
10 Years of Czech EU Membership: Expectations and Visions

Ten years ago, just before midnight on the 1 May, Prague was lit up by fireworks as the capital city celebrated the accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union. The first decade of Czech membership of the EU was marked by Charles University on Monday 5 May, when it invited representatives of both Czech and European politics to a round-table debate.

The discussion, which took place at the CU Faculty of Law, was begun by the CU Vice-Rector for European Affairs, Lenka Rovná. In her opening address she highlighted the involvement of Charles University in the Czech Republic's membership of the European Union.

"Like universities in other candidate countries, Charles University engaged fully in European research and education projects to the same extent as in member countries. We were there from the start. Allow me to recall some important dates: in 1999 Charles University became the first institution in Central and Eastern Europe to receive the title of Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence in European Studies. This title was retained in 2006 and 2013. The Faculty of Law, together with the Faculty of Social Sciences, has created courses, entitled Europaeum, for education in state administration in European matters, the aim of which was to prepare state administration for the full membership of the country. In an international competition involving more than 2,200 lifelong learning projects, this course was awarded the bronze medal by the European Commission in 2005," noted Vice-Rector Rovná, adding that CU staff had also contributed to the communications of the Czech government and the constitutionalisation of Europe, as well as working (and continuing to work) in various advisory bodies at a national, European and international level.

Guests at the debate were also welcomed by CU Rector, Tomáš Zima. "Before long we will see elections to the European parliament, the supreme body of the European Union; all of us will certainly be asking what the European Union can do for us, the citizens of Europe, the university and society. We must also, however, answer the question of what we, as members of the European Union, can do for the Union," added the Rector at the beginning of the meeting.

In the subsequent discussion panel, the expectations and ideas with which the Czech Republic joined the European Union, and the extent to which they were fulfilled or otherwise, were discussed by the guests, the chief negotiator for the entry of the Czech Republic to the EU, Pavel Telička, for Prime Minister of the Czech Republic and European Commissioner Vladimír Špidla and, giving the point of view of an existing Member State, British Member of Parliament Gisela Stuart.

Ten years ago, Vladimír Špidla was the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, and it was he who oversaw the final agreements for the country's accession to the Union. He later became the European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. In his appearance at Charles University he remembered how sharply the world's perception of the Czech Republic changed at the moment when it became clear that it would join the Union. Suddenly, the country's voice gained much greater weight. "The whole of Czech history is the history of the country's participation in some kind of integration. The aforementioned Charles IV joined us to the states surrounding us, then we were part of the Danube monarchy, then we were the Czechoslovak Republic, which was, in its way, also a form of integration, as it integrated, at the very least, Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia, before the country was forcibly converted into a protectorate. Even then, we were part of a larger whole, which was, however, a brutal one. After a brief episode from the end of the war to the year 1948 we again became part of another integration process. It is only with difficulty that you will find some period when the Czech lands have not been part of some integration process. Our history is marked by integration, and so the kind of integration process in which we find ourselves is more important than having the choice of not being in any at all. Our expectation ten years ago was therefore for a safe port, that is, to secure ourselves from the point of view of security, economy, society and culture. This expectation has, in my opinion, been fulfilled," added Mr. Špidla.

<blockquote class="rightfloat"> <p> What succeeded were the options now open to our youth, our students, which are incomparable to those open to us. </p> <cite>Pavel Telička</cite> </blockquote>

In his appearance on academic ground, Pavel Telička recalled the opportunities that opened up for university students on the country's accession to the Union, noting the opportunity for free movement of citizens within Europe. "What succeeded were the options now open to our youth, our students, which are incomparable to those open to us. While at first glance this may seem a banal observation, and, for some, the opportunity to study abroad may not be of vital importance, study abroad – and the opportunity to travel in itself – represents a prerequisite for a clash, a clash of cultures, of systems, of experiences, which, in itself, enriches. I am talking about the knowledge and experience we can gain outside the Czech Republic, in an environment into which we wished to integrate. This is something that we can,

to a certain extent, bring back with us, and I believe that this has promise as an investment in the future," considered Mr. Pavel Telička.

In her speech, British Labour MP and former British Minister for Health, Gisela Stuart, looked more to the future. "Prague is at heart of Europe both in terms of politics and of history and geography," she emphasised at the start. In relation to the crisis in Ukraine, she emphasised the importance of international communities and partnerships in the world of today, not only for the security of countries, but also for the possibility of free trade and movement of people. She also noted that the next ten years could be, in view of current events, more difficult than the ten just passed.

In the second part of the discussion panel, the floor was given to the leaders of the candidate lists of the Czech political parties for the upcoming elections to the European Parliament. The debate thus featured Jan Keller (ČSSD – Czech Social Democrat Party), Kateřina Konečná (KSČM – Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia), Luděk Niedermayer (TOP 09 with the support of Mayors), Klára Samková (Tomio Okamura's Dawn of Direct Democracy), Pavel Svoboda, (KDU-ČSL - Christian and Democratic Union - Czechoslovak People's Party), Pavel Telička (ANO 2011 movement) and Jan Zahradil (ODS – Civic Democratic Party).

On the occasion of this event, held at the CU Faculty of Law, Rector Tomáš Zima opened the 'Evropa!?!?' exhibition, which presented major figures in Czech 20th century history and their views of Europe. The exhibition was jointly prepared by the CU faculty of Arts and the Collegium Europaeum of the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences, led by Petr Hlaváček.

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