

## Essay:

### FROM ACCOLADE TO BRIDGE BUILDER. PETR NEČAS AND THE MANIFESTATION AND HISTORY OF PARTY AND PERSONAL AMBIVALENCES OF EUROPEANIZATION<sup>1</sup>

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Speaking before the European Parliament in 2009, Czech President Václav Klaus proclaimed, “For us there was and there is no alternative to European Union membership.”<sup>2</sup> Despite this statement and his involvement in the Velvet Revolution, Klaus’s pro-European credentials were anything but assured for European observers. He and other Czech politicians, particularly of the Civic Democratic Party (*Občanská demokratická strana*, ODS), have demonstrated significant ambivalence about institutional Europeanization, that is to say in the context of the European Union (EU) and to a lesser degree about the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This reflects the ambivalence of Europeanization between the state and Europe. For the ODS, Europeanization is conceived of in an almost entirely institutional context. As Václav Klaus said upon the Czech Republic’s accession to the EU, “We are not joining Europe because we have been part of it for a long time, in fact always, even at the times of our subjugation. We are joining [the] European Union.”<sup>3</sup> As such, this paper examines the ODS’s Euroscepticism and ambivalences in an institutional context.

This paper examines a 2012 speech by then-Prime Minister of the Czech Republic Petr Nečas, also a member of the ODS. The speech, entitled “10 Theses from the Prime Minister on the Future Shape of Europe,” hereafter “10 Theses,” serves as a prominent, contemporary encapsulation of the state of Czech Euroscepticism in the ODS 23 years after the fall of communist Czechoslovakia.<sup>4</sup> This paper examines the speech in the context of those 23 years, focusing on primary source analysis of speeches and political documents, particularly those of Václav Klaus as the intellectual leader of the ODS. The “10 Theses” speech is emblematic of a long-term progression within the ODS, and of Petr Nečas’s own views towards a particular Euroscepticism that reflects Czech Republic’s own ambivalent Europeanization. This ambivalence and Nečas’s ideology have their roots in a debate about the definition of

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<sup>1</sup> Essay on the source: Petr Nečas: 10 Theses from the Prime Minister on the Future Shape of Europe (April 3rd, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Klaus, Václav, Speech of the President of the Czech Republic Václav Klaus in the European Parliament, in: Václav Klaus, URL: <<https://www.klaus.cz/clanky/310>> (25.08.2018).

<sup>3</sup> Klaus, Václav, Address of the President of the Czech Republic delivered on the Eve of the Accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union, in: Václav Klaus, URL: <<https://www.klaus.cz/clanky/798>> (05.09.2018).

<sup>4</sup> Nečas, Petr, 10 Theses from the Prime Minister on the Future Shape of Europe, in: Government of the Czech Republic, URL: <<https://www.vlada.cz/en/clenove-vlady/premier/vyznamne-projevy/10-theses-from-the-prime-minister-on-the-future-shape-of-europe-99054/>> (24.08.2018). Hereafter all citations, if not marked otherwise, originate from the source printed below.

democracy and are manifested in Nečas's views on interactions between the Czech Republic and the EU, in terms of both structure and content.

## History

The ODS and Klaus both rose out of the Civic Forum movement, which was the organized political face of the Velvet Revolution. While originally allied with future President Václav Havel, Klaus and a few other leaders identified as conservatives in opposition to some of the liberal internationalist rhetoric of Havel. This propelled them to form the ODS, but there was not a conservative base of supporters waiting for them, so it had to be a more gradual towards a “Czech conservative ideology.”<sup>5</sup> Such an ideology was not previously well defined, and had practically no time in the public eye prior to the Velvet Revolution. Conservative dissidents had existed during the communist period, and Klaus was a prominent face among them as one of the “Young Economists” of the more liberal 1960s.<sup>6</sup> After the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, many of these thinkers were scattered, but the origins of the ODS can be traced back to the harsh ‘normalization’ period which followed the invasion.<sup>7</sup> With these conservative principles and stark memories of communism in hand, the first leaders of the ODS went about forming their party's policies, including those on Europe.

