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**Attitudes towards the Czech Republic
on the eve of the EU-enlargement -
An empiric survey among citizens of the city of Chemnitz***

von

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Attitudes towards the Czech Republic on the eve of the EU enlargement

An empiric survey among citizens of the city of Chemnitz (Germany)

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Summary

A questionnaire based, representative field survey amongst 933 citizens of Chemnitz (Germany) in the summer of 2002 should show their viewpoints concerning the EU-enlargement and the image of the neighbouring Czech Republic and its people. Concerning the estimated risks of the EU-enlargement, the citizens of Chemnitz mainly saw them within their very close, personal sphere (e.g. criminality, competition on the labour market), while positive aspects were recognised on a general, societal level (e.g. cooperation, cultural exchange, better understanding). It nevertheless came clear that this rather critical judgement did not affect the individual view on the people of the neighbouring country. People with personal experiences concerning the Czech Republic saw the common future much more positive than those who did not know their neighbours in Central Europe.

Zusammenfassung

Eine repräsentative Befragung von 933 Chemnitzer Bürgern im Sommer 2002 sollte deren Einstellung zur damals bevorstehenden EU-Erweiterung sowie der benachbarten Tschechischen Republik und ihrer Bürger erfassen. Bezüglich der EU-Erweiterung hat sich gezeigt, dass die Risiken vornehmlich in den die persönliche Situation betreffenden Bereichen gesehen wurden (Konkurrenz auf dem Arbeitsmarkt, Kriminalität), während die Chancen eher weniger greifbaren Segmenten zugeordnet waren (kultureller Austausch, Verständigung). Allerdings basierte die eher kritische Haltung zur bevorstehenden politischen Veränderung nicht generell auch auf einer grundsätzlich negativen Einschätzung der tschechischen Bürger. Diejenigen Probanden, welche durch persönliche Begegnung das Nachbarland kennen, sahen die Zukunft als weit weniger bedrohlich als die Uninformierten oder Indifferenten.

Introduction

Due to the upcoming enlargement of the European Union towards central Europe, an increasing number of publications and media reports concerning this topic could be noticed on either side of the former eastern Schengen-Border.

This event was expected with both, optimism and fear - again on both sides of the former EU “outer border”.

Especially the situation between Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic was often seen with a special focus. These three countries and their people share a common but difficult history. Due to this fact and because there are unspoken problems on either side or special stereotypes with regard to the respective other, it is even more astounding that the Czech and Polish attitudes towards Germany and vice versa seem to be the best ever. Even strange statements by some high-ranking Czech politicians during the election campaign of 2002

could not disturb the rather good relations between Czech Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany on the individual level.

These obviously good relations should not disguise the sceptical view towards the larger EU amongst a large number of citizens in Germany, the Czech Republic and Poland. Concerning this special topic, the media, some political parties, pressure groups and many people share a rather uncomfortable feeling. This special situation - a normal attitude towards the neighbouring countries including some scepticism - was the reason for carrying out a representative questionnaire-based field survey among the citizens of Chemnitz/Saxony concerning their hopes and fears towards the EU enlargement.

