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Przemysław Biskup (edition),

Faculty of Journalism and Political Science, University of Warsaw

***State of the Union 2012: UK's European Policy in the Time of
Crisis. Report on second part***

The second part of the panel, chaired by Dr Wojciech Lewandowski (Chair of European Studies, University of Warsaw) was divided into five speeches delivered by Mr. Jiří Koubek (Charles University, Prague), Dr Przemysław Biskup, Dr Małgorzata Kaczorowska (Institute of Political Science, University of Warsaw), Dr Krzysztof Winkler (Research Group *BRITANNIA*) and Dr Tomasz Czapiewski (Szczecin University). The contributions did address the key political developments in British politics in the second year of the Coalition Government.

The first contribution, presented by Mr. Jiří Koubek of the Charles University in Prague, was devoted to the analysis of the British inspirations from Václav Klaus to Petr Nečas for identity, ideology and image of the ODS.

In the introduction to his speech, Mr. Koubek argued that the Civic Democratic Party of the Czech Republic (*Občanská demokratická strana*, ODS) has probably been the most successful right-wing political party in the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). It has been the only case in this region that a single political party has persisted, without changing its name and with full organisational continuity, as the main right-wing party in its country for the whole post-communist history. The ODS has, indeed, played the role of the right-wing leader since the concept of right-left competition was established in the Czech Republic in the early 1990s.

According to Mr. Koubek, this success is not coincidental. As several authors have noted (Hanley, Szczerbiak, etc.), right wing parties in CEE have been strongly ideological ones. And this is particularly a case of the ODS. Founded in 1991 and lacking any historical tradition (unlike the other core parties of the Czech party system, i.e. Social Democrats, Communists and Christian Democrats), this party needed something substantially more than a strong leadership to survive its own foundational period. And it has been a distinct ideology to constantly provide this integrative power.

The role of party's founder Václav Klaus was crucial in articulating and "selling" this ideological mix. And, in doing so, some British inspirations (notably his ties to the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher) had an extremely important impact. The ideology became such a significant feature of the party that it has even become a matter of political identity, with its "British factor" quite indispensable.

Over last decades, and quite in line with an almost global trend, the Czech party system has been undergoing a shift towards more fragmentation, with increasing voter volatility, decreasing party stability, erosion of party-society linkages and even more personalised politics. As a part of this, ideologies have obviously become vaguer and shallower. In the case of ODS, this is when the "image aspect" comes into forefront. Images and self-images become continuations and functional substitutes of weakening ideologies and identities (or at least their supplements). And again, the British colours in this ODS's image-making are easily discernible.

What specifically are the British inspirations in the politics of ODS? In addition to leaders' examples and emulation (Klaus-Thatcher, Topolánek-Cameron) there is obviously the European issue to unify the parties. Moreover, these are British political institutions, particularly the "first-past-the-post" electoral system and the Westminster system tradition of single-party cabinets, which the ODS has been strongly attracted by since the party's very foundation. Last but not least, Britain has become a highly symbolic visualisation for one of the ODS's main foreign policy principles, i.e. its strong Atlanticism. In this, and without much exaggeration, for the ODS the UK has always played a role of a window to the USA.

Therefore, Mr. Koubek undertook in his paper to identify the British inspirations over the various stages of ODS's development and to follow the changing interplay in the "triple I" triangle of ideology-identity-image.

In the period of up to mid 1990s, which Mr. Koubek described as the Age of Ideology, the keys to centre-right party success in post-

Communist CEE constituted “(a) the presence of cohesive elites able to act as the nucleus of new centre-right formations, and (b) the ability of such elites to craft broad integrative ideological narratives that can transcend diverse positions and unite broad swathes of centre-right activists and voters”¹.

Mr. Koubek emphasised that he intended to focus on and explore especially the second half of the abovementioned assertion of Hanley, Szczerbiak, Haughton and Fowler. As for the first part, the case of the ODS founded in 1991 basically as a “one-man-party”, and dominated by strong Václav Klaus’s leadership at least until the first intra-party tensions in the mid-1990s, is a particularly good example of an extraordinarily cohesive nucleus (unlike, e.g., fragmented and highly competitive Polish right-wing post-Solidarity elites).

Coming back to ideology, Hanley, Szczerbiak, Haughton and Fowler are emphasising the aspect of breadth, defined as “the ability to construct an inclusive electoral entity that encompasses a socially and ideologically broad range of voters and subgroups”². In their account, the success of Hungary’s Fidesz (“high breadth, medium durability”³) is ranked higher than Czech Republic’s ODS (“medium breadth, high durability”⁴).

In his rather durability-centred approach, stressing the ODS’s *continuous* right-wing hegemony in 1991-2012 (as compared to Fidesz’s “late takeover” only after 1998 election), Mr. Koubek focused on some aspects of surprisingly successful *narrowness* in the right-wing parties’ ideological arsenal. Hanley, Szczerbiak, Haughton and Fowler are correct in pointing out that ODS’s ideological message based on “imported Anglo-American New Right ideas”⁵ and on clearly profiled

¹ S. Hanley, A. Szczerbiak, T. Haughton and B. Fowler, *Sticking Together. Explaining Comparative Success in Post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe*, “Party Politics”, Vol. 14, No. 4 (2008), p. 407.

² Ibidem, p. 409.

³ Ibidem, p. 429.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 429.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 429.

neo-liberalism has been significantly narrower than Orbán's mixture of citizenship (*polgár*) principles and national-conservative-populist ideas.

Over two decades, ODS has undergone, similarly to Fidesz, considerable development and shifts as far as its ideological profile is concerned. After all, it is exactly this ideological *flexibility* in time (which is not incompatible with *narrowness*) that will be explored in this paper.

On the other hand, even if we stick to the ODS's ideological narrowness in the initial phase of the Age of Ideology, there was some crucial overlap between (a) this very limited ideological base and (b) that time context and setting. By this context and setting, Mr. Koubek meant the prevalent Czech post-Communist mindset and (post)-transformational aspirations consisting in an almost total rejection of the legacy of Communism (and, together with this, also socialism, or, broadly speaking, left) and the call for a rapid and unconditioned "return to the West" and "return to Europe".

