

to the knowledge of spatial patterns of voting behaviour in the territory of Czechia.

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**Müller, Karel B.:**

## ČEŠI, OBČANSKÁ SPOLEČNOST A EVROPSKÉ VÝZVY.

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In 2016, the political scientist Karel B. Müller, author of the well-received canonical title 'Czechs and civil society', presented a new book with the same title: 'Czechs, Civil Society and European Challenges'. This edition has an addition subtitle which elaborates also his own normative elaborations and the trajectory of his aspirations: 'Between Nationalism and Liberalism or from Ethnic Exclusion towards an Active Boundary'. This latest work by the mid-generation political scientist, as characterised in the preface, summarizes eloquently the central topics of the academic interests he has been developing over the past fifteen years of his research career.

At the beginning, we must make clear that this book may be interesting for more than just one group of readers. Firstly, the accessibility of the language and very logical structuring of the chapters may attract a wider public who demands a profoundly informed text on the given subject. Starting from the very personal, unconventional observation of the 'Czech way' of officially commemorating places and statues in the villages, the author may easily facilitate bridging the academic and general debates about the limits of the current civil society in the Czech Republic; this may be objectively and visually evident and familiar for every rural, but I think also urban, pedestrian. With an opening chapter like this one, it is surely much easier to capture the attention of readers who come from outside of social science circles. This title is definitely laudable for the way it approaches the general public and therefore meets the promise of popularising science, which is so often rhetorically mentioned, but less often substantively fulfilled.

But then, the second branch of readers stems from the community of undergraduate and perhaps even graduate students. For them, Müller's contribution may serve as a textbook introducing the basics regarding the very same concept of civil society. Their methodological skills may be boosted thanks to the fact that author intentionally expresses the links between conceptual and empirical levels. Therefore, the various conceptualisations in the book are presented for the practical purpose of analysing different aspects of civil society and this results in a truly instructive academic text. Definitely, this text is written as scholarly rigid application of appropriate theories on the case study of the long-term process leading to the formation of civil society in the Czech lands. Ultimately, students may use this publication also as a rich and useful reservoir of data regarding the diverse actors, milestones, stages and transformations of

Czech civil society from the mid-nineteenth century to the present challenges connected with the incorporation of Czech civil society into a possibly evolving European civil society, or more precisely of the Europeanisation of the Czech national civil society.

And thirdly, this monography cannot be overlooked by academics. Karel B. Müller belongs to those authors who are bringing a grand synthesis of current knowledge on the given subject matter, and at the same time he does not hesitate to offer his own innovative reinterpretations, or what's more, an original additional conceptual solution, like in this case in the form of the so called 'active boundary'. And this is exactly the reason why his recent publication should be further discussed, reviewed, criticised, contested or supplemented. The last chapter especially serves as food for thought and as lively academic material for current social science, international relations, European studies researchers, as well as for political theorists.

The main goal of Müller's book lies in acquiring a better understanding of the conditions of sustainability of democratic governance in the Czech Republic and in Europe. This is then operationalised with the help of the concept of civil society, as a condition *sine qua non*, for liberal democracy. The main exploration is focused on the historical formation and consequent development of the civil society in the Czech lands. A smaller part of the book is dedicated to the challenges which demand creative thinking and an inventive spirit and are directly linked with the experience of the new form of polity overstressing the initial nation state and the appropriate development and adaptation or prescription of such an adaptation on the side of civil society.

In detail, the chapter titled 'Civil society' first offers a historical excursion into the conceptual debate. Later on, in the same chapter, the author elaborates on three diverse per-

spectives on civil society: empirical, normative and a third complementary perspective based on the link between action and structures. The empirical perspective is dominated by the debate between so called generalist, maximalist and minimalist definitions of the concept. The normative perspective comprehensively summarises the many functions civil society has to fulfil under various conceptualisations: participatory, defensive, legitimizing and integrative. The third perspective offers an important fusion of the previously outlined thesis and offers valuable schemes illustrating the above-mentioned functional roles of civil society. It also highlights the real problems connected with a malfunctioning civil society and the institutional defects that negatively impact civil society. These malfunctions and negative impacts are conceptualised into patterns such as the crisis of political freedom, the rise and misuse of political power, the legitimacy crisis, atomization and anomie, the weak state, and more surprisingly, even excessive participation, uncritical trust and excessive social cohesion.

The largest part of the book is dedicated solely to the case study of the genesis and development of civil society in the Czech lands. During the Austrian period, more specifically in the mid-nineteenth century, it started to be justifiable to discuss Czech society in the framework of the multinational Habsburg Empire. Karel B. Müller thoroughly covers the history of many aspects of the life of the civil society in this period onwards. Among the numerous topics under investigation in the chapter 'Civil society in the Czech lands' are German ethnic and cultural nationalism as a possible initiation of Czech self-determination; the rise in the numbers of Czech nationally conscious people; the genesis and growth of federal activities further socialising and boosting Czech consciousness and establishing a solid ground for the autonomous life

of civil society without the actual existence of a nation-state; the founding of Czech newspapers; the existence of Czech politics (actors and strategies without the existence of an autonomous polity); the politicization and nationalization of originally neutral public affairs which resulted in the nationalisation of trade, economics and consequent protectionism.

