



**AGENDA FOR CZECH  
FOREIGN POLICY  
2019**

—— Eds. ——

Vít Borčány  
Pavína Janebová





**AMO.CZ**

## **AGENDA FOR CZECH FOREIGN POLICY 2019**

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# **PREFACE**

*Vít Borčany  
Pavčina Janebová*

Czech foreign policy has long been one of the main areas of interest of the Association for International Affairs (AMO). This year you can read what is already the thirteenth edition of the Agenda for Czech Foreign Policy (first published in 2007). This systematic analysis of the Czech Republic's foreign policy is unique in its normative dimension, which it brings beyond the scope of other annual publications devoted to the subject. We consider it important that policymakers receive not only feedback from the expert community, but also recommendations for the future period. Last year, we significantly changed the format of the publication, in favour of a stronger focus on giving a holistic outlook and guidance as to which positions actors should take on various bilateral and multilateral issues. After careful consideration, we have added two regions to the analysis this year. We have extended the chapter on Eastern Europe by another priority area of Czech foreign policy in the EU neighbourhood, the Western Balkans. We have added Africa, with a focus on the sub-Saharan region, to the chapter on Middle East. Each chapter is divided into two parts - the first summarizes and evaluates the events of the past 12 months, in the second part we anticipate developments in the relevant area in the coming year and recommend the positions and actions that we consider appropriate with regard to long-term Czech foreign policy priorities. At the beginning of each chapter we reiterate the strong statements made by Czech foreign policy leaders, as well as at the end of each chapter we offer a bullet-form summary of the context of the area, the current state of Czech foreign policy within this area and the main recommendations. The thematic chapters are preceded with an introductory chapter focusing on the general political context and actions of the main actors. Although the Czech foreign policy is significantly more institutionally stable than in the previous year, we cannot really talk of any fundamental positive development in the overall policy or in its individual areas. Although there have been some improvements to its appearance, the door – or window, if you will, as each country's foreign policy is its window to the outside world, is still creaky.

Czech Foreign Policy Today:

**A FRESH COAT OF PAINT  
FOR A CREAKY DOOR**

*Vít Borčany  
Pavλίna Janebová  
Vít Dostál*

In 2018, Czech foreign policy went through several months of uncertainty and a strange government vacuum. The government helplessly sought an agreement with the President on the appointment of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, while this important role was performed by the Minister of the Interior. Subsequently, Tomáš Petříček was appointed, who quickly earned respectable confidence in the Czech foreign policy community. The resolution to the situation and the opening speech of the new minister contributed to the prevalent impression that the situation of Czech foreign policy has quickly turned around for the better. However, it continues to face the similar challenges: fragmentation of foreign policy among the actors involved in its implementation and the problems faced by the Social Democrats in the current political environment. So far, the Czech Republic has not succeeded in instilling a convincing and universally shared vision to the Czech foreign policy that would make the Czech Republic a self-assured player in the fast-changing international environment.

### **The Petříček Phenomenon and Unfulfilled Expectations**

The woeful institutional situation which marked Czech foreign policy last summer, as we reported in the last edition of the Agenda for Czech Foreign Policy, seems to be temporarily overcome. However, the stability achieved by the appointment of Tomáš Petříček comes at the price of continued stagnation of foreign policy content. Petříček's inaugural speech in October and his media appearances suggested that foreign policy was returning to a good tradition of multilateralism and constructive membership in Euro-Atlantic integration organizations. However, after only a few weeks, Petříček faced strong criticism, which made it virtually impossible to meet these great expectations. His competence was questioned. Prime Minister Babiš interpreted the constitution in a special way, arguing that foreign policy is "made by the prime minister". President Zeman contributed with strongly worded media statements and, last but not least, the political weakness of ČSSD (Social Democrats) was apparent. These factors led to the fact that Petříček could not build a position that would allow him to set the course leading to a fundamental change in Czech foreign policy. Despite his unquestionable efforts, the current situation unfortunately raises questions about who actually conducts foreign policy, which does not contribute to the much-desired transparency of the Czech Republic in the eyes of its foreign partners. Petříček undoubtedly needs more time and firm ground to strengthen his position, which, however, he may not get due to the long-term bad condition of the ruling coalition and the uncertain fate of the ČSSD.

However, institutional anchoring is not the only problem of Czech foreign policy. Perhaps more of a problem is the fact that Czech political leaders ignore the way the world is going and are under the illusion that the existing multilateral international system, which lets small and medium-sized states to secure their existence and prosperity, will not change in the coming years. Along with this pretence that the future of international affairs does not concern us, productive discussion of the issues is also hindered by irresponsible actors feeding the public forum with pseudo-problems. Not only Babiš's government, but also the opposition parties, wary of electoral losses, make appealing statements and are willing to sacrifice foreign policy to gain doubtful domestic political points.

### **Threading Water**

Although Prime Minister Babiš announced going “full steam ahead” (in his words, a more active foreign and European policy) when taking over the top executive office, the government was just mostly threading water and did not deliver a significant breakthrough in any dimension. Last year, the topic of migration gradually retreated from the foreign policy debate. However, it would be naive to believe that it will not return in the future as a way to win easy political points. Russia remained a topic which considerably polarized the political scene. While the current government is not too attached to keeping close relations with Moscow, it is clear that this position is not principled, but rather that the government chooses to keep within the boundaries set by Europe. Relations with China escalated, since, in addition to the economic and value dimension, the importance increased of the security dimension, especially in the digital infrastructure. Political parties and their representatives campaigned in the European elections which were held in May. However, the vast majority of parties were unable to offer a consistent vision for the Czech Republic's membership in the EU. Political representatives were even not inspired by the 15th anniversary of the Czech Republic's accession in the EU. Rather, it seems that the discussion of the Czech Republic's place in the EU has not been able to escape the vicious circle of ingratiating slogans and half-hearted criticism that has been its hallmark since the accession.

Last year, the Visegrad Group failed to shake off the “anti-Brussels front” label that some politicians are trying to give it, but under the leadership of Minister Petříček there is an apparent effort to diversify Central European cooperation, specifically stressing the importance of relations with Germany, and the – at least proclaimed – commitment

to continue cooperation within the Austerlitz format. Efforts to revive transatlantic relations come across as ambiguous. The Czech Republic has been unable to engage the Trump administration with an interesting agenda, and it has not been meeting the defence spending targets on which Trump strongly insists.

### **Poor Coordination**

The institutional structure of Czech foreign policy is no more complicated than in other democratic states, where different ideas and opinions also compete. In the Czech case, however, it has not been clear for a long time who is really driving and is responsible for foreign policy. Last year, such conflicts of competence have not raged in full strength, but well-coordinated positions and joint actions are still scarce.

Compared to previous years, President Zeman has focused his attention on the domestic political arena, and his foreign policy has been carried out in a relatively calm spirit, with the exception of a few statements deviating from the boundaries of government's foreign policy positions. This was particularly the case of the BIS (Security Information Service, Czech counterintelligence agency) report highlighting the risks associated with China's Huawei in relation to the building of digital infrastructure, which Zeman tried to torpedo. His opinion, however, found no support from the government and the Czech Republic stands on the side of countries perceiving these threats as serious. A surprising moment was Zeman's reaction to the developments in Venezuela; he expressed support for the opposition parliament chairman Juan Guaidó to become interim president, although Maduro's regime is one of Russia's close allies and is endorsed by China. The President continued to exercise ceremonial and representative powers in the usual course, with the exception of the controversial or untrue statements (e.g. when meeting with compatriots in Vienna). Although they were aimed primarily at the Czech audiences, it is not advisable to underestimate them. The President has been able to influence the direction of the discourse several times in the past, thus significantly affecting the overall value framework of foreign policy.

The way Andrej Babiš formulates his domestic policy is also used in foreign policy. Without any apparent ideological grounding, he promotes views which he expects will earn him popularity with voters. Examples include inappropriate statements about the Czech Presidency of the EU Council and the position on EU measures to fight climate change. Babiš's way of opposing EU themes is in direct conflict with his ambitions to play a more prominent role in European politics. In this respect, he has failed, although

he is trying to convince the public of the opposite. Moreover, Babiš often acts impulsively on foreign policy issues, without consulting the relevant Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff, who are often taken by surprise by his statements. This, of course, complicates the implementation of a consistent and transparent foreign policy.

The position of Minister Petříček in relation to the President and the Prime Minister is complicated, but his work gives a rather mixed impression. For example, after his appointment, he stopped a statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs critical of the visit of the Chairman of the Chamber of Deputies Radek Vondráček to Moscow from being released. Vondráček met with the presidents of both chambers of the Russian Parliament, who are on the sanctions lists of the EU and the US. Despite this not very auspicious beginning, however, the Minister continued to voice his unequivocal support for Ukraine in the conflict with Russia. The Czech Republic's rejection of the Global Compact for Migration by the Czech Republic, which was not based on substantive arguments against the text of the document, but rather on the irrational dismissal of anything that bears the word "migration" in its title, can be considered as a denial of the foreign policy course declared by Petříček. The Global Compact was politically exploited by the SPD, which was able to indirectly shoehorn the government into a tight corner by presenting it to the public in its usual hysterical manner.

Political parties represented in Parliament have not contributed in the last year in any way to the cultivation of foreign policy. There was no improvement in the quality of the foreign policy discussion either in the Chamber of Deputies or the Senate; nor were there any new angles introduced to the public debate on foreign policy. Communists tolerating Babiš's government often criticize Minister Petříček for his incompetence, but this is a manifestation of their denouncement Petříček's completely different foreign policy vision, not a credible criticism of his work as minister. Fortunately, the Communists' geopolitical orientation has not yet found way to influence the official government policy. Naturally, democratic opposition parties also criticize government foreign policy, but their ranks do not offer any personalities and programs that would represent a coherent and compelling alternative. Moreover, some are willing to join in controversial initiatives such as the joint condemnation of initiation of the mechanism of Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union against Hungary. The extreme right margin of the political spectrum - the SPD - does not bring any factual legitimate points into the debate; it just keeps its voters scared and in fear.

## May We Hope?

Generally, we can say that the Czech foreign policy was given only a fresh coat in the past year, but the old door is still creaky. There is hope for improvement under the leadership of Minister Petříček, but it could be prematurely buried as a result of an unstable situation in both the government and his own political party. It can be expected that, in the coming period, Prime Minister Babiš's influence in the area of foreign and European policy will not diminish. His internal political dependence on President Zeman will continue to lead to a tendency to adapt foreign policy to Zeman's wishes.

The Czech political representation must not remain indifferent. It must not ignore the ongoing changes in the international system and the challenges that not only the Czech Republic or Europe, but the whole world, are facing. It is necessary to take a clear stance in favour of maintaining the multilateral international system not only towards international partners but also towards the Czech public. Politicians have missed the opportunity of previous years, when the themes of Czech foreign policy highly resonated with the Czech public, to stimulate and cultivate a society-wide dialogue on its values and goals. In the future, however, they should not give up this ambition, as these "big questions" of the Czech Republic's place in the world will continue to be on the table.

The main tasks for Czech foreign and European policy in the coming months will be to make the Czech Republic more active and strengthen its position in the EU, which, despite many proclamations, is yet to start happening. Instead of vague signalling, passive observation, or sulking behind the shield of the Visegrad Group, the Czech Republic must learn to formulate its priorities clearly and to seek partnerships across the Union to promote them.

While the Czech Republic has a number of highly qualified and capable professionals specializing in European issues, a clear political impulse is needed to positively change the image of the Czech Republic in the EU. It will be important to start with thorough preparations for the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2022, as the Czech Republic has a unique chance to fix its image following the political fiasco in 2009. The Czech Republic should use its Presidency of the Visegrad Group in the second half of 2019 and the first half of 2020 to appease the tensions between the "East" and "West". Issues that the Czech Republic should promote towards its EU partners include maintaining the closest possible relations between the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries and promoting the integration of the Western Balkan countries.

It is in the interest of the Czech Republic to preserve and strengthen transatlantic relations, whose security and trade dimension are currently going through a rough patch. Therefore, the Czech Republic should strive for active involvement in security initiatives at European level and, at the same time, to improve its capacity to meet its NATO commitments. In the area of trade, the Czech Republic should support the EU's unified position in negotiations with the Trump administration, but at the same time contribute its own preferences to its formulation.

The increasingly convoluted situation in the Middle East warrants that the Czech foreign policy takes a more value-oriented position. The current policy of arms exports to conflict areas or authoritarian regimes runs counter to the country's development and humanitarian objectives. Despite the continuing economization of foreign policy, reliable analysis should be the basis for decision-making - not wishful thinking in the form of repeatedly proclaimed "economic opportunities". The government should also be clear about the benefits of its engagement in Syria and whether its results meet the original expectations.