As Czech social scientist and philosopher Pavel Barša put it, for Czechs during the late Communism, "West" was a dreamt concept, a myth, a utopia, a "non-place" into which they were projecting their hopes⁶.

Mr. Koubek's point was that for a newly established right wing political party, lacking any historical tradition or continuity, it would be extremely promising to connect this highly abstract notion of the West with a more specific representation of this ideal. And it is no coincidence that in the first place (at least in the European context) it was Great Britain which was most preferred and best available.

There was not only the well-known personal-ideological linkage in the form of Václav Klaus's admiration for Margaret Thatcher. Notably, it have seemed to be reciprocal: "It is equally

⁶ *How To Kill a Dream: Our Life after 1989 in the Limbo of the End of History* - available at: <http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/u/utopia/how-to-kill-a-dream-our-life-after-1989-in-the-limbo-of-the-end-of-history-pavel-barsa.html>.

flattering to be asked to perform a kind of duet with Mr. Václav Klaus. I suspect it will even be quite harmonious, since he is in a way one of my heroes. Mr. Klaus will be remembered for many achievements during his immensely creative and successful term as Czech Prime Minister”⁷).

Attention shall be paid also to some structural factors. Firstly, in searching for foreign (Western) examples to follow, very clearly profiled right-wing parties were needed. Softer, more centrist, Christian Democratic options were not available for several reasons: a strong anti-third-way bias of that time (a political discourse constructed primarily by ODS and Václav Klaus; thus the foreign example had to be compatible with this campaign), secular character of ODS and, related to this, the fact that the Christian Democratic option had already been taken by another Czech party (People’s Party with its continental European linkages):

“As some of you may know, the Civic Democratic Party was founded in 1991 as a first broad-based, not exclusive, not just a single, narrow constituency representing political party in the Czech Republic as well as in Central and Eastern Europe which **clearly, without hesitation and without any qualifications declared its position on the right of the political spectrum**, a party which admired Margaret Thatcher and British Conservative Party, a party which originally wanted to use the same name. Our intention was to demonstrate that we did not

⁷ M. Thatcher, *Re-Learning Old Lessons: Speech to the American Enterprise Institute*, Beaver Creek, Colorado, 1998, available at: <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/108377>.

want to belong to the predominantly Christian Democratic Central Europe. We looked for inspiration to the Anglo-American political style and ideas and this is where we keep staying”⁸.

Secondly, Britain was also the only European country into which ODS could project its strong Atlanticism. In this sense, UK played a role of a symbolic bridge to the USA. According to Mr. Koubek, it was a part of the then popular story about Reagan’s and Thatcher’s almost personal victory over Communism. “It is not an exaggeration to say that the melting down of communism in Central and Eastern Europe was initiated in Great Britain in the year 1979 by the election victory of the Conservative Party and Margaret Thatcher”⁹.

In a way, Great Britain was even “a more perfect mirror” of the U.S. The “concentrated” Westminster system (i.e., a parliamentary regime with executive power predominance) and its competitive democracy was much closer to the majoritarian style of Václav Klaus as the Czech prime minister than the American “checked and balanced” *presidentialism* with much more fragmented and multi-level pattern of power. Also the fresh Czech memory of a failed federation was more compatible with British unitary (and that time still centralised) government than the complex American federalism. (In connection to this, it should be added that later in 2000, the ODS was strongly opposed to introducing the regional self-government and staunchly in favour of having the municipalities as the only level.) And to add one

⁸ V. Klaus, *Speech at British Conservative Party Conference*, Bournemouth, October 9, 2002, emphasis in original, available at: <http://www.klaus.cz/clanky/2050>.

⁹ V. Klaus, *The politician I admire*, “The Times”, November 13, 2006, available at: <http://www.klaus.cz/clanky/2060>.

common feature of nearly all Anglo-Saxon democracies, the ODS has always pushed and supported introducing a “British” single-member plurality electoral system, dreaming of a two-party system and one-party cabinets.

Thirdly, and more specifically, in the early 1990s Thatcherism was an ideal referential framework for the Czech(oslovak) neoliberal architects of a thorough and rapid economic transformation from central planning to the market economy “without adjectives” (as opposed to the Social-Liberal, Social-Democratic and Christian-Democratic ideal of “social market” economy). Moreover, and luckily enough for Czech-British reference making, some quite similar issues and challenges were on agenda: large-scale privatization, deregulation of economy, dealing with mining industry, railways, health care system, etc.

Nothing illustrates the significance of the British inspiration in constructing the Czech right-wing political discourse in the early 1990s better than the following quote. “Influenced by Margaret Thatcher, I succeeded in persuading the Czech people in the early nineties that we had to restore capitalism. I was proud to say that I was a Thatcherist. I founded a party which admired Margaret Thatcher and British Conservative Party, a party which originally wanted to use the same name”¹⁰.

Next, Mr. Koubek moved to analyse the Age of Identity in ODS’s history (from “Sarajevo” to the end of Klaus’s leadership). The previous, highly ideological phase coincided with the initial Czech transformational optimism and enthusiasm, amounting even to a peculiar kind of Czech exceptionalism. These feelings of Central European primacy, at times even superiority and “not belonging” to the rest of post-Communist countries, were underpinned by a self-image of a Central European tiger, which seems to have been acknowledged even by “British teachers” themselves who, thus, participated, in turn, in crafting this success story image. “It is in keeping with that tradition of industrial prowess that the Czech Republic today is the outstanding

¹⁰ Ibidem.

economic success story of central Europe: where others have flinched under the pressures of free enterprise reform, Václav Klaus — my other favourite Prime Minister — has kept going down the right track. And the results are internationally recognised and admired”¹¹.

By mid-nineties, however, this optimism had faded in the Czech Republic and after 1997 it was entirely swept by a deep crisis, dramatic disillusionment, famously called by the then president Václav Havel as “depressed mood” (“*blbá nálada*”).

