

Figuring Out Europe: EU Metaphors in the Minds of Czech Civil Servants

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Abstract: This article presents the results of a metaphor-oriented research programme studying civil servants' conceptions of the European Union (EU). It reveals the metaphoricality of apparently neutral terms used when describing Europe and shows how the metaphors we use influence our understanding and expectations. Three conceptual metaphors – container, equilibrium and motion – are defined as modes of thinking about the EU's institutional governance. Czech civil servants from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Government Office seem to understand the EU as either a series of intergovernmental bargains (i.e. an equilibrium) or as continuously transforming (i.e. a motion). The preferences of officials for one metaphor over another depends on their agendas: Czech Foreign Ministry officials involved with Community and intergovernmental issues tend to use the motion metaphor, while Government officials responsible for intergovernmental issues prefer the equilibrium metaphor. Yet there is a general tendency for all civil servants to portray the EU as a rule-based integration project.

Key words: Czech civil service, Europeanisation, institutional governance, intergovernmental integration, metaphors, supranational model

INTRODUCTION

The nexus between the European Union (EU) and the national civil service has been a fruitful area of research in recent years. The study of the civil servants' conceptions¹ of European integration is of particular interest in this respect (Egeberg 1996, 1998, 1999, 2005; Egeberg, Saetren 1999; Egeberg, Schaefer, Trondal 2003; Trondal 1999, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c; Lippert, Umbach, Wessels 2001; Peters, Pierre 2001; Drulák, Česal, Hampel 2003, Featherstone, Radaelli 2003; Lippert, Umbach 2005; Beyers 2005; Flockhart 2005). Providing insights into their inter-subjective worlds, these studies point to ideational frameworks within which national civil servants' daily practices are embedded. Moreover, they also show how these practices may impact their conceptions of Europe.

There are various ways of conceptualising the civil servants' images of Europe. These mostly rely on the well-established dichotomy between supranational and intergovernmental Europe², outlining two possible conceptions of European institutional governance. However, to do justice to the specific complexities of European integration, some studies attempt to transcend this dichotomy by introducing a third conception of Europe – neither supranational nor intergovernmental.³ This article draws on the latter

approach by using the three concepts of Europe and examining their respective influence in two key institutions of the Czech government.

In contrast to the usual conceptions of Europe, we define three models of European institutional governance metaphorically using these conceptual metaphors: CONTAINER, EQUILIBRIUM and MOTION.⁴ While the analyses of metaphors in the discourse on European integration have gained some attention in European studies (Drulák 2004, 2006; Musolff 2001; Hülse 2003; Luoma-aho 2004), research on the EU metaphors used by civil servants could be rewarding and has yet to be undertaken.

Metaphor-oriented research can be rewarding in several respects. To start with, it reveals the metaphoricity of apparently neutral terms that are used when describing Europe, and it shows how these metaphors influence thinking about Europe. Moreover, metaphors provide useful connections between very different discourses that rely on similar conceptual metaphors. Not only can they link separate areas of research, such as EU institutional reform and the Europeanisation of national administrations, but they can also connect scholarly discussions and political or popular discourse. Furthermore, metaphorical analyses can help identify new conceptions of Europe which have not been assumed by analysts but are relevant for actors. Finally, since it is difficult to lie about metaphors (Hülse 2003), since they reflect our internalised beliefs. If people are asked to use metaphors rather than standard terminology when assessing the EU, they are likely to reveal what they really think.

Our argument starts with a theoretical backdrop to clarify the concept of metaphor, to explain the choice of the three metaphors used and to contextualise these concepts within the literature on Europeanisation. Following this introduction, the research design is sketched out to develop the three issues the paper raises: the significance of pre-established metaphors, the weight of administrative experience and the presence of new metaphors. The analysis of each of these brings about new empirical insights.

To start with, Czech civil servants live in a conceptual world within which the EU is pictured mainly in terms of EQUILIBRIUM and also, to a significant extent, in terms of MOTION. However, the significance of each of these two metaphors depends on the administrative experience of their users. While officials from the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs tend to use MOTION, Government Office officials clearly prefer EQUILIBRIUM. Moreover, where civil servants have more frequent contacts with the EU, the difference between the two institutions is sharper. Finally, we find that apart from MOTION, EQUILIBRIUM and CONTAINER, the civil servants' metaphorical preference also hints at another conceptual metaphor: the EU as a RULE (Sylvan, Voss 1998).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Our concepts rely on three bodies of literature: the wide literature on applied metaphor research (Ortony 1993; Cameron, Low 1999; Gentner, Wolff 2000; Lakoff, Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1993), the literature on metaphors in politics (Beer, de Landtsheer 2004; Chilton 1996a; Chilton 1996b;

Chilton, Ilyin 1993; Chilton, Lakoff 1995; Milliken 1996; Schäffner 1995), especially in European politics (Drulák 2004, 2006; Musolff 2001; Hülse 2003; Luoma-aho 2004), and research on the Europeanisation of civil servants (Egeberg 1996, 1998, 1999, 2005; Egeberg, Saetren 1999; Egeberg, Schaefer, Trondal 2003; Trondal 1999, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c; Lippert, Umbach, Wessels 2001; Peters, Pierre 2001; Drulák, Česal, Hampl 2003; Featherstone, Radaelli 2003; Lippert, Umbach 2005; Beyers 2005, Lewis 2005).