The need to coordinate external relations at EU level also applies to China, whose policy poses a risk to the EU, and therefore to all its Member States, in both the trade and security dimensions. The government should stimulate a realistic debate on Czech-China relations instead of lofty promises on the one hand, or scaremongering on the other.

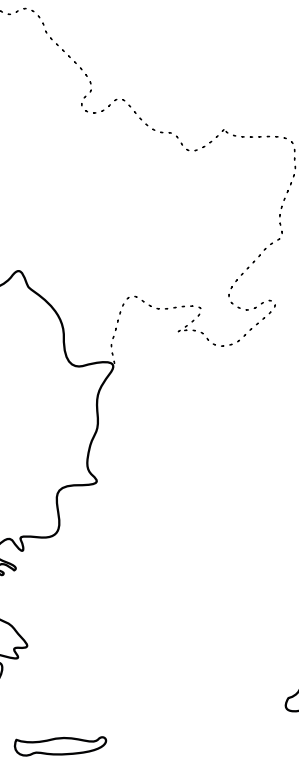
Last but not least, Czech diplomacy should commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the change in the political regime. The Velvet Revolution, among other things, made it possible to pursue a sovereign foreign policy. Commemorating its adventurous but very important beginnings at the turn of 1989-1990 should be one of the tasks of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the coming months.





# EUROPEAN UNION

*Pavlna Janebová, Zuzana Čapková, Adéla Denková,  
Vít Dostál, Tomáš Jungwirth, Magda Komínková,  
Kryštof Kruliš*



“It is important for us – Czechia and the Visegrad countries together with Italy – prevented the Spitzenkandidat from being elected. We have been criticising and opposing the system from the start. And we ultimately succeeded.”

**ANDREJ BABIŠ**

// 2 JULY 2019

“Perhaps it has made us forget that we need to do something for the Union even after we joined. It is not the case: we have to continue to work hard to have a say in the Union.”

**VĚRA JOUROVÁ**

// 28 APRIL 2019

“We need a strong Europe - Europe of strong member states. I therefore consider it necessary to restore the institutional order in the EU. The Commission must be depoliticized and the position of European leaders in the European Council strengthened.”

**ANDREJ BABIŠ**

// 16 MAY 2019

The end of 2018 and the first half of 2019 in the EU should have been in the spirit of completing the priorities and initiatives of the last five years. According to the Leaders' Agenda presented by European Council President Donald Tusk in autumn 2017, the European Union should be in a consolidated phase, ready for the coming period. However, the Agenda objectives have not been fully met. One of the reasons is the protracted withdrawal process of the United Kingdom, on which a significant part of the capacities of the EU institutions, as well as much media attention, has been concentrated in the past year. The member states' inability to overcome their differences and bridge gaps in their preferences has also prevented any significant progress towards meeting the Agenda objectives. As for specific issues identified as a priority under the Agenda, the desired progress in reforming the functioning of the EMU and asylum and migration policy has not been achieved.

Although France and Germany can still be considered as to be at the forefront of European integration, their leadership and unity have continued to weaken, despite the grandly announced projects of deeper institutional cooperation between the two countries. While Germany would rather welcome gradual overhaul of EU's processes, President Macron insists on a fundamental reform of the EU. As a result, both countries are losing their traditional close partners in each other. Relations between France and Italy are going through a crisis. Germany can no longer rely on the countries of the so-called EU's North, which refuse to accept any compromises with France and the southern EU countries, particularly on the reform of the euro area. Leaders of both countries are also faced with a number of internal political problems that weaken their position.

The Czech Republic has taken a rather defensive stance in the debate on the future of the Union. The Prime Minister, who has traditionally played the most prominent role in Czech-EU politics, and other relevant actors have not been able to present a consistent and realistic vision for the Czech Republic's place in the EU with regard to current key issues.

In the run up to the elections to the European Parliament in May, the Prime Minister was, as expected, taking a critical position vis-à-vis the EU. The manifesto of his ANO movement and the rhetoric of its leaders render the Union was conceived as an external entity rather than a space for constructive assertion of the interests of the Czech Republic. Election campaigns of Czech political parties showed the persistent division of the EU on the East-West axis on migration issues, but also the matters of cohesion policy or dual quality of food. These issues were used by political leaders to illustrate the persistent inequality between the so-called old and new member states.

Despite the reiterated priorities of the government to fill key posts in the EU after the European Parliament elections, the Czech Republic failed to present or push

through its own candidates, who would represent the priorities of the Czech Republic. Although the election of Ursula von der Leyen as President of the European Commission was interpreted *ex-post* by the Prime Minister as a success, the Czech negotiators failed to present what programmatic benefits her election represented compared with the other candidates.

One of the key EU themes was the negotiation of the multiannual financial framework (MFF) for the period 2021-2027. The Commission has proposed a slight increase in the MFF. For the next financial period, an increase in budget appropriations is planned, *inter alia* for border control, defence, migration, internal and external security, development cooperation and research. The proportion of appropriations for action against climate change should also increase. On the contrary, cuts in cohesion and agricultural policy are foreseen. The Commission proposal was not received with great enthusiasm by the Czech Republic. Given the economic growth in recent years, the Czech Republic's share of funds from the EU long-term budget is expected to shrink by about a quarter compared to 2014-2020, but the country should still remain a net beneficiary. In particular, the Czech Republic criticizes the reduction of the allocation. However, the decline is already smaller than what the conversion based on the economic growth of the Czech Republic would suggest, thanks to additional measures that prevent too drastic funding reductions in individual member states.

The Czech Republic also focused on introducing greater flexibility in the use of funds. In particular, it seeks to reduce the co-financing rate from the state budget or to facilitate the extension of project funding beyond 2027. It also calls for a thematic concentration to be diluted, since the Commission plans to spend 65% of cohesion and regional development funding on innovation, entrepreneurship, energy efficiency, renewable energy, low carbon technologies, circular economy, digital transformation and strengthening competitiveness. Furthermore, the Czech Republic does not agree with the proposed ceiling of direct payments under the Common Agricultural Policy. It also takes a reserved stance on the proposal to link the use of EU funds with the rule of law. For the time being, the Czech arguments in this matter are not ideological (as in the case of other V<sub>4</sub> countries), but rather point to the legal confusion that could arise by the introduction of the rules. Although the Czech position expresses the interests of the Czech Republic quite well and draws on existing experience of drawing on European funds, the Prime Minister has repeatedly vulgarized the national position saying that the EU must not dictate to us how we spend European funds. Such a hyped up transactional view of an important

EU policy does not help communication of the European agenda to the public or the position of the Czech Republic in the EU.

In the process of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU, the Czech Republic toed the line of the common EU position, which can be appreciated given the heightening tension surrounding Brexit. The generosity of the Czech law on the rights of UK citizens in our territory in the case of a no-deal Brexit, which Britain rates, together with the Polish law, as the most accommodating in the EU, can be seen as a plus point. Since Britain committed to reciprocity, this legislation can also help to improve the position of our citizens in the United Kingdom in the event of a no-deal Brexit.

The debate on the reform of asylum and migration policy at Union level has not seen any significant progress in the past period, given the unequivocal and non-negotiable position of individual member states on certain aspects of the reform proposals. It should be noted that the states of the Visegrad Group, including the Czech Republic, have not contributed in any way to achieving consensus or progress in the negotiations. The current Czech political representation does not attempt to curb the negative migration-related sentiments of the Czech society in any way; instead uses them as a vehicle for its own political gains. The absurd debate on the admission of 21 Syrian orphans is a typical example. A case is still pending with the EU Court of Justice against the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary in connection with the refusal to participate in the temporary redistribution mechanism of asylum seekers.

In the increasingly critical debate on action against climate change, the Czech Republic, along with some other Central European countries, held a rather conservative stance, and in June 2019 it was one of the countries that prevented the adoption of summit conclusions binding EU member states to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. Some changes of this position were evident in Prime Minister Babiš after meeting with the candidate for President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen in July 2019.

During the period under review, there was no further escalation of trade relations between the European Union and the United States. According to his statements, Andrej Babiš discussed of trade relations and the need to refrain from drastic protectionist measures at a meeting with President Donald Trump in early March 2019. The EU's interest is not to escalate trade wars with the US; so, the majority of leaders of European states who have the opportunity to meet with President Trump in person talk to him with this goal in mind. The meeting between Trump and Babiš also touched on the question of car import duties, which the US President is considering. The Czech Republic does not export directly to the US, but the duties would still affect

Czech companies that are subcontractors of automotive manufacturers from other EU countries.

Czech leaders in the EU focused on the issue of dual quality food. The shift at EU level has been only partial so far, despite the support of the Czech MEPs across the political parties, as the stricter regulation of this area proposed in the amendments to the EU directive dealing with this issue has not been passed. There has been progress in the building of the Digital Single Market, which the Czech Republic supported, including the adoption of the Geoblocking Regulation, introduction of price caps for cross-border telephony within the EU and the portability of online services. The project to complete the internal market (in particular in the area of services or the capital markets union) has not witnessed major progress. On the contrary, the Czech Republic was forced to advocate the status quo of internal market integration, for example in the posted workers area.

At the end of 2018, the question of working conditions for truck drivers and the rules for posting them abroad resonated. In December, transport ministers agreed on a position regarding the road transport reform that includes working conditions for drivers. The legislative process is still in progress, but the Czech Republic seems to have succeeded in the negotiations. Bilateral transport operations have been explicitly excluded from the scope of the posting of workers. Transit transport was also excluded, which was the long-term goal of the Czech Republic.

In July 2018, the government officially commenced preparations for the Presidency of the Council of the EU, which the Czech Republic will take in the second half of 2022. Andrej Babiš indicated that he wanted the Czech Presidency to be as cost-efficient as possible. He considers the Presidency's costs to be disproportionately high and does not see much added value. The statements made by Andrej Babiš in this context show a total misunderstanding of this opportunity and can be perceived as unfortunate, also with regard to the Czech public and EU partners. If the declared priority of the government is to increase the visibility and activity of the Czech Republic in the EU and the promotion of Czechs to key posts in EU institutions, the Presidency represents a unique opportunity to achieve these goals. And it is impossible to do well with limited resources and staff.

The Czech position in the EU is complicated by the low credibility of Prime Minister Babiš in connection with his conflict of interest and irregularities regarding EU subsidies for his companies transferred to trust funds. The Prime Minister's cases undermined the Czech Republic's negotiating position on key topics such as the multiannual

financial framework or portfolio negotiation for a Czech Commissioner in the new European Commission. Given the alleged conflict of interest, some portfolios were closed to Věra Jourová, despite her expertise or the declared interest of the Czech Republic. The portfolio of the Vice-President of the Commission on Values and Transparency is not a one that the Czech Republic would prefer, and the government has been criticized for the results of the negotiations on the composition of the new Commission. On the other hand, it is a portfolio with much potential. In the past period, Věra Jourová was also successful in a portfolio which was originally rated by the Czech political representation as one that was not very strong. According to their statements, government officials perceive the post as very important. In this respect, the Czech Republic should keep its words on the importance of these issues and promote values and transparency within the EU more strongly.



With the onset of the new institutional cycle, it is important for the Czech Republic to focus mainly on the final stage of negotiations on the multiannual financial framework, Britain's departure from the EU and, in particular, the preparation of its Presidency of the EU Council. It can be assumed that topics that have caused considerable indignation and resistance in the Czech Republic of recently, such as reforming asylum and migration policies or the EU's ambitions to further reduce its greenhouse gas emissions, will not lose any momentum.

Under the optimistic scenarios, the MFF 2021-2027 could be approved by the end of the year. The Czech Republic will host the summit of the Friends of Cohesion group in November and can, as a host and presiding country of the Visegrad Group, significantly contribute to the resulting agreement. Regardless of the specific changes that will take place in autumn 2019 following negotiations between member states, the Czech Republic would be wise to adapt to the new conditions. It will be necessary to streamline the process of administration of subsidies, as well as the capacity to identify and take advantage of opportunities to draw funds from recently formed programmes and instruments. Instead of taking a fierce opposition stance to the EU action to combat climate change, the Czech Republic should use resources from the newly created instruments to invest in new technologies and energy-efficient solutions. Consequently, it is necessary to start negotiations on the Partnership Agreement with the European Commission immediately after the budget is approved, which will usher in more clarity on issue of disbursements.