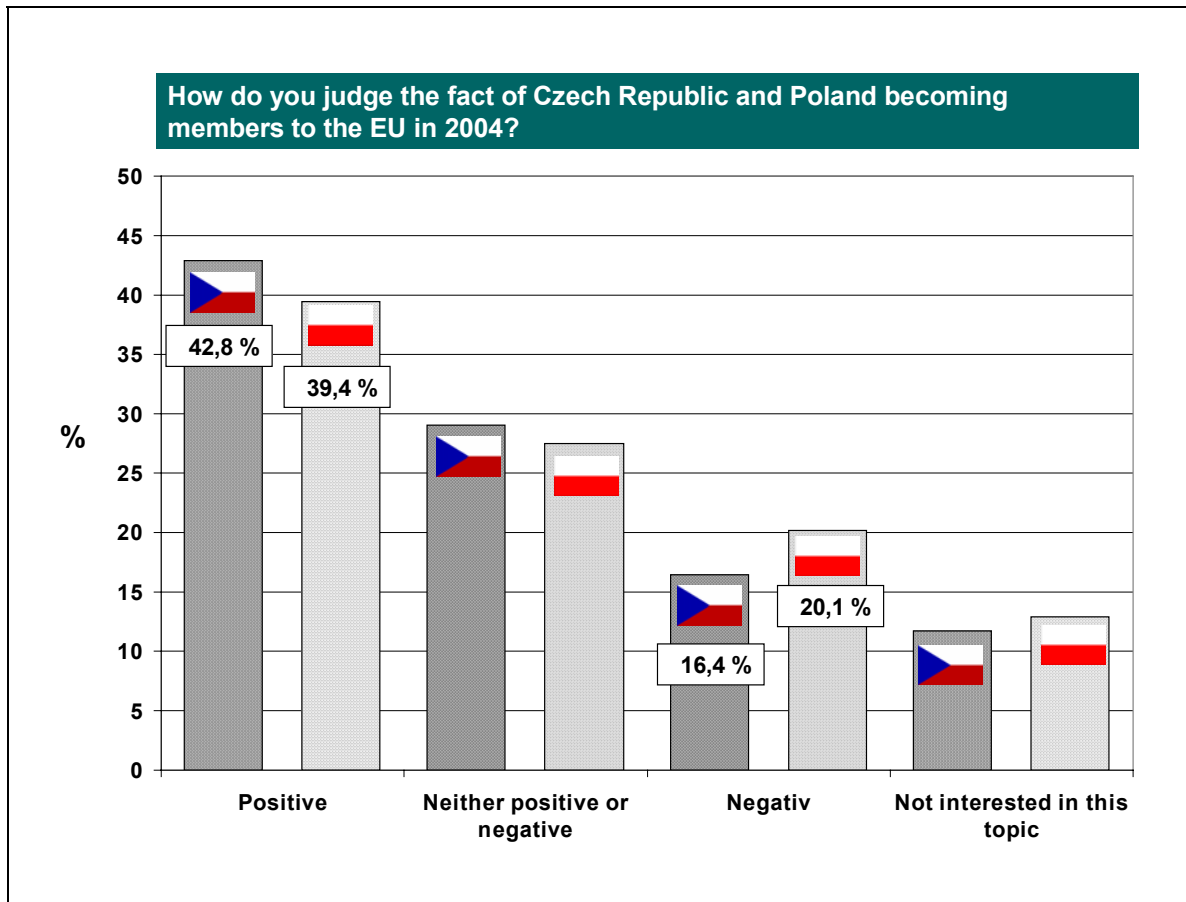
The city of Chemnitz proves to be an ideal terrain for a demoscopic survey. With about 260.000 inhabitants it is the administrative centre of south-western Saxony and represents together with Zwickau its economic core. But Chemnitz is also the local capital of a border region. The German-Czech border is only 50 kilometres away and easy to reach via Bundesstraße (main road of national importance). Thus, tourist trips to the Czech Republic are a quite common way of recreation among the citizens of south-western Saxony. Therefore, it could be expected that many citizens visited at least Northern-Bohemia during the last years and should have certain viewpoints on the neighbouring country as well as the EU enlargement in general.

In the summer of 2002, 2 years before the EU enlargement, 933 citizens were asked about their opinion on a larger EU with special emphasis on the nearby Czech Republic.

Attitude towards the new member states Poland and Czech Republic

Firstly it is to state that more than one third of all citizens were in favour of the EU membership of Poland and the Czech Republic. 20% of the citizens were against a Polish, only 16% against a Czech membership. A rather large number of people was not interested in this topic or just did not mind about the EU enlargement.

It is obvious that the membership of the Czech Republic was seen more positive than that of Poland. This could be due to the fact that the Czech Republic is much closer to Chemnitz and by consequence the citizens know this neighbouring country better than Poland. Familiar things, regions or people might provoke less "fear".