Our conceptualisation of metaphors draws on Lakoff and Johnson (1980), who argue that metaphors are not a dispensable ornament of language, but that they are at the very heart of our thinking and speaking. In general, metaphors help us see something in terms of something else, which is indispensable for the organisation of our experience. In this respect, it is important to distinguish *conceptual metaphors* from *metaphorical expressions*.

A *conceptual metaphor*, for example STATES ARE PERSONS, is an abstract rule or mapping that connects two distinct “conceptual domains” (Lakoff 1993: 208): the source domain, such as PERSONS, and the target domain, in this case STATES. Thus the conceptual metaphor applies what we know about one area of experience (the source) to another (the target). It is independent of any specific statement found in language. As Lakoff (*ibid.*) observes, the conceptual metaphor is a matter of “thought and reason”, while “the language is secondary.”

On the other hand, a *metaphorical expression* is a specific statement that draws upon a general conceptual metaphor (Lakoff 1993: 209). While conceptual metaphors connect conceptual areas, metaphorical expressions provide the bridges between the sources and targets of these conceptual areas. For example, the statements “France decided to go to war” and “Germany is our ally” are two different metaphorical expressions, but both draw upon the same conceptual metaphor: STATES ARE PERSONS.

While conceptual metaphors draw upon an organising principle of experience, which informs our understanding of the world, metaphorical expressions, which rely on a particular conceptual metaphor, are found in discourse. This distinction makes it possible to analyse and connect the two levels: that of abstract models and that of particular statements. On the basis of these statements we can identify conceptual models whose analysis reveals the speaker’s conception of the given topic.

When examining a topic, several conceptual metaphors can usually be found connecting the topic’s target domain with several possible source domains. However, each source domain reveals some features of the target domain while hiding others, thus making some comprehensible and others confusing. For example, Gentner and Wolff (2000: 318–319) notice two conceptual metaphors of electricity: ELECTRICITY IS A WATER FLOW, and ELECTRICITY IS A MOVING CROWD. Each relies on several metaphorical expressions connecting one of the two source domains with the target domain of electricity. Hence, if electricity is water, then “wires are pipes, batteries are reservoirs, current is flowing water, voltage is pressure, and resistors are narrow constrictions in pipes.” Similarly, if electricity is a

moving crowd, then “wires are paths, current is a number of entities that pass a point per unit time, voltage is how forcefully they push each other along, and resistors are narrow gates.” (ibid)

As expected, some electrical phenomena are easier to grasp by using the water metaphor while others are better explained by the crowd metaphor. For example, batteries are easy to comprehend in terms of water reservoirs but are not as comprehensible when they are connected with the crowd metaphor. In contrast, the water metaphor is poor at comprehending resistance, which is nicely captured by gates through which a crowd moves. These differences have been confirmed experimentally when people were asked to solve electric circuit problems. A Subject using the water metaphor “performed better on battery problems than on resistor problems” (ibid. 319) while the opposite was true with subjects using the crowd metaphor. Interestingly, when researchers tried to enrich some subjects’ stock of metaphors, by introducing the water metaphor to those who used the crowd metaphor and vice versa, these subjects performed worse than those sticking to their original metaphors. This suggests that conceptual metaphors guarantee consistency and that changes in the metaphorical stock, enriching though they may be, can bring about short-term costs by destabilising a consistent framework of understanding.

While electricity metaphors highlight some features and darken others, metaphors of Europe do the same with respect to European integration (Drulák 2004; Musolff 2001; Hulsse 2003; Luoma-aho 2004). Drawing on a previous study (Drulák 2004), we argue that three conceptual metaphors of the EU have turned out to be especially powerful: THE EU IS A CONTAINER, THE EU IS EQUILIBRIUM and THE EU IS MOTION. These three conceptual metaphors account for most of the metaphorical expressions used in the theoretical discourse about the EU as well as most of those used in the debate on the EU’s basic set-up. Therefore, even though alternative sets of conceptual metaphors for the EU are possible (Musolff 2001), these three conceptual metaphors are general enough to cover most of these alternatives, and their previous operationalisation and methodological development (Drulák 2006) fit into our current research concerns.

These metaphors embed three radically different discourses and visions of European integration. To start with, the CONTAINER metaphor implies a state-like entity clearly differentiated from the outside world, within which it can be a strong actor promoting its own interests. In contrast, the EQUILIBRIUM metaphor sees the EU as consisting of several containers (its members), which try to accommodate their conflicting interests in mutual trade-offs. The EU’s own interests are therefore rather vague, reflecting the lowest common denominator, and the internal accommodation of particular interests is the most important game in town. Finally, the MOTION metaphor captures the unceasing transformation of European integration while countering attempts at its delineation by traditional categories such as borders or the division of competencies. The dynamics

between these concepts are frequently expressed by an oxymoron: the EU is a federation of sovereign states.

So what is revealed and what is hidden by these metaphors? The CONTAINER metaphor serves well when dealing with the EU's external actions or with deeply integrated policy areas like monetary policy. The EQUILIBRIUM metaphor is useful for understanding intergovernmental conferences and weakly integrated areas, and the MOTION metaphor helps us address the fluidity of the EU's borders, the lack of clarity as to its ultimate form and the quasi-permanent institutional change.