From the point of view of ODS as then governing party, the crisis was triple. Firstly, there was economic slowdown which resulted in Prime Minister Klaus having to admit publicly the existence of some serious problems and respond to them by a series of austerity steps, “packages of economic measures”. This was an unpleasant shock right after the official doctrine of transformational success and optimism.

Secondly, there was a first serious intraparty crisis in ODS, leading to a split after so-called “Sarajevo Coup” when a group of challengers publicly called Václav Klaus to resign due to the party’s funding scandal at the time when he was on a state visit to Bosnia. The conflict had been preceded by increasing tensions within the ODS’s leadership concerning, among others also the European policy of the party. Klaus’s ever stronger Euroscepticism clashed with more pro-European attitudes of his minister of foreign affairs, Josef Zieleniec whose ambitions had been to participate more actively on the formulation of foreign policy. Zieleniec’s views were also shared by the “Sarajevo group” who eventually left the party to found clearly Eurooptimist Freedom Union.

Thirdly, a more hidden, underlying crisis was caused by a gradual awakening, leading to perception of Europe as a really existing place rather than utopia. Obviously, this almost Weberian process of *Entzauberung* was accelerating exactly at time of intensive access negotiations between the Czech Republic and the EU.

¹¹ M. Thatcher, *The Common Crisis: Atlantic Solutions: Speech at the New Atlantic Initiative*, Prague, 1996, available at: <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/108361>.

The change of mood was reflected especially in the unified, ever more centralised post-Sarajevo ODS in which the personal Klaus's Euroscepticism came fully into the forefront. Sean Hanley characterises this change as "a shift from a Euroscepticism stressing neo-liberalism and Czech and Central European distinctness to one stressing the defence of 'national interests' against German inspired Eurofederalism"¹².

British inspirations are obvious. Firstly and most significantly, it was the matter of re-framing the political discourse. The vocabulary of British Euroscepticism was adopted and concepts almost never used before in our country, such as *superstate*, *national interest*, *national identity*, *state sovereignty*, were domesticated in the Czech political language.

In addition to this, one of the most representative and best profiled party documents of that time, *The Manifesto of Czech Eurorealism*, comes up with a weird and completely implausible construct of a linkage between "the main stream of modern Czech politics, embodied by the continuity of efforts of Palacký, Havlíček and Masaryk" and "the Anglo-Saxon traditions of liberal conservatism"¹³.

Furthermore, Mr. Koubek analysed the Age of Image, as he described the ODS under Topolánek (2002-2010). The previously described period, in which the initial ideological input spilled over to another level and was socialized within the party as a matter of identity, was marked by hardening euro-scepticism, rising nationalism and conservatism. The peak of this period was the failed 2002 parliamentary election in which this new ODS's ideological brand proved highly incompatible with its voter profile. The party's aggressive campaign demobilised its typical young urban well-off supporters. The unsuccessful leader, Václav Klaus, was successfully launched to the

¹² S. Hanley, *From Neo-Liberalism to National Interests: Ideology, Strategy and Party Development in the Euroscepticism of the Czech Right*, in: "East European Politics and Societies", Vol. 18, No. 3 (2004), p. 513.

¹³ *The Manifesto of Czech Eurorealism*, p. 4, available at: http://www.jan-zahradil.cz/assets/files/publikace/JanZahradil_aj_manifest.pdf.

Czech presidency in 2003 and replaced by Mirek Topolánek as party leader.

The new chairman's repositioning of ODS resembled in some aspects to David Cameron's efforts in the leadership of the Conservative Party. Both leaders moderated their parties and moved them slightly to the centre (or, at least, highlighted their catch-all character). In consequence, they succeeded in leading them out of isolation (in both cases resulting in a coalition government). The ideological purity was replaced – or at least supplemented – by a pragmatic stress on change and reform. Flexibility and modernity, facing global challenges – these were the new mottos. In the Czech case, such a “new-ism” and “change-ism” was, however, not incompatible with the older layer of reformism and transformational ethos from the early 1990s.

As a part of above mentioned shifts, the parties entered some unorthodox domains. “The environment does not respect national boundaries and it is right that the EU should take a lead. Yet we are failing to meet that challenge. Europe's Kyoto target is to reduce carbon emissions by 8 per cent by 2012. But with just six years to go, carbon emissions are down by less than 1 per cent. Twelve member states have actually gone backwards and increased their emissions. The EU as a whole is set to miss its Kyoto target. That is not good enough and it has got to change”¹⁴. Whereas Cameron opened up the environmental issues, Topolánek's ODS even opened up the Green Alliance, having formed a three-party governing coalition in 2006. For Klaus this would have been an anathema, which he let publicly known bitterly and repeatedly.

The originally narrow Thatcherism-inspired ODS's ideology, later solidified by the party's “Eurorealist” identity, now gradually became much more eclectic, vaguer and shallower. Formerly so authentic and intensive ideological formulas eroded over time, being deliberately

¹⁴ A quote from David Cameron statement following the Joint Cameron-Topolánek Declaration, 2009, available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/5175708.stm.

neglected by the new leadership, until they became completely a matter of routine. And in an ever more media centred and personalised Czech politics, these were *images* that replaced and functionally substituted the ideological or identity-based messages.

This softening of ideology led to conflicts within the party (concerning, e.g., the Lisbon Treaty) in which the implicit player increasingly involved was the honorary chairman of the party, the Czech President, Václav Klaus. Eventually, his role was also crucial in overthrowing the Topolánek's cabinet in 2009.

Topolánek was aware of the risks of his new pragmatism. His British partnership, the frequency of showing publicly together with Cameron, the MER initiative, and later, leading ODS out of the EPP-ED alliance and the establishment of the ECR group, this all can be interpreted as an image-making strategy aimed at pre-empting Klaus's (and his followers' in ODS) attacks on Topolánek's "heretic" leadership. Another part of this pre-emption was a re-emphasis on neo-liberalism, leading, inter alia, to the flat tax introduction.