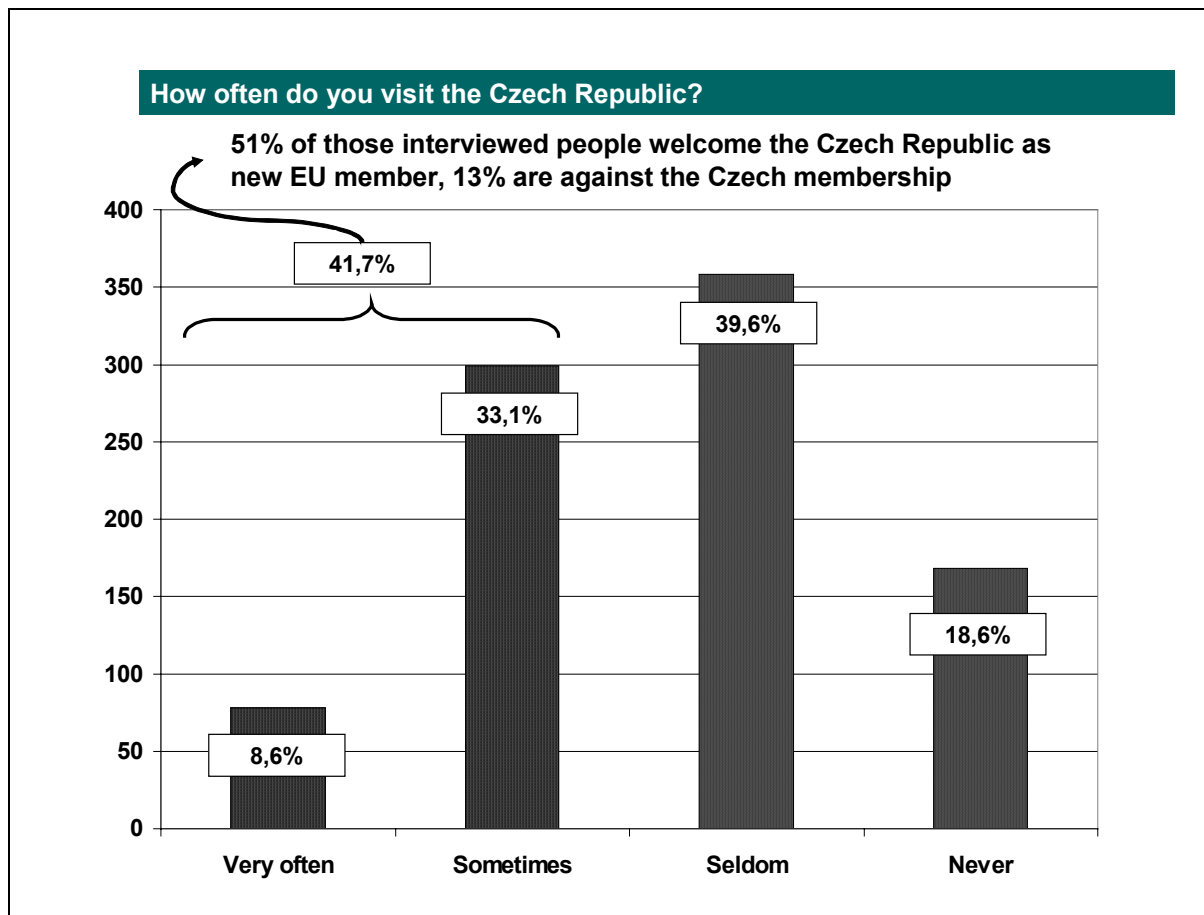
n=933

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Therefore, it is interesting to analyse the frequency of visits to the Czech Republic. The survey shows that 41% of the interviewed citizens are visiting the Czech Republic very often or often. Only about 18% do or did never visit this neighbour-country.

With regard to the reasons of their visits, tourism (44%) and shopping (tourism) (42%) are the main activities. As expected shopping tourism plays an important role in this border region with significant disparities regarding wealth.

Those who visit Czechia were in favour of its EU membership (51%). Only 13% of them were against it, the rest did not mind. It seems that those who are familiar with the neighbouring country consider events such as the EU enlargement significantly more positive.



n=881

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This result also means that “people to people” projects in trans-border cooperation should be seen as important and effective measures. Knowing the neighbour and his country changes the attitude towards him in a positive way.

The image of the Czech people

The people who had already visited the Czech Republic were asked how they judge the Czech people in general. The survey shows that the neighbours are seen in a rather positive and partially indifferent way. Only 3% of the interview-partners disliked the Czech people.