We claim that civil servants embracing a certain metaphor are better prepared to understand and practice policies consistent with that metaphor and are likely to perceive other policies as less natural or less logical. We draw upon the basic insights of Europeanisation literature and contend that the study of the intersubjective world of national civil servants (based on interviews with them) matters if we want to understand how the Europeanisation of national administrations actually works (Egeberg 1996, 1998, 1999, 2005; Egeberg, Saetren 1999; Egeberg, Schaefer, Trondal 2003; Trondal 1999, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c; Peters, Pierre 2001; Drulák, Česal, Hampl 2003; Featherstone, Radaelli 2003; Lippert, Umbach 2005). Moreover, as the conceptions of Europe held by civil servants develop with respect to their institutional affiliation, experience and contacts with the EU (Egeberg 1999, 2005; Featherstone, Radaelli 2003; Drulák, Česal, Hampl 2003; Hooghe 2001), we look at the connection between civil servants' administrative experience and their usage of metaphors about Europe.

Our distinction between the three metaphors for the EU held by civil servants is somewhat similar to the distinction between their national, supranational and functional identities (Egeberg 1999: 457–458). National identities make people identify themselves as representatives of nation states, which is consistent with the EQUILIBRIUM metaphor. Supranational identities make them feel that they belong to a single European whole, which is consistent with the CONTAINER metaphor. Functional identities, however, are those of neutral experts beyond the dichotomy of national and supranational. While functional identities that define the main fault-lines irrespective of national boundaries can be consistent with the CONTAINER metaphor, they may also agree with the MOTION metaphor. Indeed, the MOTION metaphor reflects the functionalist view of integration as an open-ended process that also provides the conceptual background to the idea of functional identities (Egeberg 1999: 471). In this respect, the MOTION metaphor transcends the dichotomy between Europe as a CONTAINER and Europe as an EQUILIBRIUM of containers, similar to the way functional identities transcend the dichotomy of supranational and national identities.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Interviews with Czech civil servants help us to provide partial answers to the following questions: What is the relative significance of the MOTION, CONTAINER and EQUILIBRIUM metaphors for Czech civil servants? And

how does their administrative experience impact upon that significance? Finally, what other metaphors for the EU do Czech civil servants use?

To start with, we assume that the significance of a metaphor in the discourse can be measured by its frequency (Cortazzi, Jin 1999). The more frequently civil servants use a conceptual metaphor, the more significant it is for their understanding and practice. To estimate the frequency, conceptual metaphors must first be associated with metaphorical expressions. It is on the basis of these metaphorical expressions that the significance of the given conceptual metaphors is assessed.

Thus, each of the three conceptual metaphors is operationalised in a series of metaphorical expressions related to sports, the arts and nature to bring about a detachment from the usual EU terminology, although a caveat is needed here since civil servants might automatically and/or thoughtlessly emulate the discourse of their peers and use EU clichés rather than constructions that express their deeply-ingrained beliefs. In the domain of sports, civil servants were offered the following metaphorical expressions: *biker* (MOTION), *team captain* (CONTAINER) and *referee* (EQUILIBRIUM). *Biker* is a common metaphor of motion associated with the EU (either it moves or it falls), the metaphor of *team captain* implies that the EU is a single team with a clear hierarchy and the metaphor of *referee* depicts the EU as divided among several players who compete against one another. The realm of nature provided us with the following metaphorical expressions: *stream* and *river* (MOTION), *pressure* and *pond* (CONTAINER), and *vibration* and *system of lakes* (EQUILIBRIUM). Streams and rivers evoke movement and are widely used as metaphors for the phenomena of change; a pond differs from a river by its clear borders and its tranquillity, and pressure comes into being only in closed containers. Objects vibrate around an equilibrium state, and equilibrium is also needed in a system of interconnected lakes. The world of arts inspired us to create the following metaphors: *movie* (MOTION), *statue* (CONTAINER) and *collection of pictures* (EQUILIBRIUM). Movies are cultural artefacts associated with movement; a statute implies a single, delimited entity, and a collection of pictures steers one's attention to the diversity of its parts.

Interviewees were then asked to choose one metaphorical expression out of the set of three (each standing for a different conceptual metaphor), which they believed would best capture the essence of the EU. We prepared six sets of metaphorical expressions like those above to guarantee robust results. Moreover, the list of questions also included three multiple-choice questions, which elaborated the possible implications of the conceptual metaphor.⁵ In total, each civil servant made nine choices, each revealing her metaphorical preferences between MOTION, EQUILIBRIUM and CONTAINER.

The frequency of the metaphors is calculated in the answers to these questions. Depending on the unit of analysis, this frequency can be counted in two different ways depending on the unit of analysis: either the metaphorical expression or the interviewee. The metaphorical expression coincides with an option in each multiple-choice question. In this respect, nine choices yield nine units of analysis that may be summarised across all

of the interviews. However, the nine choices of each interviewee can be aggregated and treated as an autonomous unit of analysis as well. At the level of the interviewee, each conceptual metaphor is characterised by the frequency with which it is used by the interviewee, as either *dominant* (more than half), *important* (less than half but more than a third) or *used* (less than a third but more than a tenth) or *absent* (less than a tenth). On this basis, the number of interviewees using the given conceptual metaphors as a dominant (or important) metaphor is a key variable in capturing the significance of the metaphor.