The position of the ODS on Europeanization, defined largely in the context of accession to the EU, changed every few years in the 1990s in response to a variety of factors, including public opinion, communications with the EU, and election performance. The first stage of this shifting ideological process begins at the start of the Velvet Revolution, when the Czech public was consumed by the idea of going “back to Europe.” It was accepted without debate that Czechoslovakia, and then the Czech Republic, would be headed for a Western, European future. It is important to note that joint ‘Western’ and ‘European’ goals did not mean ‘Western European’ goals. Klaus and others advocated Czechoslovak exceptionalism and highlighted its position in Central Europe.<sup>8</sup> This position shows that there were concerns about European integration from a very early point in the country's development, and concerns about national sovereignty did not just arise once integration was on the policy docket. The regionally motivated context helped shape the first major narrative of the 1990s, that the Czech Republic was uniquely positioned for acceptance into the EU. There was little reason to engage in

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<sup>5</sup> Hanley, Séan, The New Right in the New Europe? Unravelling the Ideology of ‘Czech Thatcherism’, in: *Journal of Political Ideologies* 4 (1999), No. 2/3, pp. 163–189. Available at URL: <<https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/15080/>> (02.03.2020), here p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> Hanley, The New Right.

<sup>7</sup> Hanley, Séan, Blue Velvet: The Rise and Decline of the New Czech Right, in: *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 20 (2004), No. 3/4, pp. 28–54, here p. 31.

<sup>8</sup> Novotna, Tereza, The Eastern Enlargement of the European Union: Public Discourses in the Czech and Slovak Republics, in: *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 3 (2007), No. 1/3, pp. 51–63, here p. 54.

international politics, because “Western geopolitical considerations” would naturally see the advantageous Czech position and take them on board first.<sup>9</sup>

By the middle of the decade, however, the EU made it apparent that the large wave of post-communist accession would not be exclusionary based on the success of domestic policies, and rather include all prospective member states. ODS rhetoric, particularly that of then-Prime Minister Václav Klaus, turned relatively more Eurosceptic, disappointed that the Czech Republic would not be given a fast track to accession because of its successes in transformation.<sup>10</sup> The early inklings of doubt about integration were starting to be supported by empirics. The party turn towards more vocal Euroscepticism was only abetted by the struggles that the ODS faced in 1997.

In the face of a financial scandal and a defeat in the 1997 parliamentary elections, the ODS simultaneously turned its ideology towards a more virulent Euroscepticism and its party organization towards one man, Václav Klaus, as its leader. This Euroscepticism and Klaus’s influence are direct ancestors of the party’s positions fifteen years later at the time of Nečas’s “10 Theses” speech. The move towards more pronounced Euroscepticism was driven partly by the existing Euroscepticism within the party. More pro-European forces were not inclined to remain in the party, particularly as it appeared that the Eurosceptics had the balance of party power. So, when the former group left, the latter was strengthened, with Klaus at the helm.<sup>11</sup> The remaining, largely Eurosceptic members, who already were on Klaus’s side in the ideological battle, gave him a further vote of confidence after a financial scandal rocked the party around the same time. Séan Hanley remarks, “Rather than outgrowing its charismatic founder, the crisis saw the reassertion of Václav Klaus’s personal authority and prominence allowing him to develop his personal policy agendas (on, for example, Europe) without being checked by the rival élites.”<sup>12</sup> As such, not only did Klaus’s views become the official policy of the party, and guide its development from there on out, but he also elevated several younger politicians to leadership positions in 1997. Among those politicians was future Prime Minister Petr Nečas, whose speech is the focus of this paper.<sup>13</sup> For understanding Nečas’s speech, then, it is no surprise that the speeches and writings of Václav Klaus together constitute an invaluable source of analysis of the ins and outs of Czech Euroscepticism as realized in the “10 Theses” speech.

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<sup>9</sup> Hanley, Séan, The Political Context of EU Accession in the Czech Republic, in: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, URL: <[http://just.wz.cz/texty/political\\_context.pdf](http://just.wz.cz/texty/political_context.pdf)> (02.03.2020), here p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.; Klaus, Václav, Toward a Broader Europe – Carefully, in: Václav Klaus, URL: <<https://www.klaus.cz/clanky/543>> (05.09.2018).

