

ly at odds with the analysis of the electoral behaviour of these groups of voters.

The conference was accompanied by a good social programme, so it was possible to discuss informally with other participants after the conclusion of the official programme. The only weakness of the conference was the unwillingness or the inability of some speakers to modify and prepare their presentation in order to meet the required 15–20 minute limit. This author finds the repeated use of sentences such as 'I will skip this, you will have to read this in the proceedings' to be insulting. This kind of approach suggests that for the speaker the audience is not worth the effort of modifying the paper (otherwise prepared for a printed version) so as to include the key ideas of the text and to maintain an interesting account. In view of the fact that the organising institution intends to continue organising two-day conferences of this kind, there will still be a chance next year to see to what extent the ability of Czech political scientists to make public presentations improves. According to Vít Hloušek, the editor of the conferences proceedings, the volume of papers should be published in the summer and it will contain some additional papers that were not presented at the conference. Judging by the quality of the papers that were presented, there is certainly much to look forward to.

Lukáš Linek

Mutual Perceptions and Cross-Border Experiences – Czechs and Germans as Neighbours

A one-day conference organised by the Centre for Applied Science in Munich and the Institute of Sociology, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Ústí nad Labem, Munich, 3 February 2005

The current stage in Czech-German relations may be described as calm. The political debates relating to the points of historical conflict between the countries in the 20th cen-

tury have subsided, and senior politicians in the Czech Republic and Germany have nothing but praise for the current 'conciliatory' relations and openly proclaim that any points of contention have been overcome. In November 2004, at the Marion Dönhoff Awards, the German Chancellor made a reference to Gesine Schwan, the German Social Democratic Party's (SPD) unsuccessful presidential candidate, and to the need to pursue 'politics of conciliation' with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe; but he noted that this was 'especially' true with regard to Poland. The Czech Republic appeared not to be the focus of attention in German's conciliatory efforts. It is indeed hard to say how far Czech and German leaders have really succeeded in settling past conflicts and thus also the future potential for conflict in the relations between the two countries. It must also be wondered to what extent the Czech Republic appears to Germans as a country of relatively minor significance in comparison with its Polish neighbour. It is as though it the Czech Republic was or has become the neighbouring country in which the German public is not interested.

In the interior of Germany there is a clear lack of interest in the Czech Republic, but not only there, and even in the border regions of Bavaria this is the prevailing attitude. This point was confirmed in the presentations that were made in a one-day conference 'How Czechs and Germans Define Themselves and Perceive One Another as Neighbours', which was held on 3 February 2005 in the Centre for Applied Sciences (CAP) at the University of Ludwig Maximilian in Munich, and organised by CAP and the Czech Border Regions Department of the Institute of Sociology, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. The conference was devoted to a discussion of some of the results of the joint Czech-German project titled 'Historical Milestones in Border-Region Identities in Western Bohemia – Bavaria (How Czechs and Germans Define Themselves and Perceive One Another as Immediate Neigh-

bours) (supported by the Volkswagen Stiftung Foundation) and it involved the participation of researchers involved in the project from both research centres: PhDr. Václav Houžvička, PhD., the coordinator of the project, Mgr. Lukáš Novotný, M.A., a researcher in the project, both from the Institute of Sociology, and Dr. Michael Weigl, from the Centre for Applied Science, along with a number of other speakers.

One of the conclusions presented by Lukáš Novotný and Michael Weigl in their paper on 'The Significance of "the Other" for Regional Identity in the Czech-German Border Region', which was based on historical analyses and qualitative analyses of interviews conducted on both sides of the border, was that a relatively large proportion of Czechs and Bavarians view their neighbour with disinterest and indifference. Novotný and Weigl argued that only a small group of the population actually take part in any active cross-border dialogue, and on the Czech side more so than the Bavarian those that are involved are generally from the ranks of the regional elites. But the majority of the population on both sides of the border maintain a position of remoteness and scepticism towards their neighbour and towards activities that may draw them into contact with each other. Those Czechs and Bavarians who predominantly exhibit behaviour patterns of 'indifference' and 'remoteness' toward their neighbour, tend to construct their local and regional identity without any awareness of the local and regional historical and traditional background. Conversely, behaviour patterns of 'accommodation' considerably more often coincide with a person's historical and regional awareness. On the Czech side, historical awareness has been undergoing a transformation since 1989, in an effort to rid itself of the influence of communist-period propaganda and the Cold War image of the German neighbour and to re-evaluate and depict regional history without tendentiousness or bias. On the Bavarian side – and it should be noted that here too all sorts of

negative constructs about Czechs evolved out of the confrontation between the West and the East – the more Bavarians' historical awareness is linked to the notion of integration in a unified Europe, the more positive their view of and identification with Czechs. For example, in this context references are made to the past and the shared medieval trade routes between Bohemia and Bavaria (e.g. the Golden Path).