The unit of metaphorical expression offers a valuable insight into the frequency distribution of the conceptual metaphors, and thus into their respective significance. However, on the level of the interviewee, on which our investigation focuses, it provides a more refined perspective. Not only does it tell us how significant each conceptual metaphor is, with respect to the given individual, but it also reveals how consistent the individual is with respect to the given conceptual metaphor, as it implies that the interviewee uses two or more metaphors with comparable frequency. In this respect, the absence of a dominant metaphor signals a lack of consistency. Moreover, at the individual level the contextual differences in which the metaphorical expressions are found (open questions, multiple-choice questions, speech, article, etc.) are accounted for. Although this is not very important for this study, which deals with metaphorical expressions identified in the same context (the multiple-choice questions posed to representatives of the same institution within one month), it is relevant when comparing the output of this research to other studies.

Having established the relative significance of conceptual metaphors with regard to civil servants as a whole, we can see if their administrative experience affects their use of metaphors. In this respect, the set of investigated civil servants can be divided into several sub-sets, each representing a different administrative experience. If the same conceptual metaphors have widely different significances for the different sub-sets, then we argue that there is a link between administrative experience and the perception of the world as conceptualised by metaphors.

Three proxies for administrative experience are used: the length of the individual's civil service, the frequency of contact with the EU and the quality of those contacts. While the former two criteria are easy to operationalise⁶ and have proven to be important in the Czech civil service by a previous study (Drulák, Česal, Hampl 2003), the last criterion was less clear. We assessed the quality of contacts by examining civil servants from two different institutions: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Government Office (GO). Putting aside the differences of their internal workings and their relative positions in the Czech administration, each institution also reflects a different part of the EU's agenda. While the MFA deals with a broad range of issues, the investigated branch of the GO, headed by the Deputy Prime Minister for Economy, focuses on the Lisbon agenda and other intergovernmental initiatives.

Finally, in addition to assessing the significance of pre-established metaphors, our method identifies new metaphors, which may be important

from the actor's perspective. Civil servants are asked to suggest metaphors that they personally see as relevant. However, to ensure that they actually use metaphors, rather than abstract arguments or Euro-speak, they are asked to explain the EU to a ten-year old child. In the second step, civil servants are asked to summarise the EU in a word or phrase that a ten-year old would understand. Thus, each interview yields one metaphorical expression referring to the source of the metaphor (the EU) as embraced by the interviewee. Our investigation focuses on the extent to which these metaphors relate to the three pre-established conceptual metaphors while looking for any new conceptual metaphors which would complement the original three.

What answers can we expect to the three questions raised here? Two groups of hypotheses can be raised on the basis of the previous research. First, the three conceptual metaphors are unlikely to be equally distributed throughout the discourse (Drulák 2004). European leaders who have participated in the debate about the future of Europe used the three metaphors in the following descending order of frequency: MOTION, CONTAINER and EQUILIBRIUM. However, when we focused only on the leaders of the new EU member states, the ranking changed: MOTION, EQUILIBRIUM and CONTAINER. Therefore, Czech civil servants are expected to use the MOTION metaphor the most and the CONTAINER metaphor the least.

Second, administrative experience is also likely to matter. A previous study of Czech civil servants suggests that civil servants dealing with the EU have better knowledge of the EU and are quite supportive of integration, albeit without being too enthusiastic about it (Drulák, Česal, Hampl 2003). On this basis, one can expect civil servants in contact with the EU to embrace the MOTION metaphor more frequently.

There are two reasons for this: first, MOTION is less obvious than CONTAINER or EQUILIBRIUM because it requires a deeper understanding of the EU and captures the transformative nature of European integration better; and second, MOTION can be seen as an alternative path between the eurosceptic (EQUILIBRIUM) and the euro-enthusiastic (CONTAINER) conceptual metaphors. However, this can differ according to institutional affiliation, as the GO officials primarily dealing with the intergovernmental agenda may prefer the EQUILIBRIUM metaphor. Therefore, one can also expect more experienced civil servants to use metaphors more consistently. Given that consistency can be measured by the presence of dominant metaphors, more experienced and knowledgeable interviewees should use more dominant metaphors.

Despite the potential of this approach to yield new insights, it has yet to be tested, and so several caveats are in order. First, there is no completely objective way of forming abstract conceptual metaphors into specific metaphorical expressions. To guarantee that the metaphorical expressions in the questionnaire are understood as intended, they were tested on a group of our students. Second, the sample of civil servants is quite small, and has been selected to represent the qualities important for our research. Hence, the use of inferential statistical methods is problematic, and the results rely

on descriptive statistics, undermining their value to make generalisations. In this respect, our research is situated in the grey area between quantitative and qualitative methodology.

Finally, even though our approach is synchronic, dynamics in the cognitive world of civil servants and causal relations are hypothesised and tested, such as the connection between civil servants' administrative experience and their use of metaphors. In this respect, we partly rely on the causal patterns recognized in Europeanisation literature and present our results as preliminary contributions to this literature. However, our approach is based on an ontological assumption that the metaphors, which are part of the cognitive world of civil servants, and their administrative practices are mutually constitutive.

