

EUROPEAN YOUTH DIALOG

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**KONFERENCE O AKTUÁLNÍCH TÉMATECH
EVROPSKÉ POLITIKY**



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European Youth Dialogue 2023 and current challenges for Europe

Jan Málek, director of the European Academy for Democracy

On November 10 and 11, 2023, Prague's DUO Hotel hosted the next edition of the European Youth Dialogue conference. This conference has been organized by the European Academy for Democracy in cooperation with the Brussels think tank Wilfried Martens Center for European Studies for many years. Several dozen participants, including students and members of youth organizations, once again had the opportunity to discuss directly with actors in European politics. In the first block, young politicians - project manager Adéla Šilar and mayor Ondřej Mikmek sat down alongside moderator Jan Málek from EAD to discuss the current challenges of European politics for young people. The issue of climate change and the Green Deal came to the fore. Recognition was given to the Erasmus program, and we looked at the functioning of Young European People's Party (YEPP). In his article in this newspaper, Václav Pláteník from EAD summarizes the concerns of young people before the upcoming elections to the European Parliament.

In the following panel, Marek Hannibal from the office of the European Parliament in Prague gave an overview of the functioning of the European Parliament and the processes that take place in it when adopting European legislation. He also outlined other activities of the European Parliament outside the legislative process, such as the awarding of the Sakharov Prize or the LUX Film Prize. The subsequent discussion revolved mainly around the low voter turnout in the European elections and possible steps that could make these



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elections more attractive, especially among young voters.

The first day of the conference ended with a discussion with political scientist Vladimír Hanáček about the political situation in Poland after the parliamentary elections and the prospects for cooperation between Central European states. Vladimír Hanáček interestingly summarizes his suggestions from the discussion in a separate article in this newspaper.

The second day of the conference started with a discussion with Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Eduard Hulicius, who presented the mechanisms according to which Czech foreign policy operates in these turbulent times. In the discussion, there was also room for a few pearls from the diplomatic background. Eduard Hulicius also contributed to this paper by describing aspects of Czech foreign policy from the perspective of Christian democracy.

A panel followed, in which senior WMCES analyst Vít Novotný spoke on the topic of migration. In the discussion, he touched on the current situation in EU

member states, which are not very good at returning illegal immigrants to their countries of origin. The issue of Russia's abuse of migration as pressure on EU member states came up for a shakeup; the situation on the Belarusian-Polish border was specifically mentioned. There was also a discussion about the fact that at the beginning of 2024, migration pressures can be expected to increase, and the issue of migration will become one of the main topics of the upcoming European elections. However, we must not forget that illegal migration makes up only a small part of the total migration flows to Europe.

The last contribution at the conference was made by CNN Prima News war reporter Matyáš Zrno, who in his presentation presented the situation in the front lines of the Ukrainian front with authentic footage. It showed both the life of ordinary citizens in times of war, as well as the nature of the clashes between the Ukrainian and Russian troops, in which, for example, the massive deployment of drones for military operations is known. The ensuing discussion focused on the current military situation in Ukraine and the factors Ukraine needs to achieve victory.

What is the profile of Czech foreign policy towards the EU and what are its Christian-democratic aspects

Eduard Hulicius – Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic

From the end of 2021, when the current government took office, the foreign policy of the Czech Republic has been defined by the guidelines of the government declaration, with which it has signed up for anchoring its place in the EU and NATO, and a stable partnership with our neighbors, but also the active promotion of the modern traditions of our diplomacy, i.e. the protection of democracy and human rights in the world. But above all, unforeseen events - an aggressive war in our immediate neighborhood, the re-emergence of war in the Middle East, the challenges of new strategic rivals of the Western world.

Within this framework, Czech policy towards the EU is self-confident, calm, and well-coordinated. More assertive and at the same time more reasonable, more constructive behavior in Brussels - whether it is a fundamental role in shaping the position of our continent vis-à-vis Russian aggression and its consequences, active assistance to Ukraine, defense of our Middle East policy

or a regular technical agenda, where we benefit greatly from the practice and prestige of a successfully managed presidency in the Council of the EU. The topics related to Euro 7 and migration are the most well-known in the media, but we are no less successful thanks to a more active role in other areas as well - promoting a free-er internal market, in energy, consumer protection or the fight against foreign interference in our affairs.

All these activities are in line not only with the political program of the SPOLU coalition, but also with the long-term foreign and European program of the KDU-ČSL. What could possibly be improved? For example, a more consistent focus of the priorities of European funds on research, education, innovation, and support of small and medium-sized businesses - and overall strengthening of the single market. The big question remains how to calibrate the balance between the principle of protecting various values close to us and economic needs as well as geopolitical imperatives. All of these issues could become deciding factors for the upcoming elections of the European Parliament.