Following the election of Boris Johnson, the United Kingdom has taken a tougher approach to negotiation and has unsuccessfully sought to change the terms of Britain's leave negotiated by Prime Minister May. The European Union continues to insist on a negotiated framework, but over time, depending on developments in the British political arena and the credibility of the threat of a no-deal Brexit, its unity may weaken. It is in the interest of the Czech Republic to maintain an agreement on financial compensation and citizens' rights, while ensuring the greatest possible continuity in EU relations with the United Kingdom in the area of both trade and security.

In all likelihood, the topic of migration will continue to be important. At the moment, on the initiative of France and Germany, potentially enhanced cooperation in the field of asylum is also being developed, addressing the issue of redistribution. The Czech Republic should be aware that the introduction of enhanced cooperation in this area may pose a risk of fragmentation of the Schengen area. Although it is not realistic to expect the Czech Republic to be involved, it should at least avoid efforts to prevent this project. The Czech Republic should also continuously evaluate its outcomes with a view of possibly getting involved in the future. It would be good for the image of the Czech Republic if the Czech representatives tried to communicate their positions on migration in a less polarizing spirit.

The Presidency of the EU Council, which the Czech Republic will take in the second half of 2022, is an opportunity to raise the profile of the country and, to a certain extent, to promote its own priorities. It is necessary that the Czech Republic - in view of the bitter aftertaste after the 2009 Presidency - takes this role with all responsibility, defines its priorities in a timely manner, coordinates with the the so-called Presidency trio partners, France and Sweden, and has a sufficient number experienced professionals to count on. In addition to coordination within the Presidency trio, this opportunity can be also used to deepen bilateral relations. It would be suitable to involve the expert community, the public and the non-profit sector early in the discussions related to the preparation of the Presidency, inter alia to stimulate the debate on EU issues, as was the case with the 2009 Presidency.

## **CONTEXT**

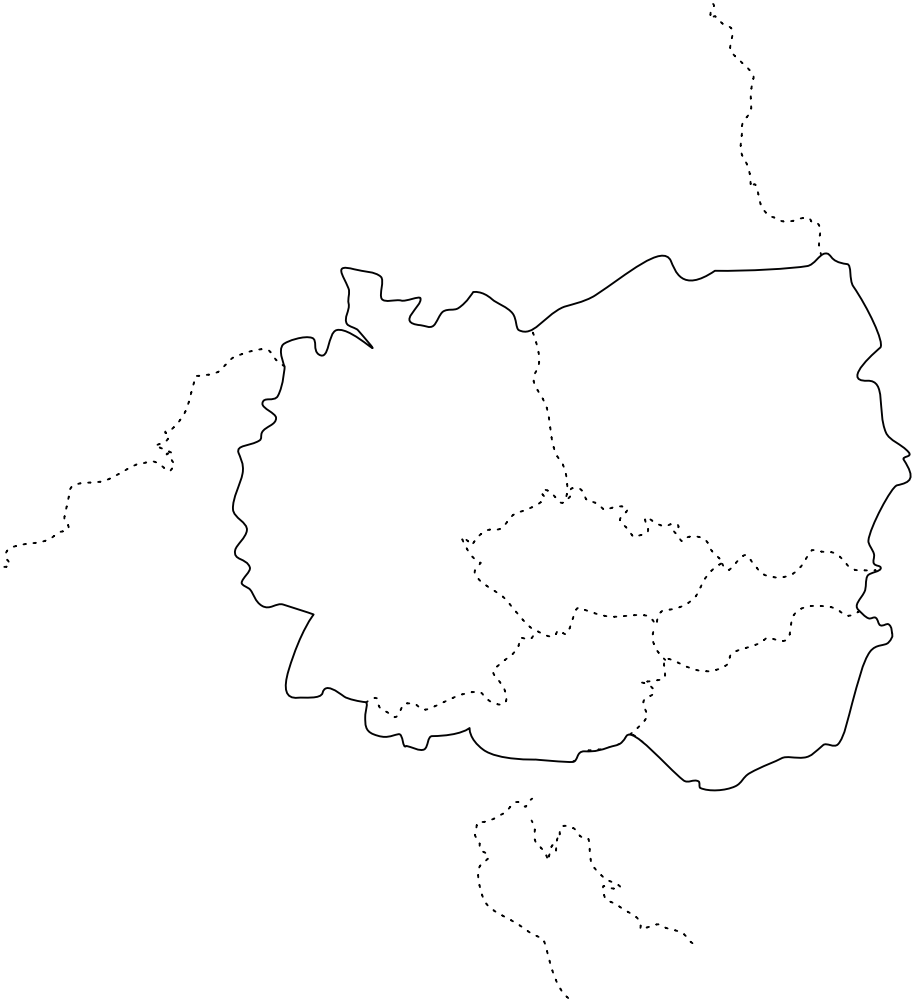
- Formation of EU institutions after the European Parliament elections
- A number of open issues from the past period
- Weakening of the Franco-German engine at the head of the EU

## **PRESENT**

- Prime Minister's conflict of interest case, fundamentally undermining the Czech Republic's position in the EU
- Aggressive and polarizing rhetoric of the Czech Republic on issues climate change and migration
- Government's inadequate communication with the public on EU matters

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Prepare well for the Presidency of the EU Council in 2022
- Present priorities more in a more constructive manner
- Encourage the EU to maintain the broadest possible relationship with the United Kingdom after Brexit



# **CENTRAL EUROPE**

*Pavlna Janebová*  
*Vít Dostál*

“I think we had a good understanding, except for how to distribute the people from the boats.”

**ANDREJ BABIŠ**

after meeting Angela Merkel  
// 5 SEPTEMBER 2018

“The Chamber of Deputies considers the European Parliament voting in favour of starting the mechanism of Article 7 of the Lisbon Treaty against the sovereign state of Hungary as erroneous and unfortunate. This will only further deepen the schism and mistrust between the old and new Member States of the European Union.”

**RESOLUTION OF THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES,  
PARLIAMENT OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC**

// 2 OCTOBER 2018

“I’m glad that the Czech-Austrian relations have become one of the pillars of development in Central Europe. #Austria is a traditional partner of #CZ.”

**TOMÁŠ PETŘÍČEK**

// 17 JANUARY 2019

“V4 is a unified front, regardless of who is from which fraction.”

**ANDREJ BABIŠ**

// 13 JUNE 2019

Compared with the previous period, which was characterized by the lack of cohesion of relations with neighbours as a result of dynamic internal political developments in both the Czech Republic and in some partner countries, the Czech Central European policy has been stabilised. Of the metaphorical three pillars of the Czech Central European policy, the Czech Republic's relations with its partners in the V<sub>4</sub> and with Germany are particularly successful, while the Austerlitz format continues to suffer of the least visibility. However, the Central European region is not in a good situation because it is plagued by the divide of the EU into the west and the east. This schism is deepening further and expanding to other areas, since it is perceived by political actors as permanent and opportune.

The Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group, which ran from July 2018 to June 2019, focused on the factual agenda and the effort to deepen relations, in particular with European partners, which markedly differed from the previous Hungarian Presidency. In this respect, the previous Visegrad focus on migration issues has been somewhat successfully side-lined, although the position of the Visegrad countries has remained unchanged. The instrumentalization of V<sub>4</sub> in migration issues has thus largely subsided. For the Czech Republic, the goal of the Slovak Presidency, which contrasted with the previous Hungarian one, was clearly positive, as it better reflected the needs of the Czech Republic. At a lower working level, the topics related to the negotiation of the multiannual financial framework dominated. In the case of deepening relations with Western European partners, the summit with the German Chancellor or the first meeting of the defence ministers in V<sub>4</sub> + Germany and France format, which line up with Czech interests, are deserving of particular attention. The cooperation between the defence ministries in this format is in line with the Czech efforts to promote European defence initiatives complementary to NATO commitments. The progress in non-European V<sub>4</sub> partnerships was then marked by the sudden cancellation of the V<sub>4</sub>+Israel Summit due to the Polish-Israeli diplomatic rupture. This event proved the fact that the development of V<sub>4</sub>+ formats with countries outside Europe makes sense for the Czech Republic only if the Czech Republic does not yet have sufficiently deep relations contacts with the country in question and can thus benefit from the common format.

Problems with the quality of the rule of law in Hungary and Poland have further intensified. Poland continued to pursue judicial reform and the country's dialogues with the European institutions have produced little progress. The European Parliament then initiated proceedings under Article 7 TEU against Hungary. The situation in both countries - and, on the other hand, the results of local and presidential elections in Slovakia

- led to the initiation of expert, public and political discussions on the benefits of co-operation in the Visegrad format. The Prime Minister, like most other representatives of the Czech Republic, approached the developments in Poland and Hungary without a hint of criticism or concern that the negative perception of some Visegrad countries could undermine image of the group as a whole in the eyes of its partners. Following the initiation of the Article 7 mechanism against Hungary, the Czech Parliament adopted a resolution which condemned the EU actions and supported Budapest. In addition to ANO, the governing party, this motion in support of Hungary was endorsed by the representatives of ODS, KDU-ČSL, SPD, KSČM and part of the ČSSD club.

Czech-Hungarian relations have intensified following the bilateral visits by Prime Minister Orbán in Prague and President Zeman in Budapest, which, in addition to the political declarations on a common approach on a number of issues on the V4 plan, also promised the development of economic relations. The Czech interests concentrated mainly on the energy and arms industries, i.e. areas in which the Hungarian government and the ruling Fidesz party play a key role. The shift in the bilateral relations means closer economic relations, but implicitly also a stronger political link between the Czech Republic and Hungary.

The key event in Czech-Polish relations was a joint meeting of government delegations, which took place in February after a two-year pause. The meeting did not bring a major breakthrough in any of the problematic issues of bilateral relations (e.g. border debt or the planned expansion of the Turów brown coal mine), but it was essential to maintain continuity and establish contacts between the new Czech Cabinet and the Polish government. Relations with Poland were then helped by a stronger Czech political involvement in the Three Seas Initiative. The Czech Republic was reassured to a large extent by the participation of the German Foreign Minister and the President of the European Commission at the Bucharest summit in September 2018, which mollified the original concern that the initiative might become a coalition of countries opposed to Western Europe. President Zeman attended the June summit in Slovenia for the first time and the Czech Republic also joined the newly established Three Seas Fund.

Over the course of the past year, the Czech-German Strategic Dialogue continued and saw progress. In June 2019, it was subject to an assessment which concluded that it was successful in a number of areas and worthy of continuation. According to the assessment, the work of the Dialogue Working Groups has shifted from addressing current operative challenges towards longer-term issues and, in addition to Czech-German relations, focuses on issues related to the European Union and transatlantic relations.

The viability of the Dialogue is also evidenced by the fact that two new working groups are currently in the process of being established. They will focus on energy and internal security issues. The focus of the Strategic Dialogue in the past has helped to overcome the political discord at the height of the so-called migration crisis, and even today it has the potential to provide a stable foundation on which relations between the Czech Republic and Germany can be built.

In the autumn of 2018, President Miloš Zeman went on a state visit to Berlin, followed by Prime Minister Andrej Babiš. His audience with Chancellor Merkel was generally regarded as a success. Both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor described Czech-German relations as excellent, except for disagreements over migration. In addition to the migration issue and bilateral relations, they spoke about the future of the EU in relation to Brexit or the adoption of the new multiannual financial framework. It seems that despite all the controversies accompanying the figure of Prime Minister Babiš, the Czech Republic could be the most promising partner for Germany in Central Europe, which is also reflected in the exemplary nature of the Strategic Dialogue. In October, Foreign Minister Petříček also headed for Berlin. For him, it was the first foreign mission in office, which can be interpreted as a positive signal for the future of Czech-German relations.

While inter-parliamentary cooperation between the Czech Republic and Germany stagnated in 2018 due to the replacement of a large number of parliamentarians on both sides after the elections, the situation is improving. In February 2019, the delegation of the Bundestag's Interparliamentary Group of Friends of the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary visited the Chamber of Deputies to meet with members of the Czech Inter-Parliamentary Group of the Czech Republic and Germany and members of the European Affairs Committee. The development of contacts also benefits from the Czechoslovak roots of Renate Alt, chairwoman of the German group.

There were no major fluctuations in bilateral relations between the Czech Republic and Austria, nor has there been any significant progress. In January, Foreign Minister Petříček came to Vienna for a working visit. He also discussed with the Austrian Minister of European Affairs, Integration and Foreign Affairs Karin Kneissl the future of the Austerlitz format and EU-related topics. In April, President Zeman met his Austrian counterpart Alexander Van der Bellen during his visit to Austria. Unfortunately, Zeman's extraordinarily failed speech on the occasion of a meeting with compatriots, in which he, among other things, falsely criticised the former Mayor of Vienna Michael Häupl for lack of support for the Czech school in Vienna, became headline news.