DATA AND RESULTS

The results confirm our hypotheses, as described in the previous section, only to a limited extent. As expected, the CONTAINER metaphor is the least significant, but the EQUILIBRIUM metaphor, contrary to our expectations, is more significant than MOTION for Czech civil servants. When asked to identify metaphors of the EU themselves, the Czech civil servants chose metaphorical expressions referring to the normative features of the EU, which we summarised with a new conceptual metaphor: the EU as a RULE.

As expected, Czech civil servants differ in their perception of the EU according to the frequency of their contacts with the EU and their domestic institutional affiliation. EQUILIBRIUM is much more important than MOTION for Government Office staff, while both metaphors are equally significant for Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials. Also, as expected, civil servants in contact with the EU embrace the MOTION metaphor more frequently and use metaphors more consistently. Surprisingly, however, the same applies for the EQUILIBRIUM metaphor. Contrary to our expectations, the length of administrative experience played no significant role in dividing the civil servants according to the metaphors they used, nor did their positions within the institution reveal a relevant fault-line.

The data (Table 1) was collected during forty interviews with officials of the MFA and the GO (conducted in April and November 2005). We approached forty civil servants from different MFA and GO departments (twenty from each) with the intent to interview roughly equal numbers of senior officials and junior staff and equal numbers of civil servants who are frequently in touch with the EU and those who are not. The administrative background is reflected in the first two columns of the table. The third column contains the metaphors interviewees created themselves, answering an open question. It also includes our suggestions of the metaphors, out of the three conceptual ones, that seem the closest to their answers (the letters in the brackets). Columns four through twelve contain the metaphorical expressions officials used when answering the multiple-choice questions. Finally, the three last columns represent the interviewee units and show how frequently each metaphor is used with respect to the interviewee.

Table 1 – Summary of Findings

<i>Administrative Experience</i>		<i>Metaphorical Expression as a Unit</i>		<i>Interviewee as a Unit</i>		
<i>Institutional Affiliation</i>	<i>Contact</i>	<i>Metaphors of EU Given by Civil Servants</i>	<i>Answers to Multiple Choice Questions</i>	<i>Contai-ner</i>	<i>Equi-lib-rium</i>	<i>Motion</i>
MFA	0	playground (e)	e e e c m e m m c	u	i	i
MFA	0	future (m)	m m c m e m m e e	u	i	d
MFA	0	team (e)	e m c m m e m e m	u	i	d
MFA	1	peace (m)	m e m m m m e e m	a	i	d
MFA	0	class (e)	c c e c e e e c c	d	i	a
MFA	0	Kindergarten (e)	m c e c e e m e c	i	i	u
MFA	1	cooperation (m)	c m m m m e m e e	u	i	d
MFA	0	class (e)	m e e c m e m e c	u	i	i
MFA	0	family (e)	e e c c e e m c c	i	i	u
MFA	1	home (e)	c m c m m e m e e	u	i	i
MFA	0	football team (e)	m m e e e m m e c	u	i	i
MFA	1	house (c)	c c e m e e m e c	i	i	u
MFA	0	little shop (c)	c c e c c e m c c	d	u	u
MFA	0	Construction kit (m)	c c e m m e e e c	i	i	u
MFA	1	family (e)	e e e m e e e e c	u	d	u
MFA	1	group of school teachers (2 nd part is US) (e)	c m e m c m m e m	u	u	d
MFA	1	scout group (e)	e c c e m e m e c	i	i	u
MFA	1	children’s game (e)	m m e e e e m e c	u	d	i
MFA	0	playground without fences (e)	c c c c c m m e m	d	u	i
MFA	1	house under construction (m)	e m c m m m m e c	u	u	d
GO	1	football team (e)	e c e c e e e e m	u	d	d
GO	0	fair (e)	c m e m m c m e m	u	u	d
GO	1	zoo (e)	e c m m e m m m c	u	u	d
GO	0	board game (e)	c e e m e e e e c	u	d	u
GO	0	football team w/o captain (m)	m c e c e e m c c	i	i	u
GO	1	bunch of friends (e)	e c e c e e m e e	i	d	u
GO	0	anthill (e)	c c e e m e m e c	i	i	u
GO	0	diversity (e)	e c c e e c m c e	i	i	u
GO	1	group of friends (e)	m c e c m e m e m	u	i	i
GO	1	garden (c)	c e m m m m e m e	u	i	d
GO	0	house (c)	c c c m m m m e c	i	u	u
GO	0	coherence/cooperation (e)	c c c c e e e c e	d	i	a
GO	1	orchestra (e)	e c c e e e m e e	u	d	u
GO	1	trickle of water (m)	e c c m e e c e c	i	i	u
GO	1	block of flats (c)	c c c c m m m e e	i	u	i
GO	1	bread with butter (c)	c e m e e e m e c	u	d	u
GO	0	future/prosperity (m)	c m c m e e m e e	u	i	i
GO	0	ship with diverse crew (e)	m m c m m e c e e	u	i	i
GO	1	friendship and support (e)	c e e m e e e c m	u	d	u
GO	0	representatives of our interests (c)	c c c e e e m e c	i	i	u

Notes:

Affiliation: MFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs; GO – Government Office