How do you like our Czech neighbours?

I like them very much	40 %
I neither like nor dislike them	24 %
I rather dislike them	3 %
I don't mind	7 %
No answer given	26 %

n=881

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A more detailed question should reveal certain characteristics. Here, only some chosen features were examined but they show a rather interesting picture of the German attitude towards the Czechs. Firstly, none of the proposed characteristics was seen very negatively.

The Czech people are considered as being friendly, open minded, diligent, sportive and well educated. Furthermore, they are less political, just, honest, generous and “clean”.

The positive results are mainly based on individual experiences whilst visiting the Czech Republic and on some outstanding Czech achievements: Czech sportsmen and women as well as Czech automobiles and other machinery products have had a good reputation since a long time. When it comes to the more or less negative aspects, the topic of “odsun” and its treatment by certain politicians (except Havel or Dienstbier certainly) could be a reason for judging the Czechs as being not so “just”, “generous” and “honest”. At this point it might be important to state that “odsun”/“Vertreibung” is not really a relevant topic in German politics or German daily life. The Czech election campaign and especially statements given by M. Zeman in 2002 put it on the (German) agenda for a short time again. Regarding the idea of Czechs being not so “clean”, this statement again was examined separately “in depth”. It occurs that this quotation was connected to the presence of the Roma- and Sinti minority in northern Bohemia. These people appear to some Germans as being “not so clean”, which represents an old prejudice against these people.

Fear, scepticism and positive expectations

The question about expected advantages and disadvantages of the enlargement on both sides of the former EU outer border is one of the “classics” in trans-border research in the last years.

In this survey, the statements given did not vary much from the expected range of probable answers.

Disadvantages of the EU membership of the Czech Republic and Poland concerning Saxony

• Negative consequences to the labour market; more competition	40%
• More criminal activities	22%
• Negative consequences to the economic development	11%
• Loss of regional identity	8%
• Rising consumer prices	6%
• Less investments in infrastructure	4%
• Other	9%

Advantages of the EU membership of the Czech Republic and Poland concerning Saxony

• Positive effects on economic development in general	31%
• Less borders	15%
• Cultural exchange and more exchange activities in general	11%
• Positive effects on the labour market	8%
• Common currency one day	8%
• European integration	8%
• Achievement of similar living conditions	7%
• Trans-border cooperation	5%
• Other	7%

n=933

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What is interesting about this survey is that negative expectations were stated relatively precise and clear. Possible positive consequences, on the other hand, remain rather vague.

As a possible consequence of problems in German economic and social policies during the last years and in particular due to the difficult situation in eastern Germany, people tend to have much more precise ideas on what could negatively happen in the near future.

Even some irrational viewpoints have been mentioned repeatedly, especially the fear that Czech and Polish citizens will come to eastern Germany to find work and will consequently create even harder competition on the labour market. This fear exists although any immigrant worker would very probably avoid the economically and socially weak regions of eastern Germany in order to find work easily and without difficulties.

Conclusion

Concerning the estimated risks of the EU-enlargement, the citizens of Chemnitz mainly saw them within their very close, personal sphere (e.g. criminality, competition on the labour market), while positive aspects were recognised on a general, societal level (e.g. cooperation, cultural exchange, better understanding). A large number of people saw the EU enlargement in a rather critical way.

On the other hand it came clear that this judgement does not affect the individual view on the people of the neighbouring country. Whilst the EU membership of the Czech Republic is seen rather negative, the country and its people are judged quite positively. Especially people with personal experiences concerning the Czech Republic quoted the common future much more optimistic than those who did not know their neighbours in Central Europe. In general the

Czech people are neither seen in a very positive nor a very negative way. This result might seem more or less disappointing, but it is not. Considering the partially difficult common history and the fact that the iron curtain fell only 14 years ago (which put the Czech Republic and Germany in the centre of Europe again) the present - maybe sober - German-Czech relations are a good achievement until now. This “sober relation” today represents an excellent base to improve and strengthen the Czech-German relations. The results of this survey show that “knowing each other“ is an important feature of a future cooperation.

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