Contemporary Nečas's leadership can be understood as a kind of middle way: partial return to Klaus's heritage, but without completely abandoning Topolánek's achievements. However, it is primarily the weakness of both the party and its leader which best characterises the current period.

In conclusion to his contribution, Mr. Koubek pointed out that broadly speaking, the Age of Image continues under Nečas's leadership despite some half-hearted attempts of ideological revival. What definitely continues, however (and is a continuous link over all three periods of ODS's short history), are the British inspirations and linkages. The most recent development, the British-Czech attitude to the EU Fiscal Compact, is another example of this evergreen feature of ODS's politics.

Mr. Koubek emphasised that he was trying to interpret the success of the ODS in terms of a "triple I" sequence: (1) a strong British inspired

ideological input in the initial phase, which (2) later spilled over onto a deeper level and was solidified / socialised as a matter of identity (accompanied with re-discovering the Eurosceptic part of the Thatcherite ideological mix), and which (3) yet later eroded and mutated into a matter of political image serving partly as a cover for blunt pragmatism, partly as a shield of pre-emption against the ideologues' attacks.

It is probably the lack of ODS's own historical traditions which motivated the party to search for Western political examples. And among those available, the UK and its Conservative Party have been the most suitable choice for several reasons.

The second paper in the second part of the panel was presented by Dr Przemysław Biskup, who elaborated upon the Coalition Government's agenda in the light of the Queen's Speech 2012.

The Queen's Speech of 2012¹⁵ is interesting for a few reasons. First of all, everybody who visited Britain in May 2012 could see how beautifully the official pomp of the State Opening of the Parliament did compliment the celebrations of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee held this year, which are only to be concluded with the opening and closing ceremonies of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games¹⁶. Second of all, the last Speech from the Throne concluded an exceptionally long parliamentary session of almost two years. Third of all, it was in a way a summary of the accomplishments of the Coalition

¹⁵ *The Queen's Speech 2012: Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech to both Houses of Parliament on 9 May 2012*: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/queens-speech-2012>.

¹⁶ *The Queen's Speech 2012*: "In the year of the Diamond Jubilee, Prince Philip and I will continue to take part in celebrations across the United Kingdom. The Prince of Wales and other members of my family are travelling widely to take part in festivities throughout the Commonwealth. Prince Philip and I look forward to the London Olympic and Paralympic Games and to welcoming visitors from around the world to London and venues throughout the country."

Government so far, and a symbolical occasion for the HM Government to reset its priorities for the second half of the present Parliament. What is also interesting in respect of this speech is not just what was contained in it, but also what was lacking.

In brief, **in the Speech from the Throne there were specified 19 Public General Bills** to be introduced into the Parliament in the newly opened session. They cover broad range of topics, from banking reform, through social and child care, electoral reform, to water supplies¹⁷. **On the top of the legislative programme of the Coalition Government there were also indicated 12 priorities**, such as reducing the deficit and restoring economic stability; reforming the rules governing succession to the Crown; building strategic partnerships with the emerging powers; the United Kingdom's assumption of the Presidency of the G8 in 2013, and strengthening of the UK's international position in relation to different regions of the globe.¹⁸ Nonetheless, it was a much smaller number of issues which effectively have been dominating the coalition's attention and setting the limits of policy bargaining.

¹⁷ *The Queen's Speech - 9th May 2012* (<http://number10.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/engage/queens-speech-2012/>): Banking Reform Bill, Care and Support Bill, Children and Families Bill, Communications Data Bill, Crime and Courts Bill, Croatia Accession Bill, Defamation Bill, Electoral Registration and Administration Bill, Energy Bill, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill, European Union (Approval of Treaty Amendment Decision), Groceries Code Adjudicator Bill, House of Lords Reform Bill, Justice and Security Bill, Local Audit Bill, Pensions Bill, Public Service Pensions Bill, Small Donations Bill, Water Bill.

¹⁸ *The Queen's Speech - 9th May 2012*: Reducing the deficit and restoring economic stability; Reforming the rules governing succession to the Crown; Working cooperatively with the devolved administrations; Afghanistan; Reducing the threat of nuclear proliferation and Iran; Horn of Africa; Middle East and North Africa; International development spending from 2013; Building strategic partnerships with the emerging powers; The United Kingdom's assumption of the Presidency of the G8 in 2013; The Diamond Jubilee; The London Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Dr Biskup underlined also that the main theme of the HM Speech had been set on the economic growth, and on development of the select social policies, which were aimed at softening the government's image dominated so far by the need for austerity. Such an image did undermine the Conservatives' chances for majority government in May 2010 and has finally struck both the governing parties during the last Local Elections of May 3, 2012. Notably, these were not only the Liberal Democrats who suffered considerable losses in the council seats, as in the last year's vote, but also the Tory party¹⁹.

The problems of economic growth and social policies aimed at softening the blow of the cuts introduced so far in result of the recession, and public debt, and fair distribution of the austerity measures in the society, were addressed by a number of measures. The Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill would “create the right conditions for economic recovery” and “reduce regulatory burdens and improve business and consumer confidence”, while the Banking Reform Bill would undertake to strengthen regulation in the financial services industry. The Banking Reform Bill would “foster financial stability and a more resilient banking sector” by giving the HM Treasury the power to ring-fence retail operations from investment divisions of big banks, and to ensure that depositors are paid out before unsecured creditors in the case of bank insolvency. It is intended that this solution would reduce the potential burden on the taxpayers. The measures included in the bill are based on recommendations made by the Independent Commission on Banking, set up by the government in 2010 to look at reforms in the banking sector in the wake of the financial crisis. The Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill would also increase shareholders' powers, particularly regarding executive pay. The government has also announced plans for the Energy Bill, designed to boost investment in low carbon energy and help in increasing security

¹⁹ *Vote 2012: Labour Are Back Throughout Country, Says Ed Miliband*, BBC News, May 4, 2012: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-17920848>.

of supply. Similar aims are connected with the pledge to launch a Green Investment Bank to provide investment in environmental initiatives²⁰.