Contact: 1 = Officials with daily contact with the EU business and in a monthly/more frequent personal or phone contact with EU institutions; 0 = Other Officials

Metaphorical Expressions: e = equilibrium; c = container; m = motion

Prevalence of metaphors: d = dominant (>50%); i = important (33–50%); u = used (10–33%); a = absent (< 10%)

General features

The data show that our initial expectation underestimated the significance of EQUILIBRIUM while overestimating the significance of MOTION. The sample of Czech civil servants uses the three metaphors in the following descending order of frequency: EQUILIBRIUM, MOTION and CONTAINER. At the level of expression (which is not reflected in our tables for reasons of space), EQUILIBRIUM is by far the most frequently used (41%) while MOTION and CONTAINER are referred to with comparable frequency (31% and 28% respectively). However, these results need slight qualification when the interviewee level is taken into account (Table 2). MOTION and EQUILIBRIUM are roughly comparable as dominant metaphors (22.5% and 20%), while CONTAINER trails behind. But when the categories of dominant and important are merged, EQUILIBRIUM is once again clearly favoured. In addition, once the MOTION metaphor has been used for the first time, it is used with more consistency (measured by the number of dominant metaphors) than EQUILIBRIUM or CONTAINER, confirming the expected link between MOTION and knowledge of the EU.

Table 2 – All civil servants interviewed (n=40), individual level

	<i>Container (%)</i>	<i>Equilibrium (%)</i>	<i>Motion (%)</i>
Dominant	10.00	20.00	22.50
Important	32.50	60.00	25.00
Used	55.00	20.00	47.50
Absent	2.50	0.00	5.00

The dominance of EQUILIBRIUM can also be observed in the series of metaphorical expressions proffered by civil servants when asked for their own metaphors. However, many of these are consistent with another conceptual metaphor – the EU as a RULE. Each of these metaphorical expressions (Table 1, column 3) is coded by one of the three conceptual metaphors (the letters in parentheses).⁷ The coding reveals that the officials used EQUILIBRIUM most frequently (62,5%), while MOTION (20%) and CONTAINER (17,5%) lagged behind. Most of these metaphorical expressions are easy to associate with the three conceptual metaphors. For example, the metaphorical expressions of *family*, *class*, *kindergarten*, *fair* or *football team* are typical elements of the EQUILIBRIUM set. Similarly, metaphorical expressions like *house*, *garden* and *little shop* belong to the CONTAINER metaphor set, while the *house under construction*, and *trickle of water* are examples of MOTION. They tend to be rather conventional, with only a few exceptions (*e.g. a little shop* or *playground without fences*).

However, some metaphors used by civil servants do not immediately fit into any of the three sets (e.g. peace, construction kit, bread and butter or cooperation). Some of these are rather abstract, going against the very nature of a metaphor, connecting a tangible source domain and an abstract target domain, and we must look deeper for the chief characteristics of these expressions so as to be able to categorise them. Also, there is a remarkable prevalence of team sport metaphors from the EQUILIBRIUM group. Perhaps even more significant, however, is the presence of a “rule” (or norms) element in most of the metaphors given by the civil servants. Most of these expressions imply frequent interaction, and their very essence is rules or rule-guided behaviour (e.g. *playground, team, class, kindergarten, cooperation, family, football team, home, construction kit, scout group, children’s game, zoo, orchestra, ship with a crew, anthill*).

In this respect, many of the metaphorical expressions suggested by the interviewees can be said to be consistent with a new conceptual metaphor: the EU IS A RULE. Not only does this account for metaphorical expressions that are difficult to associate with any of the three conceptual metaphors, but it also covers most of the remaining metaphorical expressions that cut across the metaphorical boundaries established by MOTION, CONTAINER and EQUILIBRIUM, and reveals a rule-focused element to the civil servants’ vocabulary.

Administrative fault lines

As expected, the civil servants differ according to their administrative experience. Both the quality and quantity of contacts matter. Concerning the quality of contacts, assessed by institutional affiliation, our preliminary expectation has been confirmed. EQUILIBRIUM is much more important than MOTION for GO officials, while both metaphors are used with the same significance by MFA officials. At the expression level (which is not reflected in our tables out for reasons of space), GO officials clearly prefer EQUILIBRIUM to MOTION (43% to 27%), while MFA officials use both metaphors with almost comparable frequency (EQUILIBRIUM 39%, MOTION 34%). The differences between MFA officials and GO officials are even more pronounced at the interviewee level (Tables 3 and 4). MOTION is the dominant metaphor of MFA officials (Table 3), yet EQUILIBRIUM prevails when the categories of dominant and important are merged. In contrast, EQUILIBRIUM is clearly the most significant metaphor for GO officials (Table 4).

Table 3 – Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) officials (n=20), individual level

	<i>Container (%)</i>	<i>Equilibrium (%)</i>	<i>Motion (%)</i>
Dominant	15.00	10.00	30.00
Important	25.00	70.00	30.00
Used	55.00	20.00	35.00
Absent	5.00	0.00	5.00

Table 4 – Government Office (GO) Officials (n=20), individual level

	<i>Container (%)</i>	<i>Equilibrium (%)</i>	<i>Motion (%)</i>
Dominant	5.00	30.00	15.00
Important	40.00	50.00	20.00
Used	55.00	20.00	60.00
Absent	0.00	0.00	5.00

The frequency of contacts with the EU also matters, even though our expectation that civil servants in greater contact with the EU would embrace the MOTION metaphor more frequently was confirmed to a smaller extent. First, civil servants lacking everyday contact with EU institutions (Table 5) are less consistent about the EU than those who deal with the EU frequently (Table 6). Thus, the former use dominant metaphors much less than the latter.