<sup>11</sup> Riishøj, Søren, Europeanization and Euroscepticism: Experiences from Poland and the Czech Republic, in: University of Southern Denmark Political Science Publications 25 (2010), pp. 1–60, here p. 46.

<sup>12</sup> Hanley, Blue Velvet, p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

## Democracy

Both the forefathers of the European Community and the leaders of the Velvet Revolution ensconced democracy as one of their primary virtues, but the question of what constitutes democratic legitimacy, and whether the EU possesses it, has vexed them and their descendants over the last few decades. Democracy is a key value articulated in ODS policy and rhetoric over the years, with Václav Klaus referring to it as “the most respectful ambition of Europeans.”<sup>14</sup> This is, similarly unsurprisingly, driven in part by the country’s communist past, and in that respect there is little disagreement within Czech or European politics. However, the debate diverges between ODS and EU voices here.

With his seventh, eighth, and ninth theses, Nečas echoes a long-standing argument that the key to democratic legitimacy is the presence of a demos in a given state structure. His position on the demos is most clearly stated in his seventh thesis: “In my opinion in its position the European Parliament cannot secure legitimacy of decision-making, since it does [not represent] a demos constituted around certain common themes.” The concept of a “demos”, meaning the citizens of a democracy, has driven democratic rhetoric for thousands of years. However, the ODS did not begin talking about the EU in terms of a demos explicitly until the 21st century. Contemporaneous with Nečas’s speech, Václav Klaus proclaimed, “There is no demos in Europe, there are just ‘inhabitants’ of Europe.”<sup>15</sup> Previous rhetoric was largely focused on concepts of democratic development more generally applicable to “people” or “voters.” Nečas is receiving his cues from this generalized rhetoric, but also from a longer standing, historically driven hesitation to cede “democratic accountability” to a faraway city.<sup>16</sup> As such, his indemnification of the supposedly representative European Parliament is striking, but not unexpected. It still contains contradictions, however, because Nečas claims there is no demos for the European Parliament, but he and Klaus have no problem saying that “Europeans” exist as such. Nečas attempts to obfuscate this ambivalence by referring to “certain common themes,” which can be taken to mean themes, which make a national population a demos, but make a European population merely ‘inhabitants.’

Regardless of what exactly Nečas believes constitutes “common themes,” it is clear that his overriding belief remains with the state structure. He states, “in order to secure democratic legitimacy it is necessary to involve the member states.” In other words, only a state possesses a demos, so only a state can act in the interests of that demos. Anything larger, like the EU, is

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<sup>14</sup> Klaus, Václav, European Union and Its Enlargement, in: Václav Klaus, URL: <<https://www.klaus.cz/clanky/1272>> (05.09.2018).

<sup>15</sup> Klaus, Václav, Politics Must Stop Dictating Economics in Europe, in: Slaný, Martin; Šebesta, Filip (eds.), The Never-Ending Struggle for a Free Society, Prague 2014, here p. 112.

<sup>16</sup> Klaus, Václav, Global Governance and its European Variant, in: Slaný/Šebesta, The Never-Ending Struggle, here p. 26.

illegitimate on these grounds. This belief in the state primacy in the democratic process, and democratic legitimacy resting with the state, has roots dating back to the restoration of democracy in 1989. Decades of geopolitical control by a foreign power had wrested basic decision making away from the Czech people. The nation state was thus seen as a swing in the opposite direction, a bulwark of popular, representative governance standing against an oppressive external force. Václav Klaus went further than just casting the nation state in the historical light of communism, though he resisted few chances to do that as well. Klaus has referenced the First Czechoslovak Republic, which existed between the two World Wars, by referring to the nation state as “traditional.”<sup>17</sup> But more recently, and contemporaneous with the “10 Theses,” Klaus went further, to the point of calling the nation state “a ‘natural’ product of human development.”<sup>18</sup> Considering the not only premier, but primal, role of the nation state in Klaus’s mind, it is no surprise that he termed it the “only efficient guarantor of democracy.”<sup>19</sup> In comparison, Nečas’s line of argument seems tame, but it serves to mention here that Nečas’s speech was given alongside German Chancellor Angela Merkel, making the speech a diplomatic pursuit and not just an ideological one. As such, even if Nečas was in agreement with Klaus’s naturalistic argumentation, he would be unlikely to express it in that manner. What manifests nonetheless is a deep and abiding belief that political power must remain with the states. In his eighth and ninth theses, Nečas critiques EU administration in this context, saying in his ninth thesis, “Individual states legitimately defend the diverse interests of their own citizens.” For Nečas, then, democracy is certainly the primary concern when discussing European affairs, because of his country’s experience under communism and his personal and party beliefs that only a demos, resident within a state, can provide democratic legitimacy. Nečas’s philosophy is guided by this abiding belief in democratic values, and indeed this belief impacts the rest of his theses on Europe.