There were also some other initiatives declared in the Queen's Speech, which may be interpreted as creating successful reforms without committing the Government to general withdrawal from its previous policies. This tendency is best exemplified by the House of Lords Bill²¹. This is a particularly interesting issue for a few reasons. Firstly, the Bill will be aimed at concluding the upper chamber's reform initiated in the years of constitutional crisis of 1909-1911 (Parliament Act 1911, and the proposals of the Bryce Commission of 1917). Second of all, because what we call the contemporary Lords' reform, initiated by the House of Lords Act 1999, has been mostly the Labour project. Thirdly, because it is a kind of pledge made by the Government from which it seems it has cut itself off almost instantly, the Conservative members of the Cabinet and their parliamentary colleagues in particular. Therefore, Dr Biskup stated that we might expect a very interesting discussion in the Parliament in the course of the next year, but not necessarily a particularly intense action on the side of the Cabinet on this issue. It was also confirmed in the Queen's Speech that the discussion over the alterations to the Royal Succession shall be continued with the heads of governments of the Commonwealth Realms, and other Commonwealth countries²². It has been already initiated and it centres on the right of women to inherit the throne on the same conditions as men (breaking the rule of male

²⁰ *Queen's Speech: New Measures to Boost Economy*, BBC News, May 9, 2012: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-18005246>.

²¹ *The Queen's Speech 2012*: "A Bill will be brought forward to reform the composition of the House of Lords".

²² *The Queen's Speech 2012*: "My Government will continue to work with the fifteen other Commonwealth Realms to take forward reform of the rules governing succession to the Crown."

primogeniture), and additionally on the elimination of the exclusion of the Catholics from the succession²³.

Importantly, **there is a law on defamation to be introduced**²⁴. It is intended to protect the freedom of speech and reform libel law in England and Wales. The Bill is intended to ensure a “fair balance” between freedom of expression and protection of reputation. Currently, a person suing for defamation does not have to prove the words they are complaining about have caused them actual damage, it is enough for the courts that they might. Under the new law, once it is passed, the claimants will have to show they have suffered serious harm before suing for defamation. The presumption in favour of a trial by jury will also be removed. There will also be a protection for “responsible publication on matters of public interest”. The bill will provide greater protection to operators of websites hosting user-generated content, as long as they are in compliance with the necessary procedure to “resolve any dispute” directly with the author of the material concerned. The draft bill, published in March last year, also aims at addressing “libel tourism” by tightening the test to be applied by the courts in relation to actions involving people who are not domiciled in the UK, or in the EU member states²⁵.

There also was announced an introduction of the **European Union** (Approval of Treaty Amendment Decision) Bill in order to enable the creation of the European Stability Mechanism as a permanent means to support Eurozone Member States facing gross problems. Importantly, the ESM will exempt the UK from a new European bailout agreement

²³ *Rules of Royal Succession: Eleventh Report of Session 2010–12*, House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, HC 1615 (London: The Stationery Office Ltd., 7 December 2011).

²⁴ *The Queen’s Speech 2012*: “Legislation will be introduced to protect freedom of speech and reform the law of defamation”.

²⁵ *New Defamation Bill ‘to protect freedom of speech’*, BBC News, May 9, 2012: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-18005317>.

between Eurozone countries²⁶. The other bill concerning EU policies that was announced in the Queen's Speech was of even more technical character and is to complete the ratification of the Croatia's accession treaty, although the bill also provides for new measures enabling tighter control of the immigration to the UK from EU's new Member States. However, observing activities of the backbench MPs from both the Tory and the Labour parties, it might be expected that the debates concerning UK's continued membership in the EU and its conditions will become very much heated²⁷.

The announced priorities concerning Britain's international position may be judged as continuing already well established trends, with special emphasis on building of the strategic partnerships with the emerging powers.

As long as successes of the Lib Dems are concerned, we may point at two issues. First, there is a government pledge that the level of the foreign development aid will be set in actual spending at 0.7% GNI²⁸, which was originally the Lib Dems' manifesto pledge and which became now part of Government's agenda. Importantly, however, this

²⁶ *The Queen's Speech 2012*: "My Government will seek the approval of Parliament relating to the agreed financial stability mechanism within the euro area."

²⁷ See: *European Communities Act 1972 (Repeal) Bill* [Conservative]; *European Union Act 2011 (Amendment) Bill* [Conservative]; *Human Rights Act 1998 (Repeal and Substitution) Bill* [Conservative]; *Referendum (European Union) Bill* [House of Lords - Labour], available at: *Bills before Parliament 2012-13*, <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/>.

²⁸ *The Queen's Speech 2012*: "My Government has set out firm plans to spend nought point seven per cent of gross national income as official development assistance from 2013. This will be the first time the United Kingdom has met this agreed international commitment". *Liberal Democrat Manifesto 2010: Change that Works for You. Building a Fairer Britain*, London 2010 (http://network.libdems.org.uk/manifesto2010/libdem_manifesto_2010.pdf): "We will meet the UK's obligations to the developing world by committing to spending 0.7 per cent of GNI on aid." (p. 57).

pledge came short of being set in law, which was Lib Dems' intention²⁹. Secondly, there is a pledge to create a Green Investment Bank³⁰, which, on one hand, is to promote protection of the environment and investment into technologies aimed at gaining this objective, and, on the other hand, however, it is also intended to promote development of new, more efficient technologies, and through this means the general economic growth and competitiveness of Britain. What was expected to be on Government's agenda, and what was missing in the last Queen's Speech, is the issue of gay marriages, which was quite important for the Lib Dems, but which was clearly opposed with success by the Conservatives.

Interestingly in light of the Scottish independence referendum, there was also a pledge of close cooperation of HM Government with the devolved administrations³¹. This was intended as a counterbalance to the SNP's tactics of turning the referendum into a plebiscite on the current UK Government, and on the Conservative agenda, which remain highly unpopular in Scotland, with the Conservatives holding after the 2010 General Election just a single seat out of Scotland's 59 ones³². There is, therefore, a general feeling that if the Conservative-led UK Government interfered more actively with the

²⁹ C. Mason, *Queen's Speech: What It Means - and What's Been Left Out*, BBC News, May 9, 2012: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-18002992>.