Also, as expected, civil servants in touch with the EU embrace the MOTION metaphor more frequently. In this respect, MOTION prevails as both the dominant metaphor (32% in Table 6 to 14% in Table 5) and the combined dominant and important metaphor (53% in Table 6 to 43% in Table 5). However, the same argument can be made with respect to EQUILIBRIUM, where the difference between the civil servants in touch with the EU and those who are not is even sharper; only 5% of the latter (Table 5) use it as a dominant metaphor, while 37% of the former do so (Table 6). Moreover, a steep decline in the use of the CONTAINER metaphor can be observed among officials with frequent contact, since none of them used it as a dominant metaphor and only a quarter of them as an important metaphor (Table 6). This nicely contrasts with the fifth of those who were not in regular contact with the EU, using CONTAINER as a dominant metaphor, and almost two fifths who used it as an important metaphor (Table 5). Thus, learning about the EU through daily contact with Brussels seems to bring about the following dynamics: officials are losing their original beliefs that the EU has CONTAINER-like qualities, and are instead adopting either the EQUILIBRIUM or MOTION conceptualisation.

Table 5 – Officials with occasional contact with the EU (n=21), individual level

	<i>Container (%)</i>	<i>Equilibrium (%)</i>	<i>Motion (%)</i>
Dominant	19.05	4.76	14.29
Important	38.10	76.19	28.57
Used	42.86	19.05	47.62
Absent	0.00	0.00	9.52

Table 6 – Officials with frequent contact with the EU (n=19), individual level

	<i>Container (%)</i>	<i>Equilibrium (%)</i>	<i>Motion (%)</i>
Dominant	0.00	36.84	31.58
Important	26.32	42.11	21.05
Used	68.42	21.05	47.37
Absent	5.26	0.00	0.00

The prevalence of either EQUILIBRIUM or MOTION is associated with civil servants' domestic institutional affiliation: MFA officials are more likely to use MOTION while GO officials prefer EQUILIBRIUM. Table 7 summarises how the two fault lines (institutional affiliation and frequency of contacts) impact metaphor usage. Each of the four sub-sets of civil servants is characterised by two metaphors, which appeared as dominant metaphors, the respective frequencies being stated in parentheses. However, the frequency of important metaphors had to be taken into account in the case of GO officials whose contact with the EU was rare, since both EQUILIBRIUM and CONTAINER were used as dominant metaphors by one tenth of these officials.

Table 7 – The distribution of dominant metaphors

	<i>Occasional contacts with the EU</i>	<i>Frequent contacts with the EU</i>
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	CONTAINER (27%) MOTION (18%) N=11	MOTION (44%) EQUILIBRIUM (22%) N=9
Government Office	EQUILIBRIUM (10% or 70%) CONTAINER (10% or 50%) N=10	EQUILIBRIUM (50%) MOTION (20%) N=10

The differences in the use of dominant metaphors are quite sharp between the four sub-sets. Whereas the metaphor use of MFA officials whose contact with the EU was rare oscillates between CONTAINER and MOTION with a clear preference for CONTAINER, their counterparts in the GO tend to choose between EQUILIBRIUM and CONTAINER, emphasising EQUILIBRIUM. In addition, GO officials who have less contact with the EU are less consistent in their use of metaphors (10% for each metaphor) than MFA officials with little contact with the EU (27% and 18%).

The consistency of officials who regularly deal with the EU is much higher, and there is no substantive difference between MFA officials and GO officials in this respect (44% and 22% vs. 50% and 20%). They are also similar because both groups use MOTION and EQUILIBRIUM, yet they differ clearly in their choices between the two. While the MFA officials with frequent contact with the EU rely on MOTION, GO officials frequently in contact with the EU use EQUILIBRIUM to a much larger extent than their GO peers who do not deal with the EU frequently (50% to 10%).

Implications

What do these results tell us about Czech civil servants? To start with, in line with the MOTION metaphor, many see the EU as the embodiment of a permanent transformation with only a few fixed points. This concept is common sense among old EU members (Drulák 2004). However, the intergovernmental perspective of the EU, epitomised by the EQUILIBRIUM metaphor, is more deeply rooted than expected.

This may be linked to two issues. First, due to the lack of other (more convincing) evidence, expectations have been formed in a different context – on the basis of official speeches made by leaders of the EU candidate

countries before the EU accession. The expectations did not take into account the domestic Czech debate about European integration, which is highly divisive, and they might have been based on the strategic discourse, whose goal was to convince the EU about enlargement rather than to reflect openly on the EU.