### **Variable Geometry**

Petr Nečas’s proposal for coordination, nor harmonization, to govern relationships between states and Europe, a concept he calls variable geometry, reflects both long-term developments in ODS ideology and the ambivalences of Europeanization regarding relationships between individual states and Europe as a whole. To neatly summarize his position, Nečas invokes the term “variable geometry” in his fourth thesis. The term encompasses the sort of relationship that he wishes to see between a state and European institutions, and which he defines as such, “integration with a single common foundation which applies for everyone and a series of

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<sup>17</sup> Klaus, *European Union and Its Enlargement*.

<sup>18</sup> Klaus, Václav, *Careless Opening Up of Countries Leads either to Anarchy or to Global Governance: Lessons of the European Experience*, in: Slaný/Šebesta, *The Never-Ending Struggle*, here p. 96.

<sup>19</sup> Klaus, Václav, *Conservative Ideals: Renewal or Return?*, in: Slaný/Šebesta, *The Never-Ending Struggle*, here p. 64.

supplementary areas always shared by various groups of states in line with their needs and wishes.” As established, Nečas’s guiding principle throughout his speech is that of democracy. Democracy is the “single common foundation,” however contentious the definition, that all European states as well as European bureaucrats can agree upon. In the particular realization of variable geometry, the question of democratic legitimacy then determines how that foundation is applied. Because only states are legitimate democratic actors, only states can take legitimate action. As such, the power to manage institutional Europeanization, that is to integrate, rests with the states themselves, not with European institutions.

The term “variable geometry” is carefully chosen in opposition to a more common concept: the “two-tier” or “two-speed” Europe. The underlying principle is roughly similar, as both systems allow for a range of integrative responses based on an individual state’s “needs and wishes.” Both systems are built on the idea that some states will want to integrate more, and some less. However, Nečas makes it explicit that two speeds are not enough: “I am deliberately avoiding using the term a two-speed Europe. This is not a question of speed, nor of division into two groups.” Two groups, or two speeds, is still too restrictive by Nečas’s estimation because it does not allow full flexibility for states. Only with full flexibility can the most legitimate decision-making process occur; anything that restricts states’ abilities to act in turn restricts democracy. The two-speed proposal was controversial in the ODS many years prior, and Nečas’s opposition reflects that. Even before the Czech Republic was a member of the EU, there were already doubts amongst the existing members of the Union that the then-candidate countries could keep up the pace with the grand plans for European integration made by political elites from Madrid to Berlin. The two-speed proposal was floated by existing member states as a way for newer members to still be a part of Europe, but to not have to commit themselves to a degree of integration for which they were not prepared. Perhaps understandably, Eurosceptics in the ODS responded with some apprehension and a range of opinions. Václav Klaus, for his part, was distinctly displeased about what he called a “two-tier” Europe in 2000: “It is the fastest way to promote political union and to give a special, dominant role to the hard-core countries [...]. This special ‘flexibility’ is a method to force less enthusiastic countries into accepting EU unionistic policies.”<sup>20</sup> Klaus disdained the veneer that the existing member states were trying to throw over the proposal, as exemplified by the quotes around “flexibility.” His concern about the “dominant role” likely stems from concerns about democratic legitimacy, but also from his historical experience. Where Klaus channels his values and his experience into anger, however, other members of the party put their effort into building a new, sustainable picture of European integration. In 2001, ODS Foreign Affairs spokesman Jan Zahadřil and three others authored “The Manifesto of Czech Eurorealism” to set out their vision for the future relationship between