³⁰ *The Queen's Speech 2012*: "My Government will introduce legislation to establish a Green Investment Bank". *Liberal Democrat Manifesto 2010: Change that Works for You. Building a Fairer Britain* (London 2010), Priority No. 2 (p. 7); "To help the transition to a green economy over the longer-term, we will set up a United Kingdom Infrastructure Bank (UKIB) to attract private finance – essential to delivering the much-needed expansion of Britain's transport and energy infrastructure when public finances are tight." (p. 24).

³¹ *The Queen's Speech 2012*: "My Government will continue to work constructively and cooperatively with the devolved institutions".

³² See: *Election 2010*, BBC News: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/election2010/results/region/7.stm>.

referendum, this would actually play into the hands of the SNP and bring the anti-unionist cause more and more popular support.

In the conclusion of his speech Dr Biskup stated that the last Queen's Speech seems conservative, not by its party affiliation, however, but rather due to the self-limitation of the Government. It still focuses on the economy, which was confirmed on many occasions by the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and a number of Cabinet Ministers, who made absolutely clear that it is still the balancing of the budget deficit, reducing the public debt, and making the economy grow again which is absolutely the UK's principal problem and the Government's top priority. Second of all, there were very few things on this agenda that would be openly divisive for the Conservative Party, or for the governing coalition. Even such potentially divisive issues as the House of Lords reform proved to be presented in the form that has been acceptable to the Tory backwoodsmen. This leads to a conclusion that the continuance of the coalition is still of considerable value to both of the Tory party and to the Lib Dems, despite all the differences between their programmes and agendas. As the last Local Elections have demonstrated, both parties are held responsible by the electors for the austerity programme, and they are bound together for next three years in hope that their economic programme will finally bring the Britons steady growth before the next General Election of 2015.

The third presentation during the second part of the panel was presented by Dr Małgorzata Kaczorowska, who analysed the balance of the two years of the Coalition Government in the light of the Local Elections 2012.

At the beginning of her presentation, Dr Kaczorowska said that she would not analyse all aspects of the Local Elections which were held this year and that she would rather focus on their impact on the balance of two years of the Coalition Government. Since the election took place

two years after the start of the coalition, it was the so-called *mid-term election*.

According to Dr Kaczorowska, after the Local Elections 2012 we can see that there is a little rise in support for the Labour Party (around 1 point) in comparison to the previous election of 2011. In fact, the Labour Party became the winner of the elections, thanks to obtaining more seats in the councils and winning majority in two of them. They have got 39 per cent of votes cast, while the Conservative Party have got 31 per cent of the votes, and Liberal Democrats got about 16 per cent. Dr Kaczorowska stated that when we compare the results of Local Elections 2012 in greater detail, they become even more interesting. For example, in London the Liberal Democrats took the fourth place after the Green Party. She recalled also the contribution of Professor Bale who was talking about the Green Party which appeared after last general elections in the House of Commons.

Dr Kaczorowska's opinion, Local Elections are like a barometer which helps to check a level of popularity of political parties and level of support for the politics in general. Of course, it is different when we look at a local aspect and we should remember about a few things when we want to talk about assessment of the Coalition Government in the United Kingdom. Local Elections are a kind of political event which is very important for researchers, which allows them to assess last two years but, in her opinion, it is not a perfect tool to predict the composition of the next Parliament after the General Election of 2015.

Dr Kaczorowska said that it was clear from the very moment of the Coalition Government's formation that there would be a big question concerning its efficiency and stability. Many people in Britain expected that government will stay in the office maybe for a year, maybe for a shorter time, and that the General Election will follow soon. There was also a big question what will be the future of such a structure. When we try to compare the two government parties and we look at them after two years of their cooperation, we still see many differences. Naturally, both parties share also some characteristics, e.g., the leaders of the same age.

Dr Kaczorowska pointed also out that from the very beginning of the Coalition Government we could see some key problems endangering the Coalition Government's survival. One of the biggest original differences between the Tories and the Lib Dems has been their approach to the European Union and the role of Britain in this organisation. Dr Kaczorowska expressed her belief that this problem was a real obstacle during the coalition negotiations. Then, there were the issues of the economic crisis and the budget proposed just after the General Election 2010. The budget contained major restrictions concerning the public spending and it was very difficult for everyone in the United Kingdom to accept the proposed cuts. There was also the issue of the electoral reform based on introduction of the Alternative Voting System.

According to Dr Kaczorowska, the referendum on the AV voting system demonstrated how to play the partner in the coalition. Despite the fact that the concept of the referendum was the Lib Dems' brain child, it was on the initiative of the Conservatives that the actual vote took place in just one-year's time after the General Election 2010, without time left for a thorough political campaign. The referendum demonstrated also the Liberal Democrats' weakness deriving from this party's short "institutional memory" of government. The Liberal Democrats, who did not held power in the UK since the beginnings of the 20th century, seemed to forget how it is to be in government.

Dr Kaczorowska said that when she was in London the day after vote, she noted very important and very interesting reaction of the media. Experts and journalists discussed whether it was possible that results of Local Elections 2012 could cause the end of the coalition. Then, at the same time, on the front pages of newspapers there was information about the consensus within the coalition upon the reform of the National Health Service.

In the conclusion of her presentation, Dr Kaczorowska commented upon the popularity of the Conservatives and eventual chances of Mr. Cameron to win the second term in 2015. She said that the Conservative Party has had about 10-point advantage over the Labour Party. According to her, this advantage is not significant and it will change.

When one wants to assess the past two years, one should remember that many reforms undertaken by the Coalition Government are still under realisation. When we talk about Tony Blair's government, we remember him as a reformer of the Constitution. Many specialists say that this coalition attempts to do much more because it has a stronger mandate and is forced by very tough economic situation. Dr Kaczorowska expressed her partial agreement with these assessments, but she also said the one still must remember about the difference between the Blair-Brown and the Cameron-Clegg governments, especially about economic situation and the fact that the present British government is a coalition government.

