

Článek ze serveru www.klaus.cz

22.3.2009

Interview with the President of the Czech Republic Václav Klaus for The Sunday Times

Could you please elaborate on the “democratic deficit” you identified in the institutions of the European Union during your speech in front of the European Parliament?

I see the “democratic deficit” in a growing distance between the citizens of the EU member states and the EU political elite, as well as in the shift of decision-making from the member states capitals to Brussels.

Could you please elaborate on the “democratic deficit” you identified in the institutions of the European Union during your speech in front of the European Parliament?

I see the “democratic deficit” in a growing distance between the citizens of the EU member states and the EU political elite, as well as in the shift of decision-making from the member states capitals to Brussels. About seventy-five percent of our legislation is now made in the EU by unelected officials and there are attempts in the Lisbon Treaty to give them even more power, to give the EU its own legal personality and to abolish the member states’ right of veto in a number of important areas. This certainly is not a solution to the democratic deficit, it makes the democratic deficit even greater.

The Irish have once rejected the Lisbon Treaty but they have been asked to go to the polls again - and surveys indicate that this time the vote could have a different outcome. What is your position on the renewed referendum on the Treaty in Ireland?

I will not comment on the Irish government’s decision to hold the second referendum. It is its sovereign decision for which it is accountable to the Irish voters. I am not certain that the vote could have a different outcome, I believe the Irish people knew what they were doing. But the pressure will be enormous, and not very democratic.

Supporters of the Treaty argue that it would make the institutions of the European Union more efficient, giving more power to elected member of the European Parliament rather than selected bureaucrats. Why do you think that the Treaty would make the “defect” you identified in the EU decision-making even worse, as you said in your recent speech?

If you read the Treaty from cover to cover (and you must have its consolidated version or all the existing treaties next to it), you must conclude that the Treaty makes the EU less democratic, it makes the decision-making less transparent and it gives more competences to Brussels, at the expense of member states. It makes it more difficult to disagree, as it changes unanimous voting into qualified majority voting in more than fifty areas. It opens a way for further centralisation and it includes self-amending clauses which can change and therefore extend EU competences without the need for the national parliaments or the EU member states’ citizens to agree with it.

What articles of the Lisbon Treaty do you object the most and why?

I object the Treaty as such. It is the old Constitutional treaty re-written. If ratified, it will represent an irreversible shift from “Europe of states” to “the State of Europe”. This cannot be “improved” by some cosmetic changes in article “x” or “y” of the Treaty.

As a vehement proponent of economic deregulation, what do you think of Prime Minister Gordon

Brown's plan for the upcoming G-20 summit, in which he calls for more regulatory supervision?

I think that the attempts to solve the current economic and financial crisis by further regulation are wrong and they can have the effect of making the crisis even graver. The crisis cannot be solved by restraining human initiative and putting further burdens on businesses, I propose the exact opposite: deregulation, liberalisation, removing barriers and unnecessary, obstructive legislation at the EU level. In my view, the next Commission should propose which legal acts and standards are to be repealed, rather than proposing new ones.

You criticised those who, in your view, only see an "ever-closer Union" as the only possible future of the European integration. What do you think is a viable alternative to that?

There are many other variants of how European integration can develop and I call for the debate about them to be open and free. It should be a debate which tolerates alternative points of view. I wish European integration is an evolutionary process, not orchestrated from above, which reflects authentic interests of the citizens of the EU member states and extends their freedoms, instead of legislating on virtually every aspect of their lives. It should be a process in which member states retain and not lose their sovereignty, their competencies and their right to disagree.

Being the most prominent outspoken critic of the European integration, where would you say your criticism come from and what do you hope to achieve with it?

I think it is legitimate to be critical. Not everything that comes from the EU is good in itself, not everything should be accepted unquestionably, as something sacrosanct and untouchable. My criticism is based on the sensitivity towards attempts to restrain freedom and democracy, and it does relate to the fact that for most of my life I lived in a political, social and economic system which was not free and was not democratic.

You argued that the strengthening of the European Parliament would "make the problem worse" as there ultimately is no European nation or demos. Can you imagine that there are people who have a European identity as opposed to national identities? What you think would happen young people growing up in Europe today were to give up their national identities for the sake of a European identity?

European identity exists as a feeling of belonging to European continent, it is a feeling based on common history, culture, values, but it cannot be a politically constructed and imposed identity. For me, this feeling is certainly weaker than the feeling of belonging to my country. I think identity is not something you can give up and I do not think that some people feel their European identity as something in opposition to their national identities. It is an additional, not substitute identity.

You also said the economic system of the EU is that of a "suppressed market." But do you agree with the argument that EU regulations have resulted in a more intensive competition, for instance by enforcing a reduction of roaming charges, introducing low bank transaction fees, transparency for plane tickets etc?

I strongly disagree with the statement that the EU regulations have resulted in a more intensive competition. To mastermind or correct the markets and regulate them in order to make the competition "more intensive" or "fairer" is unacceptable. The government failure is always much bigger than the market failure.

Some lawmakers in Brussels, including the President of the European Parliament, have found your indirect comparison of the EU to a Soviet-era system exaggerated. What EU practices do you feel indicate any similarity to the communist times you have been a witness of?

Anybody who carefully read the speech I had in the European Parliament knows that I did not make comparison of the EU to a Soviet-era system. I only said that not so long ago, in our part of Europe we lived in a political system that permitted no alternatives and therefore also no parliamentary opposition. It was through this experience that we learned the bitter lesson that with no opposition and tolerance to differing points of view, there is no freedom.

Why have you chosen not to fly the European Union flag over your official residence in the Hrad at a time when your country is holding the rotating presidency?

The Prague Castle has always been a symbol of Czech statehood and whenever our country was free, there was only the Czech flag, as it is the case of other seats of heads of states across Europe. There are special rules for flying a different state flag next to the Czech one at the Prague Castle, this can be only on the occasion of a state visit of other head of state or government, or when a new ambassador is received.

We have lived through the times when it was compulsory on some days to fly another state flag next to ours. I am very glad that these times are over.

The European Union is not a state and legally it does not have a flag. As you know, this was one of the cosmetic differences between the rejected Constitutional Treaty and the Lisbon Treaty, the official symbols were not included in the Lisbon Treaty.

The upper house of the Czech parliament is expected to ratify the Treaty in the next months, or even weeks. Would you refuse to sign it and could you, as President of the Czech Republic, ultimately prevent its implementation?

The senate is expected to seriously consider and responsibly decide on the Treaty's ratification. I do not wish to foresee any scenarios as to what happens after that, let's wait for the Senate's decision.

Bojan Pancevski, Sunday Times, 22. March 2009

Copyright © 2001, Václav Klaus. Všechna práva vyhrazena. Bez předchozího písemného souhlasu není dovoleno další publikování, distribuce nebo tisk materiálů zveřejněných na tomto serveru.