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<sup>20</sup> Klaus, Václav, Europe 2000: A View From Prague, in: Václav Klaus, URL: <<https://www.klaus.cz/clanky/938>> (05.09.2018).

the Czech Republic and the EU. Rather than rejecting “flexibility” outright, they put forth what can be described as a cautiously optimistic proposal:

“Let us therefore embrace flexibility and support it in such a form as would enable some states to opt out of the common policies without preventing others to participate in the closer integration they prefer. This model should resemble a menu from which Member States can select areas in which they would opt for closer integration.”<sup>21</sup>

This text foreshadows Nečas’s speech eleven years later, as it likewise advocates for a highly flexible future, individualized to the state level. Perhaps due to a change in personal beliefs or to the diplomatic setting, Nečas also added an element of “coordination” to variable geometry as described in the “10 Theses” speech. Regardless, though, the Manifesto is emblematic of an important turn in Nečas’s political and ideological role in the party. In the first few years of his ODS leadership career (roughly 1997–2000), Nečas was beholden to Václav Klaus, who had gotten him the job and was the undisputed intellectual leader of the party. The same could be said for Jan Zahradil, the lead author of the Manifesto, through the same period. Zahradil and Nečas made their mark, and found common ground with each other, with this moderate Eurosceptic approach that stood in contrast to Klaus’s vitriol. At a party conference in 2001, near the publication of the Manifesto, Nečas spoke directly to the Czech people from his position as ODS spokesman for Defense: “[Let us] gain everything possible from the EU. [...] let us not give it a fraction more than we have to. Let us say fairly, openly and loudly to the Czech public that for us entering the European Union is not, and will not be, a love match, but a marriage of convenience.”<sup>22</sup> While not measured in rhetorical tone, Nečas is setting out a more moderate vision for a Czech future in the EU. In doing so, he is trying to strike a compromise between the ambivalent poles of the state-Europe relationship that is inherent to Europeanization. Variable geometry is broadly a response to this reality, as the EU pulls actors towards unification and “national interests” pull them away. Nečas was among the young leaders who introduced this dichotomy, and the concept of “national interests,” into the ODS as early as 1999. His ideas were not widely accepted at first, but quickly gained prominence and eventually found their way into the ODS 2002 election platform.<sup>23</sup> From Nečas’s formulation about the prospect of a practical, coordinated relationship to his intellectual leadership, he was well on the way to developing his own version of ODS Euroscepticism, and the “10 Theses” speech is perhaps the best example of that. The speech’s policy focus, however,

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<sup>21</sup> Zahradil, Jan et al., The Manifesto of Czech Eurorealism, in: Documents from the ODS Conference on Party Principles and Ideology, URL: <<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/8fb5/87fdb1481a387dc9d49ec2f097b33693ccc3.pdf>> (02.03.2020).

<sup>22</sup> Hanley, Séan, From Neo-Liberalism to National Interests: Ideology, Strategy, and Party Development in the Euroscepticism of the Czech Right, in: East European Politics & Societies 18 (2004) No. 3/4, pp. 513–548. Available at URL: <<http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/15078/>> (02.03.2020), here p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> Hanley, From Neo-Liberalism to National Interests, p. 22.

goes beyond variable geometry as a way of looking at relations between the state and Europe in more general terms. Some of its most pertinent applications are in economics.