Despite the emphasis that Foreign Minister Petříček has repeatedly tried to place on cooperation with Austria and Slovakia, the Austerlitz format is still the least active of the three pillars of Czech Central European policy. Nevertheless, cooperation is starting in certain areas - on the Czech side, the Ministry of Defence and the Department of International Law of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are particularly active. The first joint meeting of the Chairman of the Chamber of Deputies Vondráček, the Chairman of Austrian National Council Sobotka and the Chairman of the Slovak National Council Danko and the signing of the so-called Kroměříž Declaration on interparliamentary cooperation between the three countries can be considered a positive step towards further development of the Austerlitz format. However, despite the initial hopes of the Visegrad leaders to strengthen relations with Kurz's government, it has been confirmed in the past that Germany and other Western European countries remain Austria's preferred partners..



It will continue to be essential for Czech Central European policy that the divide between Central and Eastern Europe (often represented by the V<sub>4</sub>) on the one hand, and Western Europe, which also includes the most important Czech partner – Germany, on the other, does not deepen any further. Development of a bilateral and regional dialogue with Germany is a necessary precondition and instrument for this. All of Central Europe, including Germany, may lose out enormously in the long term should the EU be divided.

With this in mind, the Czech Republic should reach out to the entire region and use every opportunity to promote trust. The Czech Presidency of the Visegrad Group, which has been ongoing since July 2019, represents a suitable opportunity for this effort. Its declared focus on European partnerships and bottom-up driven agenda is the right way to find realistic common interests. At the same time, this approach may reduce the political polarization associated with Czech participation in the Visegrad Group, which may undermine the stability of Czech Central European policy in the future.

However, these positive developments can still be torpedoed by the Prime Minister, other constitutional officials or by pressure from the Parliament. Many politicians welcome the Visegrad Group's anti-immigration ticket, and some see this as its main mission. Similarly, the distance between the V<sub>4</sub> and Western Europe or the European institutions may increase as part of the debate on the protection of the rule of law in the EU or the addition of new safeguards for its protection, as planned in the context of the multiannual financial framework. The Czech Republic should therefore initiate a conversation on the quality of the rule of law in Central Europe with the Polish and Hungarian representatives at the government or at least parliamentary level.

In Poland, significant parliamentary elections will be held. Their results will determine the country's approach to European policy in the next period. Regardless of the outcome, Poland will remain an important partner with which the Czech Republic should continue to develop common security and defence policy. In this respect, it is necessary to continue cooperation in the regional format after the Visegrad Battlegroup of the EU at the end of 2019. The long-term unresolved bilateral issues that may prove to be problematic for the bilateral relations should not be neglected. The outcome of the dispute over the continuation of mining operation in Turów, which can cause significant water shortages problems in the Hrádec and Frýdlant areas, will also be a major factor influencing the relations.

A weakening of the emphasis on relations with the countries of the former Eastern Bloc can be expected once after Angela Merkel leaves the office of Chancellor. The new Chancellor, whether Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer of the CDU or someone from the other parties, will likely not have – unlike Merkel – the same bond to the region. Therefore, the Czech Republic should strive to build and maintain relations with these potential candidates. Regarding the future of the Strategic Dialogue, it is necessary to place particular emphasis on achieving concrete and tangible results. Moreover, it is necessary that these results and their contribution to Czech-German relations be adequately presented to the public and to other areas of possible cooperation. Significant potential lies in the further development of cross-border relations with Saxony and Bavaria, which could help to find a compromise in relations between the Czech Republic and Germany on topics such as energy and climate crisis. The relations which already exist should focus primarily on the aforementioned issues.

In the months following the September elections, it is expected that Austria will be occupied with forming of its new government. Nevertheless, the Czech Republic should strive to maintain the Austerlitz format with the aim of diversifying its Central European policy and actively come up with topics on which it is possible to cooperate within its framework - e.g. transport or dual education. EU issues where the three participating countries share their interest include, for example, promoting the integration of the West Balkan states into the EU.

## **CONTEXT**

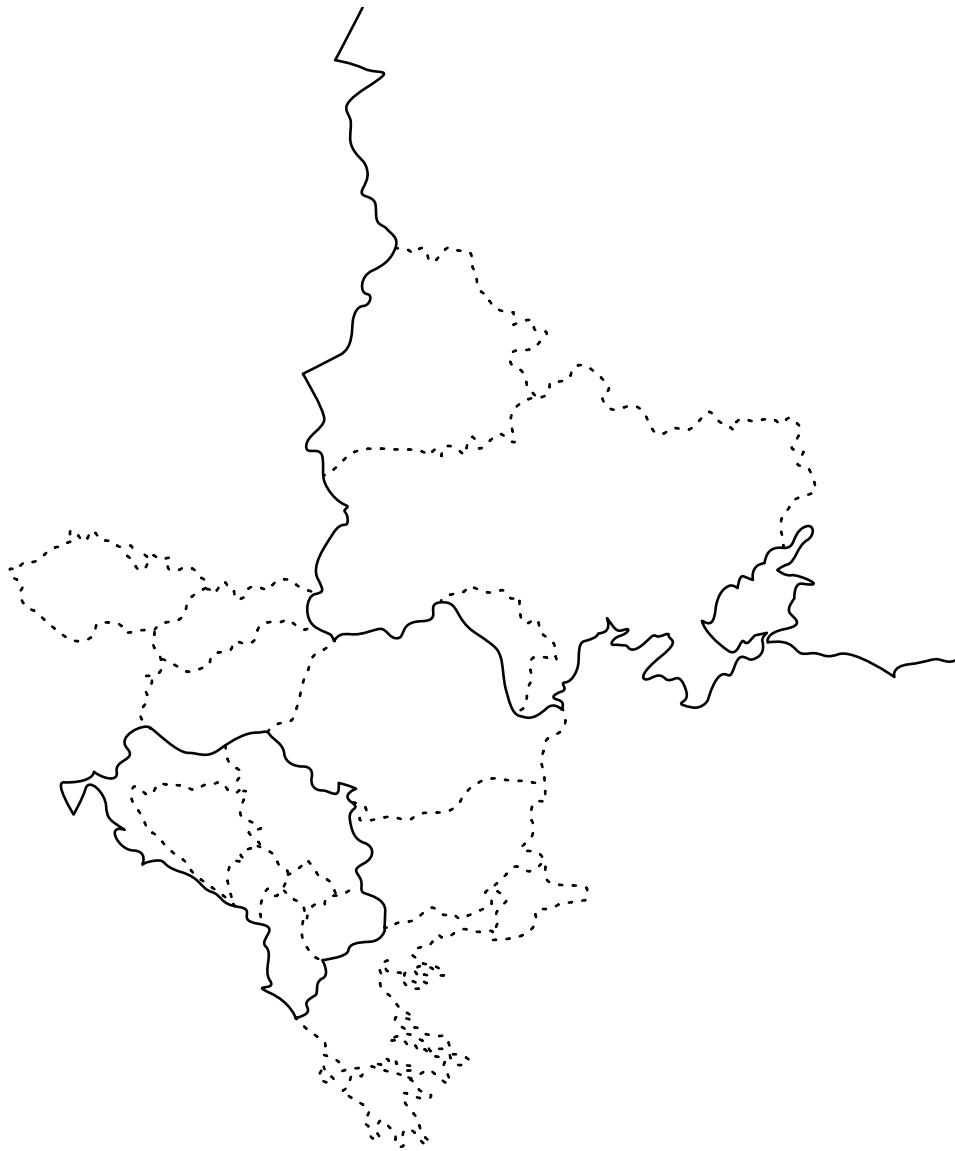
- Focus of the Slovak Presidency in the V4 on the negotiation of the multi-annual financial framework and on relations with Western European countries instead of migration issues
- Deepening the rule of law problems in Hungary and Poland and further responses from the European institutions
- Growing divide between the western and eastern parts of the EU

## **PRESENT**

- Continuing and strengthening of the Czech-German Strategic Dialogue
- Further development of political and, consequently, economic ties with Hungary and condemning the initiation of the Article 7 TEU mechanism against Hungary
- Start of the Czech V4 Presidency, which focuses on the practical agenda and the European dimension of the Visegrad cooperation
- More prominent Czech involvement in the Three Seas Initiative
- Development of expert, political and public debate on the benefits of the Czech Republic's membership in the V4

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Make maximum use of the Czech Presidency of the V4 to reduce tensions between Western Europe and Central-Eastern Europe and bridge the divisions between them
- Conduct a critical dialogue with the Polish and Hungarian authorities on the state of the rule of law in Central Europe at government and parliamentary level
- Establish and maintain contacts with the emerging next generation political representation in Germany



# **EASTERN EUROPE AND WESTERN BALKANS**

*Pavel Havlíček, Anna Jordanová,  
Michal Lebduška, Iva Svobodová*



“Integration of the West Balkans into the EU is the best way of ensuring stability, safety and prosperity in the region. We consider important to start accession talks with Macedonia and Albania in June.”

**TOMÁŠ PETŘÍČEK**

// 18 JANUARY 2019

“The decision of the Russian Federation to simplify the process of issuing of Russian passports to citizens of Ukraine who live in parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions is another step that undermines the chances of a peaceful solution to the conflict with Ukraine. It is an attack against Ukrainian sovereignty and contradicts the Minsk agreements.”

**MZV ČR**

// 26 APRIL 2019

“[...] let me say that I consider the Czech Republic one of the European flag bearers of the Eastern Partnership. And I am not only referring to the symbolic level when we started this activity in close cooperation with Poland and Sweden at the time of our Presidency of the European Union, but I mean in particular the future relations.”

**ANDREJ BABIŠ**

// 16 APRIL 2019

Last year, the relations between the Czech Republic and the EU on the one hand, with the countries of Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans on the other, were driven by the different levels of the Union's ambitions towards both regions. While the EU was proactive in the Western Balkans with its own initiatives, the Eastern Partnership region and Russia were, from the European point of view, more in a regime of crisis management and critical reflection. For example, the successful mediation of dialogue within the EU between Greece and Northern Macedonia, and the renaming of the former Yugoslav Republic, paved the way for this small Western Balkan country's admission to Euro-Atlantic structures. In the eastern neighbourhood - with the exception of the democratic transition in Armenia and the good but volatile situation in Moldova - equivalent progress in relations did not arrive. On the contrary, there were a number of negative events to which the EU had to respond. In general, although the Czech Republic, under the leadership of the new Foreign Minister Tomáš Petříček, sought to be more active in both regions, the way the relations with the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe will develop in terms of dynamics is largely determined by European consensus.

The polarisation in the way the Czech society views Russia continues. On the bilateral level, the Czech-Russian relations were plagued by conflicts. The opposition criticized the official visit to Moscow, led by Deputy Prime Minister Vondráček, as being too servile. After the last year's fiasco, the activity of the Czech-Russian Discussion Forum officially continued with the second meeting in Moscow this June, but this platform failed to perform to expectation in terms of added value for the development of Czech-Russian relations. In addition, other diplomatic disputes, in particular the case of renting flats by the Russian embassy in violation of diplomatic conventions or the expulsion of a member of the Russian ministerial delegation on the sanction sheet, are also reflected in other institutions, such as the campaign against Jana Rejnišová, the Czech representative in the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

The main issue in the economic relations remains to be the sanction mechanism linked to Russia's non-compliance with the Minsk peace agreements. The plans to engage Rosatom in the building of additional nuclear generation units in the Czech Republic have been met with several, especially security-related arguments. However, it is not certain in what direction the situation regarding the completion of nuclear units will continue to develop. BIS and the government opposition have repeatedly pointed out the security risks arising from precarious Russian economic activity in the Czech Republic.

Over the past year, several important human rights events were held in the Czech Republic, including the Boris Nemtsov Forum. For example, director Oleh Sentsov, ac-

tivist Oyub Titiev, Russian non-profit organization Memorial or Ukrainian sailors illegally detained during the Kerch crisis received verbal support and awards from Czech officials, including Minister of Foreign Affairs Petříček. This follows from the previous effort of the Czech side to communicate with the Russian civil society and the opposition-minded part of the Russian society rather than with representatives of official structures.

