

## **Olomouc Hosted a Debate with Commissioner Bieńkowska and Minister Petříček**

*Report by Chad Bumsted, written for Euroskop*

**A debate celebrating the fifteenth anniversary of the membership of the Czech Republic in the European Union was held in Olomouc on Tuesday, October 8, 2019. Participating in the public discussion was Elżbieta Bieńkowska, the member of the European Commission; Tomáš Petříček, the Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs; and Karel Konečný, the Deputy Mayor of Olomouc. The conversation was moderated by Václav Stehlík from the Palacký University in Olomouc.**

It has been thirty years since jingling keys were heard echoing across Czech streets amidst the Velvet Revolution, signifying the restoration of freedom within the Czech Republic. Since then, half of this time has the country spent as a Member State of the European Union, an international organization that has benefited the country tremendously. In 2017, for example, thirteen years into the membership in the community, the Czech Republic was the beneficiary of over sixty-seven billion CZK.

### ***Bieńkowska: European Union is not an ATM, values are more***

While this is an undeniably strong benefit for Czech citizens, commissioner Bieńkowska was quick to dismiss any idea that the EU should be viewed as an ATM. Instead, it is freedom, and the other EU values, that truly make the EU the “most beneficial organization possible in Europe.”

In order for the EU to retain this status, the commissioner noted, there must be a give and take between the organization and Member States to truly offer an economic and social system that is able to compete with the largest countries in the world.

### ***Petříček: Membership in the EU requires compromises***

Echoing this train of thought was minister Tomáš Petříček, who stated that the cost of membership in the EU is “compromises,” compromises that enable European countries to be a part of “the biggest democratic club in the world.”

Through compromises, other countries have made it possible for the Czech Republic to reap benefits that would not be possible without the membership status. The EU cohesion policy, for instance, heavily aids countries that need economic help by allocating funds proportionately. According to commissioner Bieńkowska, the cohesion policy has played a major role in bringing

the Czech Republic's GDP to a level that is only 10% less than the average of all Member States - 20% higher than it was fifteen years ago.

***“All for one, not one for all” must stand***

As the economy of the Czech Republic gets stronger, the concern may arise regarding the economic benefits arising out of the membership. This is why, as stated by minister Tomáš Petříček, a common goal is necessary, and it is important to remember that the EU should follow the motto “all for one, not one for all.” Accordingly, a reciprocal relationship is necessary for each EU Member-State and may not always offer benefits in every single category.

Ultimately, the strongest message offered by the speakers was that despite the fact that progress in the Czech Republic has been maybe slightly slower than expected by Czechs, it is still far better than if the country was outside of the EU.