## **Economics**

Petr Nečas's proposals for further integration of the free market and internal strengthening of the currency union reflect his democratic principles, years of ODS intellectual development, and the ambivalence between European integration and Czech sovereignty. Economics are on the table from the beginning with Nečas's first thesis: "European integration was from the beginning and should remain a political, and not just an economic project." On the face of it, this is a striking comment. Political integration implies a loss of political power, or a transfer of authority from the state to the European level. This counters the principles of state-based democratic legitimacy that Nečas has built his ideology around. Yet there is a difference between a political project and the particular political project of integration. Nečas argues that economic integration does not need to unnecessarily infringe upon state sovereignty, and can in fact encourage progress towards a mutually beneficial future: "By creating a space for free trade without barriers, followed by the system of the classical four freedoms, Europe was to be linked together so that its peaceful development was assured." "Peaceful development" could be taken at face value, but it should be interpreted as a euphemism meaning development, of both a political and economic nature, carried out in a way that respects and strengthens strong institutions. In other words, Nečas is saying that peaceful development means democratic development, carried out for the benefit of the demos via the singularly legitimate democratic institution, the state. He is establishing a trade-off with this thesis, asking in effect, "Is it net beneficial to Czech citizens to economically integrate?" His answer is yes, that economic integration between states provides greater benefits than a system based on completely independent states, and these benefits outweigh the harmful effects of giving up some degree of sovereignty to accomplish the integration. Nečas's path to this conclusion twists and turns over the years, with small bends in the road turning into cleavage points between him and other members of the ODS.

Economic liberalization has been a core tenet of the Czech Republic's development after the fall of communism, and has been particularly emphasized in a historical context within the ODS. Speaking in 1997, Václav Klaus said of the immediate post-communist period in the early 1990s, "We did not have the slightest confidence in the capacity of the government and its representatives to centrally plan and command the economy, nor did we believe in their capacity to mastermind the transformation of such a society."<sup>24</sup> This belief was rooted in his experience

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<sup>24</sup> Klaus, Václav, Systemic Transformation and Its Costs, in: Václav Klaus, URL: <<https://www.klaus.cz/clanky/1923>> (05.09.2018).

under the communist regime: “We did not want to repeat our previous mistakes and to make new, but similar attempts to mastermind the economy from above again. We wanted to make it free.”<sup>25</sup> However, this same historical conviction was not the majority opinion in Czech society. Whether for a lack of political debate, of knowledge of market-based economic traditions, or for some other reason, the Czech public was not ready to throw their full support behind a rapid market liberalization for its own sake. Recognizing this, the ODS took a new rhetorical turn in line with the reinvigorated national fervor that was a key component of the early transition. Hanley writes, “The market and its mass opportunities were [...] projected as grounded in Czech national character and cultural traditions.”<sup>26</sup> This tactic helped the ODS win the parliamentary elections in 1992 and take office for the next five years, with Klaus as Prime Minister. Because of this electoral success, the underlying national-historical message remained the guiding line of the party while Petr Nečas was climbing its ranks in the 1990s, and was even more emphasized after Klaus consolidated political and ideological power in the aftermath of the dual electoral and financial crises of 1997. Nečas reflected this line of rhetoric in his aforementioned split from a purely Klaus-ian ideology in the early 2000s, but distinguished himself by a greater willingness to cooperate than Klaus, not by taking a more nationalist position. To understand what exactly Nečas’s views are, and how he and Klaus split hairs in the intervening decade plus, one must first return to the “10 Theses.”

Petr Nečas believes that the European market must integrate and expand its reach, whereas the currency union should only strengthen itself and not expand, as the former serves greater democratic ends and the latter does not. With his fifth thesis, Nečas declares the primacy of “deepening” the internal market in the process of integration. Within that, he makes it clear that the economic implements have political ends: “The idea of an internal market without barriers is motivated not only by economic interests, but has in itself a deep political message.” This political message is that of peaceful development, as Nečas phrases it elsewhere in the speech, that ultimately serves the average citizen. So why does the currency market not serve these ends, or have the same message? The answer is competition, which promotes economic growth and thus strengthens the citizenry. This peaceful development of a stronger economy, and ultimately a stronger people benefitting from that strong economy, is Nečas’s ultimate goal.

Nečas denigrates the currency union as a broken institution in his third thesis, blaming it in larger part for the European financial crisis. Part of his critique, the lack of unity between fiscal and monetary policy, is a common refrain in Europe, but Nečas is more focused on another issue, competition: “The key element is not fiscal policy of itself, but economic policy and the maintenance of competitiveness.” The currency union is inherently noncompetitive in terms of

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<sup>25</sup> Klaus, Václav, *The European Problems as Seen from Prague*, in: Slaný/Šebesta, *The Never-Ending Struggle*, here p. 101.