Given the conflict with Russia, full integration into Euro-Atlantic structures remains Ukraine's long-term strategic objective. This year's presidential and parliamentary elections confirmed the country's pro-Western and democratic direction. In the last year, the Czech Republic has seen a renewed interest in Ukraine both at the multilateral level of the Eastern Partnership and at the bilateral level, but Ukraine still does not receive as much attention from the Czech Republic as it deserves due to its importance. The minister's visit to Ukraine in January, including a trip to Mariupol, Eastern Ukraine and the front line in Donbas, as well as a renewed emphasis on the human rights agenda, including a meeting with Crimean Tatar delegation, confirmed the interest. The clear response to the escalation of the conflict in the Kerch Strait or the signing of the memorandum on the establishment of the Czech-Ukrainian Forum can also be seen in a positive light. On the other hand, the Czech-Ukraine relations suffered as a result of statements made by some Czech representatives including President Zeman, and visits to the Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories. Most attention in this respect has been given to the case of the son of Andrej Babiš and his presence in the Crimea, a discussion on the Banderites, which was stirred up in January by Vojtěch Filip, Chairman of the Communist Party, and the visit by MP Ondráček (Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia) to Donetsk in May.

Overall, the Eastern Partnership policy has lost its importance, despite its 10-year anniversary and a certain, however precarious, progress towards democracy in Armenia and Moldova. There is no clear consensus on the future of the Eastern Partnership at the Czech or EU level. Compared to the previous period, the Czech Republic has shifted from the rhetorical support of the Eastern Partnership to being an active player contributing, alongside Poland and Sweden, to keeping this external policy on the European agenda, for example through public diplomacy and its own initiatives on the future of the Eastern Partnership after 2020. The revived emphasis on the promotion of democracy and human rights, the rule of law and civil society, as well as the promotion of free press in the Eastern European region and the continuing proactive approach to local government reform within the multilateral dimension, can be seen in a positive

light. Especially in Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine, Czech diplomacy has been heard and appreciated for its good insight into internal relations and support for reforms in the countries.

The Czech Republic takes a very clear stance towards the enlargement of the EU in the case of the Western Balkan countries, and regularly includes this topic in international negotiations at the highest political level. The stability of the region, which is of value to the Czech Republic as a European ally and as a developing foreign market, remains a priority of Czech foreign policy. This was manifested in the Czech support of the acceleration of the Berlin process – the integration of the Western Balkans into the EU at the V<sub>4</sub> ministerial summit in Poznan in June 2019. The Czech Republic supported the prompt opening of accession negotiations with Northern Macedonia and Albania and announced that the topic of EU integration of the Western Balkans would be one of the priorities of the Czech V<sub>4</sub> Presidency.

The Czech Republic's focus in the Western Balkans was on the local level, similarly as in the Eastern Partnership region. Emphasis was given to strengthening good relations with local governments, which represent the most flexible level of decision-making, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bilateral relations are built mainly through economic diplomacy, which is also manifested in the areas of development and cultural cooperation. This approach strengthens the potential of Czech export but limits the Czech Republic when it comes to the development of a coordinated approach of the international community vis-à-vis sensitive political issues such as corruption, energy dependence on Russia or insufficient implementation of European legislation. Security was also on the agenda, as evidenced by the signing of the Northern Macedonia Accession Protocol to NATO in 2019, and the continued participation of Czech troops in international mine clearance projects and KFOR missions. President Zeman made a strong statement on participation in the Balkan missions on the day of the twentieth anniversary of the Czech Republic's accession to NATO; Zeman said that, in retrospect, he considered the approval of the 1999 NATO bombing of the former Yugoslavia by the Czech government in which he was Prime Minister as a mistake. By contrast, the revived tension between Kosovo and Serbia caused by the formation of the Kosovo army in December 2018, in which many people in the region see the risk of a renewed conflict, did not solicit an official statement from the Czech Republic (unlike criticism of the army's formation from the EU and NATO). This situation, too, shows the paradox of the Czech Republic's reluctance to take a clear position on current political issues of the region it considers to be a priority.



In the following period, it is necessary to count on the continuing aggressive behaviour on the part of Russia and further violations of international law by Russia. As the security and stability of the Czech Republic are dependent on the maintenance of international law, the Czech Republic should take an active stance against such behaviour. The Czech Republic can build on its former reputation of the mediator of human rights and international law issues. In its internal policy, the Czech Republic must persevere in the fight against Russian hybrid threats, especially disinformation operations. This includes the need to find a basic consensus across the domestic political spectrum on key security issues such as information and cybersecurity, protection of strategic sectors and infrastructure.

Given the clearly declared foreign policy course towards the EU and NATO and the growing trade exchange with EU Member States, Ukraine is an ideal country for developing political, economic and security relations. That is why it is necessary to continue to closely monitor the Ukrainian reform process, which will be challenged by the arrival of the new President Volodymyr Zelensky and the results of the parliamentary elections. It is still true that one of the most important factors stimulating the progress of the Ukrainian reforms is the pressure of the international community led by the EU and the IMF, as well as the local civil society, which should therefore not cease even with the advent of a new political representation.

The conflict with Russia will remain the key issue in relation to Ukraine, which makes cooperation in the area of security very important; maintaining anti-Russian sanctions, which should be further expanded in case of further escalation of tension, is equally important. The clear aim of the Czech foreign policy should be to act actively and condemn any negative acts, such as insensitive and anti-Ukrainian statements by some Czech representatives or visits to the Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories. In the area of cultural cooperation and people-to-people contacts, it is possible to take advantage of the recently established Czech-Ukrainian Forum or Ukrainian Institute, whose branch is to open in Prague in the future. These platforms are also suitable for extending cooperation between non-profit organizations or strengthening contacts and establishing a constructive agenda in mutual relations. An integral part of Czech policy towards Ukraine is also technical and transformation cooperation which, together with strategic communication, remains an ideal tool for maintaining a positive image of the Czech Republic in Ukraine. The Czech Republic can proactively use the opportunity of

its V<sub>4</sub> presidency from 1 July 2019 to mediate bilateral disputes between Ukraine and its neighbours, especially Hungary.

In view of the exchange of political leaders in Brussels and the not very strong effort in this area on the part of the new representatives of the European Commission, we cannot expect too much activity on the Eastern Agenda in the coming months. Therefore, the initiative and involvement of EU Member States, especially members of the so-called like-minded group, consisting mainly of Central and Eastern European countries and Sweden, will be crucial. The Czech Republic must stand out as an unequivocal advocate for the EU's eastern policy and a supporter of the value-based approach important for the development of the Eastern Partnership after 2020. It should also maintain its interest in holding the EaP summit in Prague in 2022 and efforts to influence the pan-European debate on the EaP towards a more proactive and strategic approach to the region. The first step should be a change in the government's position on the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), which differs from other related EU Member States. The Czech Republic should also support some Polish proposals from the 10th Anniversary Conference of the EaP in Brussels: for example, to strengthen institutionalization, deepen sectoral cooperation or closer integration of partner states into the EU structures within the EaP+ concept as promoted by the European Parliament. It would also be appropriate to strengthen the area of people-to-people contacts, youth exchanges and the resilience of Eastern Partnership countries. Last but not least, the future Czech engagement in Eastern Europe is important in view of the dynamic process of democratization currently taking place in Armenia and Moldova, but also in Ukraine and Georgia, which requires a high level of foreign aid. It is in these countries that Czech diplomacy should be active in supporting internal reforms, transfer of transformation know-how and cooperation with the civil society.

Personnel changes after the EP elections will certainly slow down the integration of the Western Balkans into the EU. The process is currently stagnating not only because of the Brexit events opening the debate on the dissatisfaction of some Member States with the current model of European cooperation but also because of the lack of confidence of older members in further enlargement. If the Czech Republic wants to continue to support the integration of the Balkans into the EU, it will probably have to abandon mere proclamations and clearly defend its position at the European level. However, the integration is hampered by growing conflicts between the Balkan elites, and its partners there will soon expect the Czech Republic to take a position on sensi-

tive geopolitical issues, which it has so far rather avoided. In order to specify the direction in the region, it is necessary to update the concept of the Czech foreign policy in the Western Balkans, which has not existed as a separate policy document since 2013. Independent media, which the Czech Republic plans to support financially even more than before, will also be key to maintaining democratic development in the region. As a founding member of the Western Balkans Fund, the Czech Republic should take advantage of the momentum afforded by the second round of financing non-profit projects and seek to transform the Civil Society Platform established by the fund into a real force for deepening of the cooperation between the Western Balkan countries.

## CONTEXT

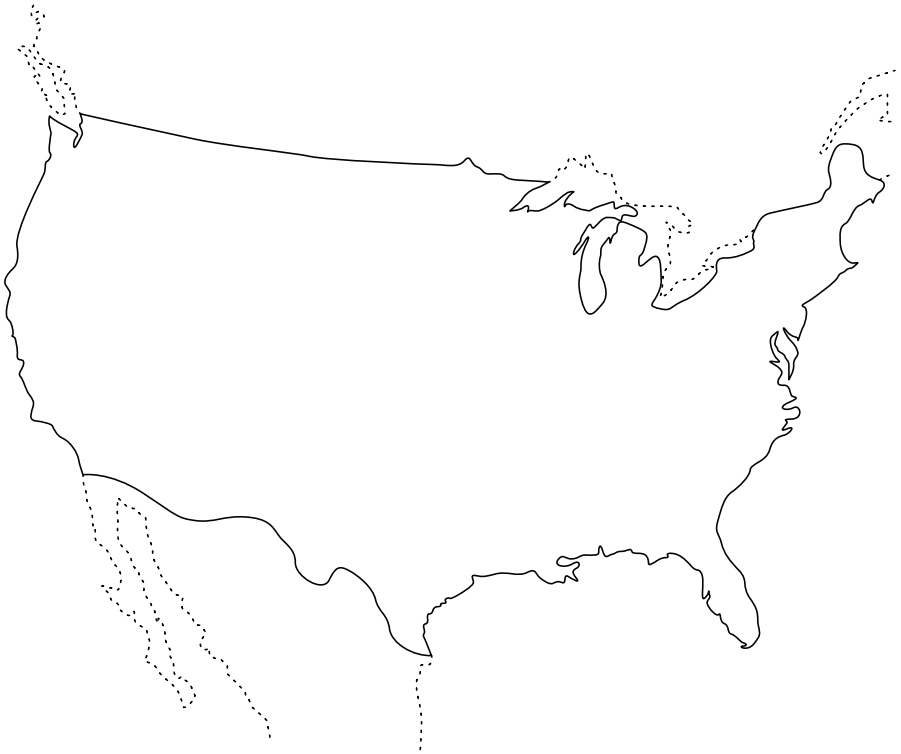
- Strategic reflection on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Eastern Partnership and debate on how it will continue in the next decade
- Slow integration of the Western Balkans into the EU and the continuing conflict between the states
- Russia's continued aggressive policy towards the West and the EaP states
- Western-oriented Ukraine, continuing reforms in spite of all difficulties

## PRESENT

- More active involvement of the Czech Republic in the debate on the future of the Eastern Partnership after 2020
- Czech interests in economic diplomacy and know-how sharing in the Western Balkans
- A polarized debate on Russia and cooperation with it across Czechia and the EU
- Hand-over of political power in Ukraine and continuing instability in the Eastern neighbourhood

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Engage more actively in the process of revising the Eastern Partnership and organizing the EaP summit in Prague during the Czech EU Presidency in 2022
- Ratify the Northern Macedonia Protocol on NATO membership and strengthen cooperation with the Western Balkans in the area of rule of law and democracy
- Actively support reforms in Ukraine, including the rule of law, fight against corruption and strengthening of the civil society sector
- Develop coordinated strategic communication about/in Eastern Europe and continue to build up a good reputation in Eastern Europe



# **TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS AND SECURITY POLICY**

*Michal Bokša, Petr Boháček, Jakub Kufčák*

“We have the opportunity of catching up with a train we had missed. The US arrived to the conclusion that they have left our corner of Europe alone for too long.”

**PETR KOLÁŘ**

// 8 MARCH 2019

“A country of our size cannot afford the luxury of dreaming of some kind of neutrality or acting solely on our own.”

**PETR PAVEL**

// 12 MARCH 2019

“If the Americans pull out of Afghanistan, so will we.”

**LUBOMÍR METNAR**

// 9 FEBRUARY 2019

Transatlantic cooperation is the foundation of the security of the Czech Republic and therefore maintaining and strengthening relations between Europe and the United States remains a strategic priority of Czech security policy. Although the uncertainty initially associated with Donald Trump's term as President of the United States has diminished considerably, tensions in transatlantic relations due to current US unilateralism and confrontational diplomacy remain. European defence cooperation initiatives still represent a significant missed opportunity to considerably strengthen both the security of the Czech Republic and the European pillar of the North Atlantic Alliance. A delayed modernization of the Czech Armed Forces and the ability to adapt to new security trends, especially the increasing number of cyber threats, remain a challenge that must be addressed by the Czech Republic.