Second, the EU has many faces, depending on the issue area. These faces range from a highly integrated entity (e.g. the Common Agricultural Policy, the common currency and the common trade policy) to a loose group of states (e.g. foreign policy, education and the Lisbon agenda). Thus, the answers of civil servants mirrored the aspect of the EU with which they deal rather than a synthetic general image of the EU as such, as may have been the case with political leaders. In this respect, it comes as no major surprise that officials at the GO, who deal with that part of the agenda almost exclusively in the hands of national governments, see the EU as a series of intergovernmental bargains. On the other hand, MFA officials, who deal with both the communitarian face of the EU (its common policies) and its intergovernmental side (Common Foreign and Security Policy), tend towards a mixture of the intergovernmental perspectives and the received wisdom about permanent transformation.

The agenda's influence on the cognitive world of administrative elites is also evident from the effects of frequent contact with the EU, which reinforces civil servants' conceptions of the EU. On this basis, we can say that civil servants rationally adjust their cognitive world, as reflected by their metaphors of the EU, to their administrative practice.

Nevertheless, only one dimension of this practice matters. Contrary to our expectations, neither the position in the administration nor the length of administrative experience had any impact on the conceptions of Europe. This may be due to the Czech institutions' state of flux, which lacks strong socialising mechanisms as compared to intensive exposure to the EU agenda (Drulák, Königová, 2005). However, such socialising mechanisms may still be present, although they do not particularly shape civil servants' subjective conceptions of the EU.

Remarkably, civil servants tend to avoid vocabulary that gives the EU state-like qualities: the CONTAINER metaphor clearly fares worst. This can be construed as a lukewarm attitude towards the federalisation of Europe. On the other hand, closer examination also shows that officials with more experience with the EU (also being quite consistent in their views) avoid this vocabulary the most. This implies that the more people learn about the EU, the less they believe it can be compared to a state or any other CONTAINER-like entity. Moreover, those who switch from CONTAINER to MOTION, rather than EQUILIBRIUM (like the MFA officials), are likely to support deeper integration, since this does not militate against the MOTION metaphor.

Finally, as their own metaphors have suggested, the civil servants strongly believe that the EU is a normative community whose influence and shaping power, exercised on both the inside and the outside, is primarily rule-based and rule-focused. This is connected with the very nature of the accession process within which the EU has emphasised the fulfilment of clearly set

conditions. In addition, this belief reflects widespread hopes and expectations that EU membership is a guarantee of “the rule of law and administrative efficiency” – as opposed to a somewhat bleaker transitional reality – which had been present in the Czech discussions about the benefits of membership.

CONCLUSIONS

The growing community of European integration analysts argue that metaphors matter. They have shown how the metaphors people use when speaking about the EU shape their understanding and expectations. This article demonstrates how the perspective of metaphors provides us with analytical tools that help us to better understand the cognitive world of those responsible for the day-to-day administrative implementation of EU policies.

The empirical results of our research, as presented above, allow for several tentative conclusions. Civil servants from two Czech Government institutions that are critical of the implementation of EU policies see the EU as either a series of intergovernmental bargains or as a steady transformation. The third concept, the EU as a state-like entity, is also used quite frequently yet haphazardly. Although these two concepts are not necessarily contradictory, each captures a very different part of the EU’s reality. The more civil servants deal with the EU, the more strongly they cultivate these two concepts. The presence of two significant images rather than one is presumably due to different EU agendas that the officials deal with. While MFA officials are involved in both common and intergovernmental policies, GO employees are exclusively responsible for intergovernmental policies. In addition, Czech officials tend to emphasise the rule-based nature of European integration, based on their experience of accession and expectations of membership.

Given the caveats, the external validity of these conclusions should not be overestimated, nor should it be discarded. The sample is not big enough regarding the Czech civil service as such, but it is significant with regards to the two institutions and the Czech EU agenda. In addition, the conclusions confirm, to some extent, the results of previous studies. Finally, the new insights that have been generated present well-founded hypotheses for further research.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ We use the concept of image as a general term encompassing opinions, administrative identities, attitudes, etc., as they represent the subjective and cognitive worlds of civil servants with respect to the EU, which are the centre of our focus.
- ² The magisterial study of European civil servants by Liesbet Hooghe is the best example (Hooghe 2001).
- ³ Morten Egeberg's distinction between the national, supranational and functional identities of national civil servants is a nice example (Egeberg 1999: 457–458).
- ⁴ From here on, we will use capital letters when referring to conceptual metaphors. Statements referring only to metaphors in general, without any adjectives, apply to both conceptual metaphors and metaphorical expressions. For explanation see the “Theoretical Background” section.
- ⁵ For example, we asked the interviewees what the major feature of the EU *is at the moment*, in their opinion, letting them choose from three options: (a) building a single space within the borders of the Union; (b) maintaining the equilibrium and arriving at compromises among various actors; and (c) on-going internal change. Later in the questionnaire, the same options are given, only this time asking the respondents to indicate what the “signature process” of the Union *should be in the future*. Similarly, we are asking what the EU of today needs: (a) to step up the integration pace in a number of areas; (b) to formulate its interests clearly; and (c) to strike a new deal among key actors.
- ⁶ The length of civil service is measured by the number of years spent at the ministry while the quantity of contacts is measured by the frequency of personal and e-mail contacts with Brussels. Both variables are then further dichotomised as we distinguish between short experience and long experience, and between occasional contacts and frequent contacts.
- ⁷ The coding was done not only on the basis of the metaphorical expressions listed out in Table 1 but also in view of the reasoning given for this particular word/phrase by the individual MFA and GO officials.

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