<sup>26</sup> Hanley, *The New Right*.

monetary policy, and while Eurozone members still have fiscal autonomy, they are inevitably more linked to each other on fiscal policy than non-Eurozone countries like the Czech Republic. This concern surrounding the currency union has been present in the ODS for many years, with Václav Klaus saying in 2001, “I believe that efficiency and strength will not come from uniformity but from experimentation, diversity and competition.”<sup>27</sup> Even five years earlier, Klaus was expressing his concerns with the Eurozone still in development: “I cannot resist the impression that the problems regarding the European Monetary Union – because of the fact that it is predominantly a political endeavor – are being trivialized.”<sup>28</sup> Nečas’s concerns have deep roots in the ODS’s ideological development, and reflect Klaus’s earlier concerns that the currency union was too homogenous and too political. Both men agree that the currency union is a failure because it fails to deliver outcomes to citizens and to respect the democratic legitimacy of states. However, they have different approaches to dealing with that failure.

Petr Nečas believes the solution is to reform the current economic system, reflecting his cooperative nature, rather than Václav Klaus’s penchant for the more brash move of starting anew. Klaus’s doubts about the currency union established in the 1990s quickly turned into vociferous arguments in the 2000s. A few months after the Czech Republic’s accession to the EU, Klaus declared that there were no guarantees about his country’s participation: “Our membership in the EU has no alternative but all other things do have alternatives.”<sup>29</sup> This is in line with Nečas’s message three years prior declaring Czech EU membership a “marriage of convenience” with no guarantees.<sup>30</sup> However, Klaus’s tone soured further, and just two years later, and even before the financial crisis, proposed a radical solution to the problems he saw: “I suggest [...] redefining the whole concept of the European Union, not just to make cosmetic changes.”<sup>31</sup> He continued this rhetoric through the end of his presidency, including Nečas’s premiership. Such drastic reformulating changes were not what Nečas voiced, however, in the “10 Theses” speech, reflecting a split in ideology. His third thesis states it directly: “The currency union will need to integrate further in order to survive [...]. The solution to this now cannot be the breakup of the Eurozone, but must be a shift towards further stages of integration.” This begs the question, why does Nečas not take Klaus’s more pessimistic stance, considering the fact that Nečas sees the currency union as non-competitive and harmful to member state sovereignty, not to mention democratically illegitimate? The answer is that Nečas knows that a strong currency union can mean a stronger Czech economy. As he says in his tenth thesis, “We

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<sup>27</sup> Klaus, European Union and Its Enlargement.

<sup>28</sup> Klaus, Václav, European Monetary Union and Its Systemic and Fiscal Consequences, in: Václav Klaus, URL: <<https://www.klaus.cz/clanky/2096>> (05.09.2018).

<sup>29</sup> Klaus, Václav, Integration or Unification of Europe: Notes for the Berlin Speech, in: Václav Klaus, URL: <<https://www.klaus.cz/clanky/7>> (05.09.2020).

<sup>30</sup> Hanley, From Neo-Liberalism to National Interests, p. 17.

<sup>31</sup> Klaus, Václav, The European Union: From Unification Back to Integration, in: Václav Klaus, URL: <<https://www.klaus.cz/clanky/78>> (05.09.2020).

rely on cooperation with the other states of Europe.” Bringing this issue back to the argument on competitiveness, Nečas knows that economic competition is improved when the competitors are stronger. If the Czech Republic is to be competing with Eurozone members, then he wants those Eurozone countries to be stronger competitors. And if they are tied to the Eurozone, which Nečas believes cannot be done away with, then the only solution is to make the Eurozone stronger for the countries that are already in it. By doing so, Nečas is promoting competition via bilateral strength, or competitive depth: that any two given partners in a competition will complement each other’s strengths. The other method of strengthening competition is through expansion, or competitive width, and Nečas promotes that through a further integration of the free market. A larger market, either one that has more members or one that covers more sectors, means more competitors or more areas of competition. Nečas mentions by name the service and energy sectors as chief areas of improvement, referring to what he sees as failures to transfer liberalizations from paper to the real world. But with all this in mind, including the careful distinction between the currency union and the common market, Nečas is still an advocate of caution, borne of his democratic principles.