The NATO summit in Brussels in 2018 was strongly marked by disagreements between NATO Allies and the destabilized security environment in Eastern Europe. In response to Russian aggression, modernization initiatives have been finalized to strengthen the credibility of collective defence. These included mainly new logistic headquarters and the adoption of the 4x30 concept, which is to provide the Alliance with more operational units in less time. The aforementioned disagreements were also reflected in Trump's treatment of the European allies. The US president was particularly critical of the planned German-Russian gas pipeline and insufficient increases in the European defence spending. However, in the context of the growing influence of China and the Russian Federation, the interest of the United States in Central Europe has increased. This manifested not only in the visit of the US Foreign Minister in the region, although not directly in the Czech Republic, but also in the invitation of the representatives of the V4 countries to the White House.

The visit of Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš to the White House, which focused on security issues, can be considered as the highlight of Czech-American relations in the recent period. After six years of half-hearted relations, and given the uncertainty regarding the strategic orientation of the Czech Republic as a result of President Zeman's controversial statements, there have finally been some signs of recovery. The discussed issues of energy security, namely the import of US liquefied gas into Europe, and the postponed Czech acquisition of 12 military helicopters were joined by the campaign against Chinese information technologies, where the Czech Republic has taken a stand congruent with US priorities. Babiš also used the meeting to highlight the EU-wide position against the imposition of customs duties on imports of European cars into the US. He also rejected Trump's criticism of Russian gas imports into Europe. Apart

from cyber security, however, the meeting did not offer any significant topic for further development of bilateral relations which have been held back mainly by the issue of defence spending.

The Czech Republic is still lagging behind in terms of increasing defence spending and strengthening its capacity for action. Since 2014, the Czech military budget has been growing at a similar pace as the Czech economy, i.e. almost stagnating in terms of GDP. The real problem, however, is that the increase in expenditure is attributable almost exclusively to the increase in the number of soldiers, not to modernization projects. Yet without the renewal of major military equipment such as tracked armoured personnel carriers, multi-purpose helicopters, radar technology or artillery, it is impossible to realistically meet NATO collective defence commitments or achieve 2% defence spending by 2024.

The Czech Republic still does not make sufficient use of the potential of European arms cooperation to develop its military capabilities or the arms industry. Despite the fact that the Czech Republic has recently achieved two successes: approval of the Czech PESCO project and involvement in the project of the first European high-altitude long-elevation drone, as part of which the Czech Republic comes into direct cooperation with large Western European companies associated in the Organisation for Joint Armament Cooperation (OCCAR) for the first time. In the second wave of PESCO projects, the Czech Republic no longer underestimated the preparation and negotiation of support, as was the case with the first wave. Thanks to Germany's support, the Czech project in the field of electronic warfare succeeded.

Two topics dominated the domestic security debate. The first was cyber security associated with the development of the fifth generation of wireless systems (5G) and the Chinese company Huawei. The National Cyber and Information Security Authority warned against using the company's software and hardware. Despite the dissenting opinion of the President of the Republic, Miloš Zeman, the Czech Republic joined the side of Alliance countries, which already limit or publicly label the Chinese telecommunications company as a potential security threat. The second was the topic of fake news and the so-called information war. Disinformation portals, which have experienced a marked boom in previous years, have already reached their peak and do not show significant potential for further growth. In addition, the society-wide debate on fake news has been considerably desecuritized, which can be seen as a step in the right direction.



Europe's ability to directly contribute to strengthening US security and strategic goals in the region in the coming years will greatly affect the internal coherence of the Transatlantic Alliance. It cannot be expected that internal political scepticism regarding the benefits of the North Atlantic Alliance for the US will end completely with the eventual departure of Donald Trump from the White House. Given Europe's currently limited military and technological strength, building common defence capabilities within the European Union is a promising tool to bolster Europe's role as a strong and reliable security partner. The degree of cooperation between the United States and Europe regarding China and the penetration of high-risk Chinese technologies will also become a significant factor in strengthening of the transatlantic relations.

The Czech Republic should continue its efforts to improve relations with the United States. The foreign-political representation has not yet sufficiently capitalized on the renewed interest in the Central European region on the part of the United States and will therefore have to credibly demonstrate its will to strengthen its allied commitments. The aim should also be the de-escalation and subsequent stabilization of transatlantic trade relations. Better coordination of the European response to a potential threat from China (see East Asia chapter) is desirable, not only in the area of cyber security but also in the area of controlling Chinese investment. The creation of a strong European defence pillar within NATO is also an important step. Finally, the Czech Republic should also take advantage of the opportunity to strengthen the EU's position in space activities (see Selected Global Issues) and the intention of NATO countries to develop NATO space policy so that this area becomes a permanent part of foreign and security policy.

At European level, it can be assumed that Western European states will continue to converge their arms industries and armed forces. Undoubtedly, both the already proven instruments (OCCAR) and the recently created instruments (European Defence Fund, Permanent Structured Cooperation) will be used for this purpose. The Czech Republic must not only be involved in such initiatives, but also strive to ensure that their further development is ideally directly under the heading or at least in the closest possible connection with the European institutions. Projects that are completely outside such structures may potentially prove to be more effective, but the price will be the minimum chance of influencing in any way the already established European projects from the position of the Czech Republic. Although the Defence Ministry is right to perceive European defence cooperation as a potential opportunity, at the political level this topic

is not sufficiently addressed. Instead, the current debates are dominated by proxy discussions about the conflict between the “European Army” and NATO.

The ability of the Czech Republic to meet its allied commitments in the coming years greatly depends on the country’s ability proceed with the acquisition process. At least at the structural level (heavy brigade, light brigade, airborne regiment), the Army of the Czech Republic already has the foundations to make a valid contribution to virtually all forms of NATO forces - from collective defence, for which there is already heavy brigade assigned, through the potential assignment of a light brigade to the 4×30 concept, all the way to assigning paratroopers for the NATO Rapid Reaction Force. There is room for improvement mainly in the building up of reserves, which would bolster defence capacity in the event of a major armed conflict, and the development of artillery and air defence capabilities. For example, the project to modernize air defence would be a good a way to build on the still underdeveloped arms cooperation in Europe.

Brexit represents a short-term threat to cyber security. At the EU level, the UK has made a significant contribution to the development of standards in this area. Therefore, the Czech Republic should support close cooperation between the EU and Great Britain after its departure from the Union. At the same time, the Czech Republic should strive to strengthen the role of the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) in ensuring cyber security. Due to the high standard of cyber security but relatively low strategic significance, the Czech Republic may become a frequent target for third party testing attacks. Failure to avert such attacks would not only have real security implications but would also damage our reputation among allies.

By contrast, misinformation does not pose a significant security threat in the short term. However, it must be acknowledged that concepts such as computational propaganda and deep fake in the medium to long term can greatly enhance the real capabilities of foreign information operations. At the EU and NATO level, the Czech Republic should therefore strive to expand the human and material capacities of the EU East StratCom Task Force and NATO StratCom, which are understaffed and under-resourced.

## **CONTEXT**

- Persistent tensions in transatlantic relations, American unilateralism and confrontational diplomacy
- Continuing convergence of the European arms industry and the armed forces
- Growing US focus on Central Europe in connection with the growing influence of China and Russia

## **PRESENT**

- Efforts to restart Czech-American relations in the absence of a leading theme which could be used as a basis for their further development
- Slow rate of increase in defence spending, which is, for the most part, limited to personnel
- The Czech Republic does not make sufficient use of the potential of European arms cooperation

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Be actively involved in European security initiatives
- Significantly expand the Czech Army's reserves and support capabilities in the areas of artillery and air defence
- Launch an acquisition process to improve the ability to meet allied commitments





# MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA

*Tereza Jermanová, Matěj Denk, Josef Kučera,  
Karolína Lahučká, Vilém Řehák*

“The Czech Republic has long supported the enlargement (EU). We want to continue the accession talks with Turkey. But the process has two sides. The accession process is based on the fulfilment of conditions by the candidate country, for example in the area of human rights, democracy and the like.”

**TOMÁŠ PETŘÍČEK**

// 30 APRIL 2019

“I promise to do my best to reach the third base – after honorary consulate and the Czech House – and I will let you guess what this third base is.”

**MILOŠ ZEMAN**

at the Knesset  
// 26 NOVEMBER 2018

“[In] the context of sustainable development we have to pay more attention to the southern dimension of our neighbourhood, namely Africa.”

**TOMÁŠ PETŘÍČEK**

// 18 OCTOBER 2018

“The Czech Republic is already applying a restrictive policy towards Saudi Arabia when it comes to military exports. We export mainly equipment and vehicles, not deadly material.”

**TOMÁŠ PETŘÍČEK**

// 24 OCTOBER 2018

Due to their location in the close European neighbourhood, the Middle East and Africa are important regions for Czech foreign policy. This was also acknowledged by Foreign Minister Petříček, when he defined long-neglected sub-Saharan Africa as one of the new foreign policy vectors in his speech when he came into office. A substantial part of both regions has been experiencing instability in recent years, which has a direct impact on European security. The security situation in the Middle East last year was mainly influenced by rising tensions between the US, Iran and Israel, and the continued rivalry of regional and world powers and non-state actors, which manifested mainly in conflicts in Syria and Yemen. The first half of this year ushered uncertainty into the developments in northern Africa, where non-violent civil protests rocked the Algerian and Sudanese regimes, while the internationally recognized government in Libya came under pressure from opposition militias. Further to the south, African countries faced a surge of undemocratic tendencies, and the Sahel states were not very successful in curbing radical Islamists. Despite these problems, both regions represent a viable foreign trade opportunity for the Czech Republic.

Czech diplomacy has long seen Israel as its main partner in the Middle East, and in the last year this direction has only been confirmed. This is evidenced by the growing trade exchange and official visits by three key players, Foreign Minister Petříček, Prime Minister Babiš and President Zeman. In November last year, the latter symbolically opened the Czech House in Jerusalem, which promotes tourism and business and cultural contacts. Despite the close ties between the Czech Republic and Israel, in our last year's report we commended the Czech diplomacy for its effort to take a more balanced position with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It needs to be pointed out, however, that the Czech Republic has moved away from this approach. In line with the EU, the Czech Republic refused to follow the controversial US action, which in March officially recognized Israeli sovereignty over the occupied Golan Heights in violation of international law. However, it clearly deviated from the mainstream European position in the debate about relocating the Czech Embassy to Jerusalem. The joint statement of government ministers does not unequivocally reject this move, and the relocation of the embassy has the support of President Zeman and a substantial number of deputies.

After eight years of the Syrian conflict, there was a shift last year towards consolidating the position of current President Bashar Assad. At the same time, in March this year, the IS in Syria lost control of the rest of its former territory, although it is premature to talk about the permanent defeat of an organization that still has fighters, resources and ideology. In Syria, the Czech Republic was primarily involved in two ways:

providing humanitarian aid and controversially maintaining - as the only EU member state - diplomatic contacts with the Assad regime at the highest level. The war deprived of home more than ten million people who are predominantly internally displaced or have taken refuge in neighbouring countries, with a small portion going to Europe. The first engagement reflects the Czech intention to address migration in the countries of origin and first refuge. The question in relation to maintaining diplomatic relations is whether the embassy actually served as a useful channel of information to our allies in NATO and the EU, or rather this action has helped to legitimize the Assad regime internationally, while weakening Europe's long standing efforts to isolate the regime through applying sanctions.

Recognizing Turkey's fundamental role in resolving the Syrian conflict, the Czech Republic continued to support Turkey as a strategic partner for the EU and a NATO member. However, the Czech Republic also demonstrates that not all Turkey's political actions are supported - for example, the occupation of Syrian territories, which NATO has been talking to Turkey about for a long time. Despite the economic crisis that culminated in Turkey in the autumn of 2018, trade between the two countries continued to grow. In November 2018, the conference in Palermo also delivered a breakthrough in the diplomatic relations which have been rather cold since the Czech Republic's recognition of the Armenian genocide, and in the autumn of 2019 a meeting is planned between Prime Minister Babiš and President Erdoğan. The meeting should focus mainly on business and trade, in particular finding a solution to the failed Czech investment project Adularya 2010.

The export of Czech weapons to countries in the Middle East systematically violating human rights or actively contributing to regional conflicts remains a controversial issue. In recent years, Saudi Arabia, which independent organizations consider to be one of the world's least free countries, has been an important destination of Czech military material exports. In October, in response to the brutal murder of Jamal Khashoggi, a voluble critic of the Saudi regime, the EP called for an EU arms embargo and Germany, for example, has already implemented it. Although finding out the exact extent of Czech exports at the moment is prevented by the system of sharing this information, Petříček's cautious statements advocating this type of trade suggest that the Czech Republic did not follow the German example. The supply of arms is also problematic due to Saudi regional engagement. Saudi Arabia financially and materially supports a number of non-state armed groups and through these activities contributes to prolonging the current largest humanitarian disaster - the war in Yemen. Similarly problematic is

the export of arms to the United Arab Emirates or Egypt. If the Czech Republic really seeks to resolve conflicts contributing to migration or terrorism directly in the region, it should end exports of military material to these countries.