The voices of the young generation in the European elections - what are they calling for and will they be heard?

Václav Plátěník – Deputy director of European Academy for Democracy

Any estimates of voter turnout many months before the elections are only indicative, but those from the end of 2023 indicate that in the Czech Republic, more citizens are not going to exercise their right to vote than in previous years. Despite extraordinary events such as the covid pandemic, Russia's war against Ukraine or the energy crisis or our presidency, in which the European Union plays a vital role, roughly two-thirds of citizens leave their choice to others. The younger generation usually does not miss these elections, so their vote can have more weight. However, the long-term Czech debate is influenced by low interest in European topics and it easily turns to local or otherwise less relevant topics. So what is this election about from the point of view of the younger generation?

How to go green

Even from the most ambitious supporters of the green transformation, such as Great Britain or Germany, questions such as "what to do next?" are now being asked. The energy crisis has exposed the fragile links of global

energy and its impact on the economy. Today, it appears in many places that the zero-emissions plan envisioned peace, cheap energy for industry, and functioning global trade, neither of which is currently certain. Especially among young people, green topics are among the largest priority. It will thus depend mainly on them, whether they will vote to support those who will stick to the green course, even with changes in the schedule, or whether the effort to completely abandon it will win.

Safe European metropolises

Young people live in Europe today and every day. They aspire for free borders, endless possibilities, bright future. However, the security situation is not conducive to Erasmus or Euro-weekends. Terrorist attacks have had their own column in the European media for a long time. Newly added images of town squares full of crowds, a large part of which were migrants in later generations, chanting slogans in support of Palestine (or outright anti-Jewish slogans) have also been weighing on their minds. Only about a fifth of persons with a negative result of the migration procedure are returned outside the EU. Crime takes place online and knows no borders. These are just some of the areas that significantly influence the perspectives of young people in Europe. Although the topic of migration may be at the lower levels of priorities for the young generation in classic surveys, their desire for safe metropolises remain very high.



Poland teaches the EU to look East

Vladimír Hanáček - political scientist,
University of South Bohemia

Polish socio-political polarization is nothing new, and this year's election campaign rawly exposed its long-standing form. It originates from the very process of the birth of Polish national identity, characterized on the one hand by the historical role of Poland as a regional power, and on the other hand by the non-obviousness of the existence of this state entity, which was wiped off the map by its imperial neighbors for more than a hundred years, and then again for another six years. Respectively, they made it their own colony in an arbitrary position. For some, the reason for this state of affairs was the pre-modern nature of Polish society and the state, and the key ethos was the effort to turn Poland into a "normal" state identical to foreign models. For others, on the contrary, the cause of historical tragedies was the aggressiveness of the great powers that did not understand Poland, and the meaning of its existence lies precisely in heroic struggle for the freedom and independence of Poland. Both camps are still present on the Polish political scene. The first is formed by the parties of the future government coalition, i.e. the liberals, the (post-communist) left and partially also the Polish People's Party (Agrarians), the second by national conservatives from PiS.

The government was again taken over by Mateusz Morawiecki's government following the election by the decision of President Duda. However, the Polish constitution clearly defines the time limits in Article 154,

according to which a government that does not win the confidence of the Sejm may not remain in office for more than a month, and the next prime minister is chosen by the Sejm. Donald Tusk, the chairman of the liberal PO, recently sworn in as Prime Minister, and his government will try to get Poland back into the position of a reliable partner of Western countries.

Tusk, however, faced criticism at home before the elections for the former efforts of his first two governments in the years 2007-2014 to so-called reset relations with Russia, to warm them and to achieve a new framework of cooperation with the Eastern power. The TVP public television series Reset, which was created and broadcast just before the elections, comprehensively mapped this issue. It is of course impossible that Tusk's new government would seek something like this again in the current situation. On the contrary, it will certainly continue to support the struggling Ukraine, similar to the current PiS government, whose positions (e.g. on the embargo on Ukrainian agricultural products) are often interpreted as a split in relations with Ukraine, which is of course nonsense. However, due to the complex relations with the Western partners, the current government has never succeeded in upgrading its own Eastern policy to an EU-wide shared approach. The new government will thus have a major task of turning Poland's Eastern policy into a concept that will be adopted by the EU. The EU's consistent Eastern policy is not only necessary for the security of the Central European countries but is also linked to the EU's ability to be an important geopolitical actor capable of influencing its surroundings. And given the Russian aggression in Ukraine, it is high time!



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