The fourth contribution in the panel's second part was presented by Dr Krzysztof Winkler of the Research Group *BRITANNIA* and treated on Queen's Diamond Jubilee as a Commonwealth event.

In 2012 the United Kingdom had only the second opportunity in its history to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of its monarch. Queen Elizabeth II has reigned for sixty years and during this time she has been a symbol of changes taking place in Britain and in the world. When the Queen took the throne in 1952, Britain still had a great empire and was one of the leading global powers. Now, the United Kingdom remains an important part of the European Union, but it has lost most of its prominence in the world. After the Second World War the UK had to acknowledge the role of the United States as the global leader. Nowadays, there are new challenges to be faced by the UK, like the growing role of China and India. The Jubilee takes place when Britain has to fight against another wave of economic crisis and when the Coalition Government is trying to impose austerity measures to fix British economy.

Dr Winkler stated that events planned for Jubilee could be seen as a way to give some kind of entertainment for the British

people in the time of austerity. This is also an occasion for the Royal Family to gain more popularity after years of failures and problems. These events are taking place one year after the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge. That event was very successful for the Royal Family and has shown its new face, proving that the British monarchy is prepared for the challenges of the 21st century. As in case of the wedding, the Diamond Jubilee events were covered not only by the British media but by foreign too, including the leading Polish ones. The members of the Royal Family have good press in the world media in the recent time and it is their merit that the Royal Family and the Jubilee have such a good appeal among the people. In Dr Winkler's opinion, a significant part of interest in the Jubilee and the Royal Family is being driven by tabloids and women's magazines, and is connected not only with Her Majesty, but also with the Duchess of Cambridge. Nonetheless some articles covering the Jubilee appeared also in the newspapers. That shows that in Europe the Jubilee is the event too. We, who live on the Continent, know that something unique is happening across the English Channel.

According to Dr Winkler, from the very beginning of 2012, members of the Royal Family have been travelling around the world and they have visited most of the countries belonging to the Commonwealth. On their path there have been such countries as: India, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, New Guinea, Singapore, Malaysia, South Africa, the Falklands Islands and, in Europe, Malta and Gibraltar. The Royal Couple have been travelling only around Britain, while other members of the Royal Family have travelled across the Commonwealth. In Britain, the events participated by the Queen, have been also attended by representatives from many parts of the world, including Asia, Africa and America. Dr Winkler stated that this is a visible sign that the Queen is still present in many countries as the Head of the Commonwealth or head of state (e.g., Canada, Australia).

The Commonwealth of Nations is an interesting institution which was born from the colonial rule but which still exists on changed rules nowadays. It was established in 1926-1931 upon the

Statutes of Westminster. It was an answer to raising position of the Dominions within the Empire. In the aftermath of the Second World War and decolonization it became an international organisation in which most of the former British colonies are associated. Designed as an embodiment of Britishness, it is now one of the most multinational organisations of the world, second only to the UN. The British heritage still plays an important role in cementing the organisation, together with the English language, because contacts between politicians are much easier when they share the same language, and the Queen.

Her Majesty is the Head of the Commonwealth. The London Declaration of 1949 stated that the British monarch is the symbol of a free association of independent countries. The Queen is the head of state in 16 out of 54 countries belonging to the Commonwealth. If the Queen dies or abdicates, her heir will not automatically become the new head of the Commonwealth however. It will be up to the Commonwealth heads of government to decide what to do about this symbolic role³³. The Queen's role now includes, owing to the developing tradition, a number of symbolic functions which enhance the sense of the family ties within the Commonwealth. She holds discussions with the Commonwealth leaders in their national capitals, in London and during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGM). She visits the host country during each CHOGM summit, meets the leaders at individual audiences and at larger formal receptions. The Queen plays a very important role in preserving the unity of the Commonwealth. The Queen is one of few official institutions existing in this organization, even as the symbolic Head of the Commonwealth. Because the Commonwealth does not have a strict formula, it is possible that republics, which are its members, accept the Queen in her capacity of the Head of the Commonwealth.

³³

Head of Commonwealth:

http://www.thecommonwealth.org/Internal/191086/150757/head_of_the_commonwealth/.

From the very beginning of her reign, the Queen has known much about Commonwealth activity. She also acknowledged the changes which happened in this organisation. Until 1955, in every speech delivered by the Queen on the Commonwealth appeared the words: "Empire" and "Commonwealth". After this date, the word "Empire" has never been used. The Queen has her own view on how this organisation should work. Her speeches are not written with advice of any head of the Commonwealth or the United Kingdom Prime Minister. This part of the prerogative is one of the most freely exercised by the Queen. The speeches are, however, customarily sent to the UK Prime Minister.

Dr Winkler pointed out that the Queen has made almost 300 journeys abroad, most of them to the Commonwealth states (above 200 visits). As a consequence she has visited all member countries of the Commonwealth apart from Cameroon and Mozambique. She is trying to participate in every important event taking place in the Commonwealth countries. She also opens the Commonwealth Games. During her Silver Jubilee in 1977 she made the trip around the world and took part in the celebrations which remarked this events. In the same year there was the CHOGM summit held in London. Now, unlike in 1977, she cannot go herself to all Commonwealth states. Therefore, as it was mentioned above, she is represented by other members of the Royal Family

Since the post of the Secretary General of the Commonwealth Secretariat was established the Queen has been receiving reports from his activities. When the additional information is required, the royal staff is sending questions concerning detailed issues. In many documents preserved in the archives of Commonwealth institutions there are signs of Queen's vital interest in their activities. Many politicians who took positions in the Commonwealth Secretariat emphasise value of the monarch in continuing intergovernmental cooperation and keeping the Commonwealth together. Likewise many authors indicate that Queen have played an important role in decolonisation process, not least because of her position as a symbolic Head of the Commonwealth.