The Czech Republic also sought to strengthen its direct operation in the high-risk Sahel region, which is a source and transit region for migration. This engagement is based on the Czech Republic's Strategy for Supporting the Stabilization and Development of the Sahel Countries for 2018-2021 from April 2018. In the first phase, Czech participation in EU missions in Mali, where we are now one of the largest contributors, was increased. Efforts to build own capacities in the region and reinforce security, political and economic cooperation have so far been less successful. The establishment of a Czech embassy in Bamako, Malaysia, is a key prerequisite, but the government-approved January deadline has not been met. The second key milestone - to appoint a Special Envoy for the Sahel to coordinate our activities in the region at ministerial level and with foreign partners - has not yet been achieved.

Promoting trade cooperation and investment is one of the key Czech priorities in Africa. In recent years, Czech companies have been able to penetrate African markets to a greater extent; further development of trade relations is also dependent on state support. Projects of economic diplomacy play a fundamental role. These projects are implemented by embassies in cooperation with individual ministries and the private sector within the PROPED program. However, the number of these projects decreased slightly year on year and there is also a lack of sustained support from the highest political leaders on the ground.

One of the declared objectives of the Foreign Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa is to promote stability and good governance. However, a positive review of the controversial elections in Zimbabwe and a uncritical attitude towards the inauguration of the new President of the Democratic Republic of Congo who had been elected in opaque and rigged elections indicate a potential conflict between the two priorities. Delaying the agenda of good governance at the moment may appear to be the right step to ensure stability, but Czech diplomacy should be aware that such a policy may endanger both objectives in the long run.





In the coming period, developments in the Middle East will be shaped in particular by the situation in the presently escalating US-Iran relations. It is crucial for the Czech Republic, as well as for the EU, to prevent possible conflict escalation. The EU should continue to insist on the implementation of the nuclear agreement and maintain a dialogue with Iran - international exclusion could lead to nuclear arms race in the Middle East, one of the most apocalyptic scenarios possible.

Negotiations on the post-war restructuring in Syria will also be important, as the outcome will decide, among other things, whether and under what conditions the displaced people will be able to return. Although their repatriation will also depend on improving the security and economic situation in the war-stricken country, talks should ensure that the Syrians are not persecuted upon their return. However, reducing US presence in the country is likely to decrease the potential influence of our NATO and EU partners in the negotiations. Czech diplomacy should strive for the EU to converge its approach, because only in this way will it be able to retain some influence on the outcome. It is unlikely that these problems will be resolved in the short term, and neighbouring countries affected by migration will therefore continue to face instability. Although the situation in Lebanon and Jordan will be difficult to sustain in the long term, humanitarian and development aid can provide at least a temporary relief, and the Czech Republic should therefore continue these activities.

Diversification of relations with the Gulf countries, which have so far been rather random, could contribute to reducing the problematic regional operations of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. In particular, the relations with Qatar (currently via the embassy in Kuwait) and Oman (via the embassy in Riyadh) will be of paramount importance. Qatar, as a potentially important trading partner, is profiling itself as a key regional player balancing the influence of Saudi Arabia and is also an important mediator in dealing with Islamist organizations - currently facilitating negotiations between the US and the Taliban on peace in Afghanistan. The Czech Republic should follow the example of countries such as Hungary or Croatia, which have already established official ties with Qatar. Oman, which is now stepping out from a long period of international isolation, plays an important role as the primary mediator of escalated regional relations, whether involving Saudi Arabia and Iran, or individual factions of the Yemeni war. The already existing initiative to deepen relations with Oman, including the establishment of the embassy in Muscat, should be given a clearer form.

If Czech diplomacy wants to accentuate the human rights agenda and promote democracy, it should speak out more strongly on electoral manipulation, violence against the opposition, discrimination of minorities and usurpation of political power by the military in the Middle East and Africa. The latter problem is currently particularly evident in Sudan and Algeria. The resignation of the presidents after non-violent civil protests led in the first phase only to strengthening of the position of the army and to delays in negotiations with the opposition and civil society organizations on the form of transitional political organization and the date of free elections. The human rights agenda should be reflected more in our relations with Israel, and the Czech Republic should criticize human rights violations in the Palestinian Occupied Territories and increasing discrimination against Arabs in Israel.

Undoubtedly, economic diplomacy will remain one of the Czech priorities in sub-Saharan Africa in the coming period. However, it will be necessary to intensify the support of Czech companies by embassies, ministries and top representatives of the country, especially in important regional markets such as Senegal, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Nigeria or Angola. Negotiations on the reorganization of EU relations with African, Caribbean and Pacific countries will also be an important agenda, as the current Cotonou Agreement will expire in 2020. The new treaty should place more emphasis on partnership and shared responsibility between the two sides. From the statements made so far, it can be assumed that the EU will focus on security issues such as migration and the fight against terrorism. This opens up space for the Czech Republic to promote its own goals, which should follow from the specific topics defined in the objectives of sustainable development and be limited and achievable.

## CONTEXT

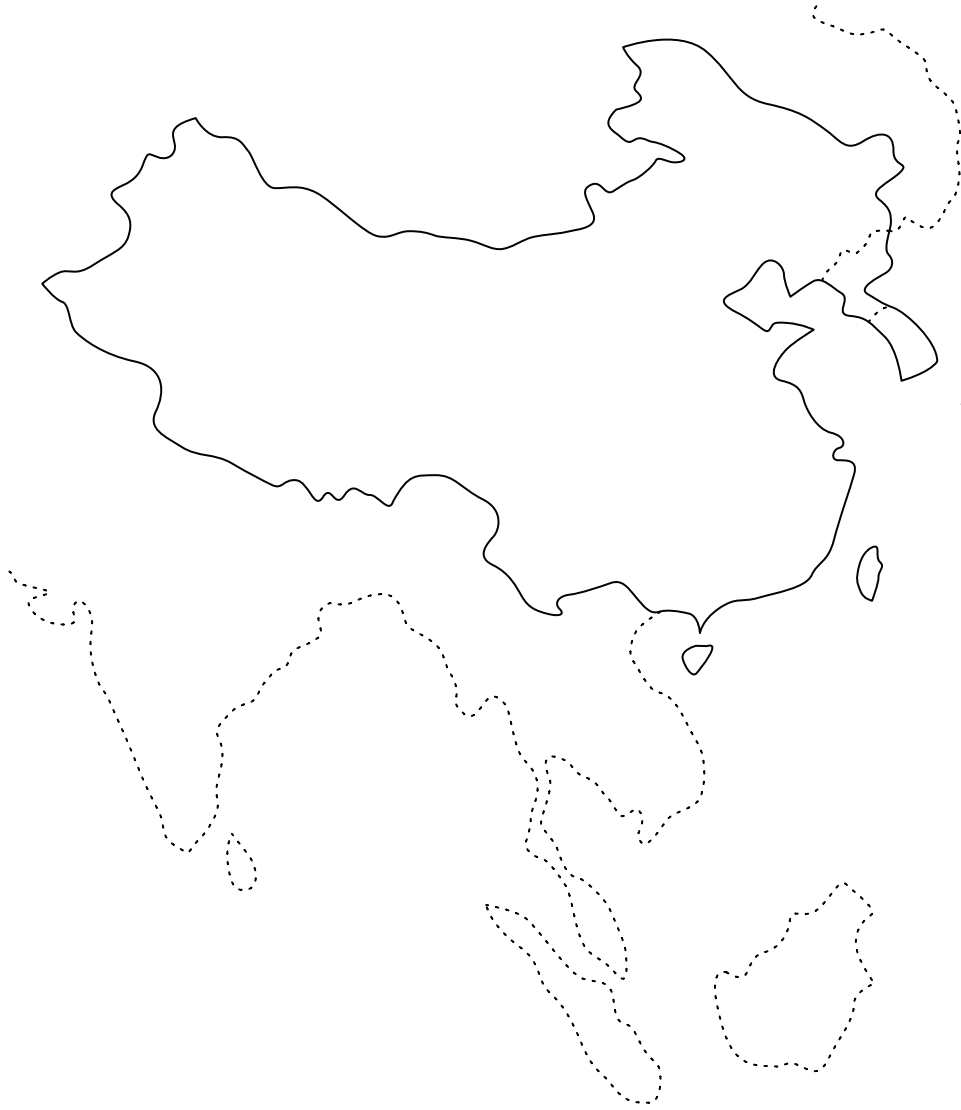
- Intensification of anti-Arab policy in Israel
- Escalation of relations between the US and Israel on the one hand and Iran on the other
- Shift in the Syrian conflict towards strengthening the position of current President Bashar Assad
- Persistent security instability in the Sahel
- Strengthening authoritarian tendencies in many African countries

## PRESENT

- Prioritizing trade relations and arms exports over value-based foreign policy
- An uncritical attitude towards Israel and a risky game to move the Czech embassy to Jerusalem
- Limited capacity to strengthen direct operation in the Sahel
- Inconsistent attitude towards promoting democracy and good governance in Africa

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Defend human rights, promote democracy and good governance and critically reflect on non-democratic tendencies
- Maintain balanced relations with Israelis and Palestinians, oppose increasing discrimination against the Arab population and expansion of settlements in the occupied territories
- Eliminate arms exports to countries that violate human rights and destabilize the Middle East
- Contribute to unifying Europe's position on the Syrian conflict, continue development and humanitarian aid in Syria and neighbouring countries, and work to ensure the safe return of the Syrians
- Diversify relations with Gulf countries





# **EAST ASIA**

*Václav Kopecký*

“I think that China should honour the contracts with PKF – Prague Philharmonia and not cancel the tour. Failing to honour contracts points to the fact that China is not a reliable trading partner.”

**ZDENĚK HŘIB**

// 18 JULY 2019

“In Europe, there is this angry little red corner – the country which is against Huawei.”

**MILOŠ ZEMAN**

// 28 APRIL 2019

“Neither the Czech government nor the Czech state have made any mistakes. We are an independent, sovereign country and I have nothing to apologize for. What the ambassador did is unconventional.”

**ANDREJ BABIŠ**

// 6 JANUARY 2019

The Czech Republic's relations with Asian countries have been dominated by contacts with China over the last twelve months, which have developed dramatically. Babiš's government has so far more noticeable issues with Beijing than the previous cabinet of Bohuslav Sobotka. On the economic level, most of the companies owned by CEFC have been finally taken over by the state-owned company CITIC but new investments did not materialize. In the realm of politics, relations are now rather complicated. On the other hand, the situation with two other key Asian partners, Japan and South Korea, is without any significant issues.

Beijing is increasingly assertive in its foreign policy all over the world, and the repercussions of this have been also felt in the Czech Republic. When the National Office for Cyber and Information Security (NÚKIB) issued in December 2018 its report warning against components of Chinese companies Huawei and ZTE in critical infrastructure networks, this was not an isolated case within the European Union. The Czech approach was not so much focused on specific components that could pose a problem, but rather on the incompatibility of legal systems. China's laws instruct Chinese companies to cooperate with the secret services without the possibility of refusing to do so. This means that the use of their technologies could pose a security risk for the Czech Republic, e.g. in the case of data flowing through the network or its complete shutdown.

There was the first major conflict in Czech-Chinese relations in a long time, which even led to a meeting between Prime Minister Babiš and Chinese Ambassador Zhang Jianmin just before Christmas. A subsequent post on Facebook by the embassy stated that "the Chinese side acknowledges the efforts of the Czech government to correct the errors." This formulation prompted Prime Minister Babiš to accuse the ambassador of a lie. Despite the subsequent hushed settlement, Czech-Chinese relations are far from free of tribulations.

The Czech Republic continued to participate in meetings of Chinese platforms, but there were also critical voices. Prime Minister Babiš visited Dubrovnik in April for the 16+1 Summit of (now 17+1 after the accession of Greece), complaining about the absence of major Chinese investments and a slow increase in Czech exports to China. To illustrate: in 2014 China was the destination of Czech exports in the value of € 1.5 billion and in 2018 € 2.2 billion despite a huge number of meetings. President Zeman was also cautiously disappointed at his visit to the New Silk Road Summit in April, but he at the same time called the Czech Republic an "angry red corner" for criticizing Huawei. The summit brought the usual promise of billions of investments, this time mainly in the banking sector, or an agreement on cooperation in the promotion of Chinese ice-hockey.