In the same vein, the author pursues Czech civil society throughout the 20th century: from the beginning of the independent Czechoslovak state bolstered by rich civil society organisations, to the demise of autonomy and freedom under totalitarian rule. But before that, Müller pays attention to the central problem of the newly established nation state after the First World War. Therefore, he stresses the bare fact that the state was not national in the sense of exclusive occupation by one ethnic or cultural nation. In the Czechoslovak case, this has a clear consequence in multiplication of civil society organisation alongside of the national cleavage, but newly also according to political party affiliations. One point made by Müller should be especially highlighted because it provides a synthesis of the development of the relational patterns between the state and the society in the Czech lands and explains the dynamism as well as the success of the regime change, all in just a few eloquent sentences: "The lack of identification with the Austrian state was, in the complicated situation of the First Republic, replaced by the colonisation of the state with a corporate pluralism of the Czech society. This, accordingly, proved to be a good prerequisite for the colonization of the society by the state. After 1948, the First Republic's «Party State» gradually evolved into a communist one-party state." (p. 148).

The communist era is also analysed within the central chapter of Müller's book. The prevailing message reminds us of the evolution of the deep rift between the public and private

realms created during that period. Being engaged with the institutions was 'stigmatising and close to the parricide' (p. 153). This experience determines the condition of the newly re-established civil society after 1989, classified as: 'Quite weak...especially in respect to citizens' ability to enter the public sphere and to influence and control public decision-making processes and institutions.' (p. 160) The current state of civil society in the Czech Republic is further characterised through the lens of public distrust in the officials and institutions, civic passivity, a generally weak public realm, and a crisis of institutions and trust.

Because of the aforementioned problems that Czech civil society faces, the author makes a shift towards a theoretical analysis in the form of two short but enlightening chapters. He tries to find the seeds of possible solutions: Firstly, he searches for what 'Trust' in institutions really is. He then asks how trust in the institutions should be won. Is it through the bottom up/horizontal process of associating with others? Or top down, through the institutional cultivation and, for example, incorporation of norms and adoption of international law? Definitely, the answer will be not clear cut. Because the trust in state institutions is shown to be questionable, the second scenario is a more probable candidate for thorough review. But a concrete recommendation can finally be derived after Müller's introduction of the classical conceptualisation of simple versus reflexive modernity. Simple modernity is characterised through binary logic: good versus bad, most typically Us versus Them. If the Czech self-perception of their own democratic institutions is still dominantly occupied by Them, meaning the politicians and the elite, then it is probably the right time to start to evaluate ways to enter the reflexive modernity. How? Müller points to a preferential focus on the assessment of actual institutional performance as a promising start for gaining trust

in institutions, or to expressing distrust which may lead to reconciliation.

Another short theoretical chapter is dedicated to modernity and identity. The author presents modernist theories of nation building and connected accounts of identity, ways of misusing political identity, boundary creation and political inclusion and exclusion. This chapter also clearly indicates a qualitative change in the debate. It is quite clear that these outlined accounts will be not exclusively solved on the platform of the nation-state itself, but they are rather relevant for the new transnational polity of the European Union. This chapter then serves the purpose of opening the final topic of civil society in Europe.

As was already mentioned, scholars should pay closest attention to the last chapter of the book. Müller paradoxically positions his innovative contribution to the debate about the sustainability of democracy in Europe, the original concept of an active boundary, exactly at the end. What is Müller's active boundary? In short, one active boundary is a tool used for the Europeanisation of civil society (p. 224). In the plural, active boundaries are cultural forms that enable public criticism, democratic integration and the formation of positive identities (p. 224). 'An active boundary allows cultural clashes and understanding of differences, but does not imply polarisation and rejections, but builds on continuing communication and cooperation.' (p. 230) In practice, the appropriate space for exercising the active boundary should be in the realm(s) of European

public spheres. The Europeanisation of public spheres should embrace this concept and apply it throughout the EU, in the sense that: 'Actors of the European public sphere would be able to create common discursive space and framework for communication, which goes across porous boundaries of concurring discussions and public spheres.' (p. 241) Operating active boundary endorses a respect towards those coming from the other side, so there should be no enemies or foreigners, maximally the people we don't know yet. With the help of Europeanised political institutions and public spheres, the actors would be able to safely enjoy the limitation by the boundary, and at the same time encounter the difference when operating the active boundary. (p. 244) This particular prescriptive outline of the future shape of (European) civil society is surely contentious food for thought which deserves thorough commentaries and deep analysis.

Karel B. Müller's book is a specific mixture. It is an introductory, yet excellently informed text which serves as a source of empirical data, accessibly described and characterised concepts, and conceptualisations. It also shows its author's ambition to come up with his own outlines of the future of thinking about civil society. Therefore, students and the general public are advised to read it from the beginning, and those who are familiar with the topic should read the very last chapter.