Besides these symbolic roles, the Queen may use three mechanisms by which she can influence the situation in the Commonwealth. These are: (1) direct consultation between the Queen and the key politicians (this kind of meeting usually takes place during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting); (2) official Queen's speeches (she may indicate the directions in which this organisation should direct its efforts); (3) decisions and communicates (the best-known case was the announcement that Queen would take part in the CHOGM meeting in 1979 in Lusaca, which forced Prime Minister Thatcher to take part in this meeting too).

The Queen is also the head of the Anglican Church, both in the Isles and globally, as the Church of England remains the Mother Church of the Anglican Communion. According to the latest research made by BBC, most of the British citizens support this position. The hierarchy of the Anglican Church strongly supports her due to the deep crisis in the Church in recent years. The main issue is the clash between "conservative" and "liberal" wings. Many members of the Anglican Church are converting to Roman Catholicism because of changes made in recent time in the Church of England. The number of worshippers in the UK is declining, so the role of the monarch has become more important as a symbol of faith. Royal commitment to the Church of England can be an important example for the rest of believers to stay in the Church and to rejuvenate it.

The Queen plays also an important role in the domestic politics. Dr Winkler made a remark that she is the symbol of British unity. Even Mr. Salmond took part in the Jubilee celebrations. According to Dr Winkler, it is a truism that in Britain monarch reigns but not rules, but as the Queen has such a long experience, she could deliver a valuable advice for the government.

The peak of the Jubilee celebrations in Britain took place on June 3-5, 2012. There was the pageant of many vessels sailing down the Thames, parading before the purpose-designed Royal Barge. There were also street parties, military parades and music concerts. On the

final day there was also a special service in St. Paul's cathedral. They were all a vigorous demonstration that the British monarchy is still alive.

The last presentation in the second part of the panel was made by Dr Tomasz Czapiewski who provided an analysis on the Scottish National Party and the Scottish Executive leadership of Alex Salmond. Dr Czapiewski started from making remark that we know little about Alex Salmond's private life although he is of a celebrity. According to Dr Czapiewski, Salmond is often accused of being a spinning machine. One of the Scottish journalists, J. Sillars wrote: "He was only a spin machine, spinning in a policy vacuum". One side of his celebrity image is his friendship with Sean Connery, who promotes the idea of Scotland's independence. Connery was also a financial supporter of the SNP. Then, Salmond, is ironically called by some people "*el presidente Salmondo*", in comparison to dictators in South America. Dr Czapiewski recalled also the statements of Salmond who said that he had been the first one who had started the process of depriving Margaret Thatcher of power. According to Dr Czapiewski, the Lockerby Affair was one of the key moments in the relationship between Blair and Salmond. Salmond did not call him after winning the election. However, Salmond and Cameron called each other.

Dr Czapiewski raised also the issue of conflict over the Scottish independence referendum. He said that question for referendum proposed by the SNP was: "Do you think Scotland should be an independent country?". In his opinion, the Tories and the UK government will not agree for such question because it promotes "yes" answer. According to Dr Czapiewski, without Alex Salmond in the UK politics, the fate of the UK would be very different. Dr Czapiewski does not see an alternative leader in the SNP who could take Salmond's place successfully. Without Alex Salmond, Scottish independence would be much further away.

Dr Czapiewski said that Alex Salmond presents himself as a business-friendly politician. As he pointed out, Salmond maintains that he wants to bring new jobs to Scotland. He presented himself as a friend of Robert Murdoch and Donald Trump because the latter one wants to create a big leisure and golf centre in Scotland. The friendship with Trump has come to an end in last few months because of the decision to build windmills in Scotland which will destroy these hopes of Trump to build the leisure centre. On the other hand, in the last few years Mr. Murdoch has become a controversial person in the UK due to the “News of the World” phone hacking scandal. In Scotland Mr. Salmond was seriously accused of lobbying in favour of Mr. Murdoch.

Dr Czapiewski also pointed out that Salmond likes to describe himself as the “Celtic Lion”. Dr Czapiewski recalled that the worse moment of Salmond’s career was in 1982, when he was banned from the SNP for 6 months because of left-wing sectarianism. Lost elections in 1999 and 2000 were another tough moments for Salmond. Dr Czapiewski mentioned also Salmond’s critic of intervention in Kosovo and campaign of “Penny for Scotland” which turned out to be a total failure. After that Salmond decided to resign from the leadership of the SNP for four years. Fortunately for him, the SNP decreased in popularity and election votes in that time, which cleared his return path to power.

In the conclusion of his presentation, Dr Czapiewski said that Alex Salmond sees independence not as a revolution and one moment in time but rather as a journey, or a process, because in the 21st century notion of independence is not so clear as it was, e.g. 100 years ago.

The second part of the panel was concluded by a lively discussion open to members of the public.

The panel was concluded by a short address by Professor Franciszek Gołembski, who thanked all the speakers and other

participants for their contributions, for the questions and the following discussion.

* * *

In the course of the panel there were presented the findings and the data collected within the framework of the research projects sponsored by the National Science Centre: *Influence of Devolution on the United Kingdom's European Policy: From Imperial to Post-Imperial Solutions* (research grant No. N N116 712540, project leader: Professor Franciszek Gołemski) and *Influence of British Political Identity on the United Kingdom's Participation in European Integration Projects* (research grant No. N N116 434237, project leader: Dr Przemysław Biskup).

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THE ORGANISING COMMITTEE

Chairperson of the Organising Committee: Dr Przemysław Biskup (Chair of European Studies).

Committee Coordinator: Dr Wojciech Lewandowski (Chair of European Studies).

Committee Members: Dr Małgorzata Kaczorowska (Institute of Political Science), Dr Krzysztof Winkler (Research Group *BRITANNIA*), Mrs. Anna Krawczyk M.A. (Faculty of Journalism and Political Science), Mr. Jarosław Szczepański M.A. (Faculty of Journalism and Political Science).

Supporting Members: Mr. Rafał Kamiński M.A. (Research Group *BRITANNIA*), Mr. Grzegorz Gogowski M.A. (Research Group *BRITANNIA*).