The paper presented by Melanie Hoffrath, from the Technical University in Kaiserlautern, which focused on the relationships between the neighbouring border communities of Strážný and Philippsreuth, also confirmed that behaviour patterns of 'accommodation' are found only among a minority of the population on both sides of the border, while among the majority there is a clear lack of interest in the neighbouring country. Hoffrath argued that it is not possible to speak of any mediation space between these two communities, as, despite their geographical proximity, there is practically no communication between the two communities and their citizens, and on both sides there is a predominant lack of knowledge and interest about the other community. It is primarily the inhabitants of Philippsreuth who visit Strážný, more so than the other way around, but the purpose of such visits is almost always shopping tourism, as the German visitors go to Strážný to shop at the cheap Vietnamese markets located there. Each community has a distinct identity and specific cultural standards, and this, along with the language barrier, make the situation between the communities and their members even more complicated. According to Hoffrath, if the space between the two communities is to become a real mediation space, it will require more than just cross-border activities conducted on an official basis. To succeed in this it will first be necessary to awaken a sense of interest among the populations in their neighbour and foster the potential for contacts between the two sides.

Markéta Hahn, an advisor to firms operating in the Czech-German environment, presented a paper titled 'History, Politics, Society: The Specifics of Czech-German Economic Experience', and pointed out that the limited amount of interest each side has in the neighbouring country complicates cross-border cooperation. In the area of economic cooperation she notes that often top managers from Germany who are sent to the Czech Republic are well aware of the relatively rapid career advancement this signifies for them, but they are much less aware of what to expect in the other country and what kind of differences they must be prepared to encounter in the way of thinking of local inhabitants. Czech mentality is foreign to them, and they consequently often come up against a lack of understanding and willingness in the Czech community. Therefore, Hahn particularly emphasised the need to devote sufficient time and attention to developing inter-cultural skills in general and developing an awareness of the other country's cultural standards. German managers need also to realise that the tough company rules and matter-of-fact approach they are accustomed to in German firms tend to run up against a lack of understanding on the part of their Czech colleagues.

An important historical milestone in Czech history was the year of the revolution in 1989. Claudia Beier, a fresh graduate of the CAP, presented a paper titled after a well-known quotation from the German writer Christa Wolf, "Every Revolution also Frees the Tongue" The Connection between Language and Politics Based on the Velvet Revolution'. The paper dealt with the specifics in the style of communication between Czechs and Germans in the periods before and after 1989. Beier used caricatures and illustrated jokes as examples of Czech linguistic humour typical for the period prior to 1989. In the post-1989 she pointed out the more frequent occurrence of English expressions in Czech humour and presented examples of witty remarks by top Czech politi-

cians, especially Miloš Zeman, to demonstrate that even after 1989 language continues to be an important political tool.

Although it was Miloš Zeman who in 2002 referred to the Sudeten Germans as Hitler's 'Fifth Column', resulting in a deterioration in Czech-German relations and prompting Chancellor Gerhard Schröder to cancel his scheduled visit to the Czech Republic at that time, Birgit Vierling from the University in Regensburg stated that the relations between the two countries between 1998 and 2002 were nonetheless regarded as smooth and normal. She noted that the Sudeten German issue and the Temelín nuclear power plant both became contentious issues in connection with the Czech Republic's accession to the European Union, but the German and Czech governments managed to successfully handle both. Current relations between the governments are considered good, though there are prevailing disagreements, such as over the planned European Centre against Expulsions, which the Czech side views with reservations (while part of the political leadership in Germany even backs establishing a 'national' version of such a centre, without the involvement of the other countries), or over how the Sudeten German issue is viewed from Prague and Munich.

In her paper on the integration of the Czech Republic into the European Union, Anne Sophie Kross of the University of Göttingen discussed the ideas of František Palacký, who described Czech history as remarkable for the way in which it had significantly shaped European history, but noted that the country's history had often been negatively influenced by Germany. Kross supported Palacký's observation with historical evidence, but also cited the very recent example of the accession process of the Czech Republic to the EU, in which Germany played an important role in many respects, but in this case also became the source of the Czech scepticism towards the two-tier unification of Europe, where large