Variable geometry means that states will decide in what areas in which they want to cooperate, and so Nečas has to explain how that coordination would work in terms of market integration. He speaks of “transfers of authority” as a weighty term. In a contemporary speech, Václav Klaus expressed a cynical view of the EU’s motivations for these transfers: “The main motivation for shifting the bulk of decision-making out of the nation states is to get rid of the democratic control which – with all its limitations and imperfections – still exists in the nation states.”<sup>32</sup> Nečas is cautious about transfers of authority, but does not go as far as Klaus, recognizing in his sixth thesis that some transfers of authority will be “essential” in order to integrate “clearly defined areas of the internal market.” Nečas’s eagerness to pursue market integration shows that he acknowledges the value that the common market holds for the Czech people, and the necessity to transfer some degree of authority in order to make sure that market functions. An interstate market cannot be completely free and regulated if there is not some interstate authority to ensure its freedom and enforce necessary regulations. As such, Nečas recognizes the role of the EU in this context. However, he hesitates to jump into this project immediately, maintaining in his second thesis that above all else, discussions need to respect the role of the states and be based on “a long-term vision of what is to be achieved.” This cautiousness, and his lack of willingness to endorse nearly any other form of integration, reflects Nečas’s deep-seated belief that democratic legitimacy lies with the states, not the EU. This ambivalence between sovereignty and integration forces Nečas to attempt to reconcile the divide throughout the “10 Theses” speech, and so it is no surprise that his eventual conclusion

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<sup>32</sup> Klaus, *Careless Opening Up*, p. 92.

is complex and cautiously bridges the gap between complete sovereignty and complete integration.

## Conclusion

Petr Nečas's "10 Theses from the Prime Minister on the Future Shape of Europe" speech demonstrates that his Eurosceptic views are based in his democratic principles above all else, and that those principles in turn lead to his conclusions about the prospective structure and content of European integration. Nečas rose to power through the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) in the 1990s as a disciple of Prime Minister, late President, Václav Klaus, supporting the party line on Euroscepticism and promotion of the free market. However, Nečas distinguished himself ideologically around the turn of the millennium. He kept a few key party views, including the concern that because only a proper demos, or electorate, could provide legitimacy to a democracy, only states and not the EU were legitimate actors. Nečas maintained a focus on the democratic "national interest," but this led him to more conciliatory positions with regards to Europe than Klaus and other traditionalist members of the party. The "national interest" for Nečas meant that any sort of European integration had to be cooperative, between states, and that the only integration worthy of pursuing would be one which would support the national interest. This left the common market as the only acceptable area of integration for Nečas. His concerns for national interest, state sovereignty, and democracy had to be balanced against his knowledge that market integration could benefit the Czech people and thus even strengthen their democracy via economic growth. Ultimately, Nečas's decision making reflects a key ambivalence of Europeanization, as the state and European structures play against each other constantly.

The "10 Theses" speech is just one example of a speech intended to concisely summarize a politician's point of view. It is worth noting that the speech was given in a diplomatic setting, and so its tone is perhaps more downplayed than a political speech. It would be informative for future research on Nečas, Klaus, or the ODS, to investigate the differences in tone between different settings for speeches on similar topics, and how those differences in tone reflect the speaker's perceptions about their audience. In terms of content, it is also intriguing to note the divergent uses of history and historical memory between different politicians' speeches. Why do they invoke history when they do, and in the way they do it? This can be expanded beyond the context of Klaus and the ODS, though a short-form intellectual history like this paper may provide some helpful background to the context for historical rhetoric in political speeches. Regardless, it is important to note that the study of one speech cannot speak for a politician's entire career or set of beliefs. It is, however, the best way to understand why something was

said in the way that it was, when it was. It is a reasonable hope that these small-scale histories can then in turn contribute to a greater understanding of the forces at play.

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Ben Gardner-Gill, From Accolade to Bridge Builder. Petr Nečas and the Manifestation and History of Party and Personal Ambivalences of Europeanization, in: Themenportal Europäische Geschichte, 2021, <<https://www.europa.clio-online.de/essay/id/fdae-98776>>.

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