the Government is concerned, and 4 points as far as the Parliament is concerned). It is likely that the increase in trust is connected with the introduction of the interim government, led by Jan Fisher, who himself enjoys considerable support among Czech citizens. People may perceive the non-political caretaker administration more positively, for it is not so much involved in quarrels of political parties and their representatives and, unlike Mirek Topolánek's Government, is supported by a wider political spectrum.

National governments and parliaments are institutions trusted by about a third of people (32 %) in the EU as a whole. 63% and 61% respectively of respondents express distrust of these institutions. **It can be generally said that the EU 15 states trust their national political institutions more than the new member (and namely the post-communist ones) states.**

Compared to the low trust in national political institutions, trust in European bodies is considerably higher. A majority of the Czech population have trust in the EU as a whole and its two main bodies, the European Parliament and European Commission.

People in the EU 15 countries have more trust in their national political institutions and less in European ones, whereas the situation in the new, mainly post-communist countries, is the converse. Although the people in the new member countries more often feel that their influence in the EU is insignificant and that they are forced to adjust their interests to those of the Union, they regard the Union highly, have trust in it and regard their membership as beneficial. Compared to their national governments, the European Union is a trustworthy and effective body, according to most respondents in the new member states.

The EU and its institutions are trusted mostly by younger and more educated people with right-wing political orientation.

Attitudes towards selected issues on the European agenda

European Monetary Union with one single currency, the euro, is supported by more than half (51 %) of the Czech population, while 45 % are against it. In the greater scheme of things, Czechs are rather lukewarm supporters of the euro, as in the EU, on average, 61 % are in favour of it and a third (33 %) are against it. The greatest supporters of the euro are Slovaks (89 % of the public approves of it). Support for the Monetary Union in the Euro area is strong; the single currency is supported by more than two-thirds (69 %) while a quarter (26 %) is against it. The countries outside the Eurozone show a balanced proportion of supporters and opponents (46 % : 45 %). The euro thus seems to be successful and well accepted in those countries, where it was introduced as the national currency.

EU enlargement is supported in the Czech Republic. 54 % of people approve of it and 39 % are against it. However, the overall proportion in the whole EU is negative towards the enlargement (46 % : 43 %). The views of new and old member countries differ quite sharply. People in the 12 new member states mostly approve of it (64 % : 21 %), but public opinion in the EU 15 is negative towards further enlargement. Opponents prevail by a proportion of 52 % to 38 %.

Model of a "multi-speed" Europe (i.e. differentiated integration in different countries) is mostly refuted in the Czech Republic.

People in the Czech Republic would like to see more decision making at European level in some spheres. This refers especially to security issues: the fight against terrorism, organized crime, but also environmental issues, providing a stable energy supply and fostering economic growth.

Most people in the Czech Republic would like the EU to focus on economic (45 %) and social (43 %) questions. This is not surprising because people regard the economic and social situation as bad and consider these to be the two most important issues faced by the country. Economic and social issues are also cited across the EU as a whole, but are given less emphasis than in the Czech Republic.

Research regarding the newly included question of gender equality, i.e. equal status of men and women in the society. Czechs are very conservative in this respect. With 77 % of people agreeing with the principle of equal wages and 64 % with the equal representation of women in politics, Czechs are at the bottom of the list of all member and candidate states, together with Poland, Hungary and Italy.

Role of the EU in the world

The efficiency of the European economy is regarded as higher than that of Russia and India, on a par with the US economy, but worse than the Chinese and, especially, the Japanese economies. The Japanese economy is considered the most efficient.

Despite this fact, Europe is, in the eyes of its citizens, best characterized by its economic power. This aspect is seen as the most important by nearly half (45 %) of European citizens. For less than a third (30 %), it is its political influence. In the Czech Republic, the EU is perceived on the basis of both economic and political power more or less to the same extent. Economic power was chosen as the most characteristic feature of the EU by 41 % of Czech population and political influence by 39 %. The cultural influence and the military power of the Union are marginal for Czech citizens, as these were chosen only by 7 % and 4 % respectively.

A majority of Czech citizens thinks that the EU is sufficiently involved in the support and defence of the human rights in the world. This is the opinion of 49 % of Czechs; support in the area of the human rights is insufficient, according to 38 %. **However, in most European countries, the opinion that support of the human rights is not sufficient prevails.** The involvement of the EU in the human rights area is generally valued more highly in the new member states than in the EU 15 countries.

Czech Republic's Presidency of the EU

Czech citizens were, as expected, the most informed about Czech Republic's presidency of the EU. 84 % of people noticed information connected with the presidency, while 15 % did not. However, **the level of awareness was rather low on the European scale. About a third (34 %) of Europeans knew about it, two-thirds (63 %) said they had no information.** From the other Member States, it was Slovenia and neighbouring Slovakia, where people were the best informed about the Czech presidency. People in the new member states were generally better informed (45 %) than those in the EU 15 (30 %).

Compared to the situation in autumn 2008, when the same question was asked in the course of the French presidency, the current level of awareness is lower. Back then, about 50 % of

people had information about the French presidency. One can only guess that the extent of this lower awareness in Europe is caused by a lack of interest in the Czech presidency because of the political instability of the Czech Republic; it is likely that the higher importance of France on the European scale plays a role too. Nevertheless, the awareness of Europeans of the Czech presidency increased in its course (to the above-mentioned 34 %) from 19 % in autumn 2008.

European identity

Democratic values are, for Europeans, the most important basis of European identity. These were cited as one of the two main elements which constitute European identity by 43 % of Czechs and 41 % Europeans in general. Other aspects cited included: **a high level of social security, common history, common culture and geography.**

For Czechs, the most important characteristics defining Czech nationality are the following: to be born in the Czech Republic and to feel part of the Czech nation. The same is true of the EU as a whole. There are, however, significant differences between the Czech and European public opinion when choosing other important factors. Czechs emphasize, that one must grow up in the Czech Republic and speak the Czech language to be called a Czech national. Europeans, on the other hand, stress the application of human rights in a given country (e.g. voting rights) and also belonging to a Christian community.

In the case of the European identity, the ideas about its constitutive elements are also quite similar. To call one's self "European" one should, according to the majority of the Czech population, feel like a European and be born in Europe. As in the case of the national identity, Czechs consider growing up in a European country and other Europeans applying of civil rights and Christianity to be the main constituents of the European identity.

About a third (31 %) of people in the Czech Republic feel they are European to a great extent and another almost half (47 %) to some extent. About a fifth (22 %) of people do not feel European at all. The strongest attachment is, of course, to their own country and the region in which they live.

Immigration and ethnic minorities

Czechs, compared to Europeans as a whole, seem to be quite unfriendly towards foreigners. **Most people think that the presence of people from different ethnic and national groups increases unemployment (65 %) and that immigrants use healthcare and social system excessively, more than they pay in taxes (57 %).** On the European scale, about half of people (49 %) blame immigrants for increasing unemployment.

A majority of the European public feels that immigrants can play an important role in the development of better understanding and tolerance with regard to the rest of the world, that people from different national and ethnic groups enrich cultural life in host states and that they are needed for work in certain branches of the economy. Czechs, however, in these respects, are more sceptical and tend to disagree with the abovementioned statements.

Most of the public both in the Czech Republic and Europe disagree with the statement that immigrants will solve the problem of the ageing of Europe.