In July, another dispute broke out in connection with Prague Mayor Zdeněk Hřib's trip to Taiwan in April, and the capital's attempt to strike out a passage from the Prague-Beijing partnership agreement which was worded in such a way that Prague would explicitly recognize that Taiwan is part of Chinese territory. Beijing accused Prague of disrupting mutual relations, cancelled the already arranged performances of the Prague Philharmonia and began sending out press releases warning the Czech Republic of further negative steps. Mayor Hřib responded to these warnings in a rather laconic way by saying that it is China that is failing to deliver on its economic promises.

In addition to the capital city, the Senate also became a more active player in the Czech-China relations. In March, the Chamber issued a resolution condemning human rights violations in China and urged the government to discuss this with the Chinese side. However, the government has not yet addressed this issue.

Relations with Japan and Korea have not brought any significant news over the past year. The main priority for Korea remains the completion of Czech nuclear power plants, which is a central topic of mutual negotiations. Strategic partnership negotiations continue with Japan, but Tokyo prefers the existing regional V4+Japan format instead of dealing with countries separately.



Although the Czech Republic is actively involved in most of China's initiatives, and until recently it has met many of Beijing's demands, it has not seen any real benefit. On the contrary, the situations which followed a warning by NÚKIB and the actions by the Mayor of Prague showed that the Czech Republic had no privileged position in China's book. China's retaliatory measures against the Prague Philharmonia and other musical ensembles can only be the beginning, and entrepreneurs should be aware of the risks to trade relations.

Greater coordination within the EU should be a priority area for Czech foreign policy towards China. Only the EU can play the role of a sufficiently strong partner for Beijing, despite all the practical problems of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy. In addition to a more coherent approach towards China (e.g. the relatively rapid approval of the Foreign Investment Review Mechanism), the EU will be negotiating an investment treaty with China in 2020, which will aim to equalize the treatment of foreign and domestic investors in the Chinese market. The Czech Republic should be active on all these issues and offer its experience.

The Czech Republic now plays an important role in the 5G area, where it should continue its leadership role in seeking a pan-European solution at the summits organized in Prague. However, it is important to view this dispute in the context of the US trade war with China, in which the European Union must avoid to become only an instrument of the warring parties. Europe-wide rules should contain a very broad consensus on the areas in which Chinese technology poses a real threat and in which it would be merely commercially discriminated. At home, the Czech Republic should complete the law introducing investment screening instruments, which should also include industries with significant societal impact such as the media.

In initiatives such as 17+1 and the New Silk Road, the Czech Republic should strive to create a common agenda and coordinate the positions of all 17 states. Although it is not possible to expect fundamental results at the moment, it is probable that leaving the initiative would not bring anything of value to the Czech Republic.

Human rights issues are becoming more prominent, with more and more actors (such as the Senate) getting involved. The developments have also affected the domestic scene, as was the case, for example, of Beijing's request to extradite a group of Taiwanese suspects of fraud, which the Czech Republic refused. The Czech Republic should participate in a possible reform of human rights dialogue at the EU level, as it is not very func-

tional in its present form. Despite 37 rounds of meetings, the human rights situation in China continues to deteriorate (e.g. the massive internment of the Uighurs in Xinjiang) and the EU does not have effective tools to exert pressure on Beijing for better results. The Czech Republic should also continue to explain to the Chinese counterparts the principles of democratic distribution of power and the bad form of interfering in the activities of elected local governments.

In 2020, the Czech Republic will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations with Japan, which represents a unique opportunity for strengthening mutual relations, not only in the cultural sphere. A successful conclusion of strategic partnership negotiations would be desirable. Yet the Japanese side is less driven in this respect than the Czernin Palace, which has been pursuing the partnership for a long time.

## **CONTEXT**

- China's increasing assertiveness
- Political discord and stagnation of economic cooperation
- Stable relations with other East Asian partners without any significant progress

## **PRESENT**

- Disputes over the role of Chinese companies in the development of 5G networks and relations with Taiwan
- More active role of the Senate and the City of Prague
- Continued involvement in China's foreign policy initiatives

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Strive for greater coordination of foreign policy towards China at the EU level
- Actively participate in the development of pan-European rules for the construction of 5G networks
- Include the media industry in the Foreign Investment Review Tool
- Participate in or initiate a reform of the European human rights dialogue with the PRC
- Achieve a strategic partnership with Japan with a specific programme of cooperation



# **SELECTED GLOBAL ISSUES**

*Tomáš Jungwirth, Petr Boháček,  
Ondřej Rosendorf, Iva Svobodová*

“There are no migrants here.”

**ANDREJ BABIŠ**

// 3 NOVEMBER 2018

“Of course we want to tackle climate change. But we want climate policy to be a matter for the whole world, not just Europe.”

**ANDREJ BABIŠ**

// 22 MARCH 2019

“We do not make development aid from pure charity. It is also an opportunity for companies to expand into new markets.”

**TOMÁŠ PETŘÍČEK**

// 19 DECEMBER 2018

The past year was a breakthrough both in terms of new alarming evidence of the rapid progress of climate change summarized in the Special Report of the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) and in terms of activating civil society and increasing pressure on politicians to radically reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The example of the young Swede Greta Thunberg has led to the emergence of an international student climate movement, an offshoot of which has also been established in the Czech Republic, which has influenced both the campaign and the outcome of the spring European elections. More than a hundred scientists supported the March school strike that took place in more than a dozen Czech cities. In December, COP24, the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change in Katowice, negotiated the basis of the rulebook, a key implementation document for the Paris Agreement. However, total global greenhouse gas emissions have increased again after several years of stagnation. At the same time, the European Commission presented its vision of a carbon-neutral Europe in 2050, which has not yet found endorsement from the Council, owing to Czech resistance, among other things. In real time, climate change alters the thinking of financial institutions and leads to breakthroughs in the private sector. Nevertheless, the Czech Republic remains virtually unaffected by these trends, despite the dramatic changes in the climate on its territory, which have led to droughts of the past several years.

In spite of the ongoing significant decline in the number of asylum-seekers coming to Europe, migration remained one of the main policy issues. At the global level, the controversy and disagreement of some states notwithstanding, a breakthrough has been achieved in the adoption of the Global Compact for Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees. Both of these non-legally binding documents can, if properly implemented, facilitate constructive management of migration and asylum policies. Although the Czech Republic did not object to the Global Compact for Migration during the negotiation phase (and at the same time the government did not make an effort to inform the public), the topic was politicized at the national level and the Czech Republic ultimately voted against the adoption of the document in the UN. On the contrary, the Czech Republic finally supported the Global Compact on Refugees. The case of the resettlement of Syrian orphans from Greece, initiated by MEP Michaela Šojdrová, continued to stir up the domestic political scene for several months. It has not yet reached a definite denouement, but it apparently lacks the support of Prime Minister Babiš which it would need to go ahead.

While the total amount of funds spent on development aid by the Czech Republic has been increasing slightly for several years, in 2018 the level of support for certain coun-

tries and themes as well as the way of cooperation changed significantly. The budget of the Czech Development Agency (CzDA) has been reduced and the Agency announced a gradual phasing-out of activities in Kosovo, Serbia and Mongolia. Zambia has returned to the priority cooperation countries. In the last year, Czech development cooperation has been more focused on creating opportunities for entrepreneurship, which is consequently reflected in the under-financing and reduction of many classical “soft” projects aimed, for example, at education and youth. Foreign Minister Petříček announced an interest in deepening cooperation with Czech entrepreneurs, which was demonstrated by earmarking CZK 50 million for commercial loan guarantees. Bilateral cooperation with developing countries focused more on the strengthening of technical and manufacturing infrastructure, especially in the areas of rural development and renewable energy, in which over 36% of the funds were spent in 2018. On the other hand, there was a decrease in the funding for social services. The problem of the current approach is over-focusing on the financial side of sustainability and failing to work with local communities and investing in developing their capacity. On the other hand, the integration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into the policy and project planning, which was carried out in accordance with the new Foreign Development Cooperation Strategy for 2018-2030, can be viewed as a success.

Regardless of the existence of the documents Action Plan on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and the Government Strategy for Gender Equality, Czech foreign politics remains in practice the domain of men. In 2018 and 2019 the trend of decreasing the number of women in the position of ambassadors continued and with the arrival of Minister Petříček there was only a partial increase in the number of women in the top positions at the ministry. Underrepresentation of women appears to be one of the reasons why gender issues are not given enough space in foreign policy. Currently, there is no concept for gender mainstreaming in Czech development projects – in contrast with international trends – despite the fact that all priority countries of development cooperation face the issue of gender inequality. Unfortunately, this situation is not surprising given the prevailing indifference to these issues in domestic policy. The implementation of the Action Plan on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda is most evident in the deployment of Czech young professionals to relevant UN agencies under the United Nations Volunteers program. In contrast to other types of representation in international institutions, this program has long been dominated by women. On the contrary, the Czech government acted proactively on the issue of the Istanbul Convention, however the lack of communication of the content of the document and the subsequent public

controversy regarding its signature probably led to the current inactivity of the Parliament regarding its ratification.

Despite pressure from Western EU member states, the Czech Republic managed to keep the headquarters of the European Satellite Systems Agency (GSA) in Prague, which, thanks to the new seven-year EU space program, will be extended to the EU Space Program Agency. Its activities will focus on security accreditation of EU space activities (Earth observation, navigation systems, secure government satellite communications or monitoring of the Earth's vicinity) and proposing research priorities. The enlargement of the Union program is taking place in the context of an upswing in space activities (mining in space, thousands of new satellites) and the advent of new state and non-state actors. Since 2009, the Czech Republic has increased its contribution to the European Space Agency (ESA) by more than a billion crowns, and a part of these funds come back in the form of contracts for dozens of Czech businesses and research institutions whose activities include planetary defence and space extraction. The Czech Republic's priorities in the field of space are set by the forthcoming five-year National Space Plan (2020-2025), which, however, lacks political will and adequate instruments for its consistent implementation.

The Czech Republic also responded to events in the field of international regulation of artificial intelligence, although the steps taken were not much more than a reflection of the developments at the European and global levels. The strongest players, such as the US, China, but also the EU, have adopted a series of regulatory measures designed to stimulate the development of artificial intelligence while mitigating potential negative consequences. In this context, the actions of the European Commission are key for the Czech Republic. In 2018, the Commission adopted the Communication Artificial Intelligence for Europe and the Coordinated Plan on Artificial Intelligence, aimed at strengthening technological capacities and cooperation between member states. The key development on the domestic scene was the emergence of the National Artificial Intelligence Strategy, which was presented in March 2019. The strategy sets an ambitious goal for the Czech Republic to become one of the leaders in artificial intelligence research. Its creation responds to progress in areas such as deep learning, face recognition or natural language processing. The strategic importance of these technologies is also illustrated by the sharp increase in investment by the EU, which is expected to reach € 20 billion by the end of 2020. However, the promise of economic development entails a number of risks related to privacy, legal responsibility or profound effects on the labour market.



Due to the unfolding climate crisis, the global climate movement can be expected to grow further, including initiatives operating in the Czech Republic. The COP 25 conference will be held in Chile in late November and early December. The final version of the Paris Agreement rulebook will be discussed, including a transparent country-by-country emission attribution system that the conference failed to adopt in Katowice due to the lack of support from Brazil. The debate on long-term climate ambitions will continue in the European Union and it would be desirable for the Czech Republic to keep pace with its efforts to achieve a carbon-neutral economy, which can, however, be hardly expected under the current political constellations. At the same time, the next Multiannual Financial Framework of the EU is being negotiated with the anticipated allocation of 25% of all funds to tackling climate change. Instead of further preventing the planned ceilings of direct agricultural subsidies and making them conditional on soil and water protection measures, the Czech Republic should, in its own interest, promptly support the transformation of unsustainable agricultural practices within its territory.

It is expected that after the inauguration of the new European Parliament and the European Commission, reform efforts or at least partial corrections of the Common European Asylum System will be initiated. The Czech Republic should play a more constructive role here than in the past four years. Furthermore, a consistent approach in terms of external policies implies a significant increase in development aid in countries of origin and transit of displaced persons. With a view to improving the international reputation of the Czech Republic, it is advisable to extend at least a partial gesture of solidarity in the form of resettlement of several dozens of unaccompanied children, for example those from the Greek islands. The practical implementation of the two global compacts adopted last year, at the global, European and domestic levels, however, remains a great unknown.

In the coming year, negotiations on the international post-Cotonou Agreement on international development cooperation, to which the Czech Republic is also a signatory, are expected to be completed. The new EU long-term budget (multiannual financial framework, MFF) is likely to introduce a single financing instrument for development, which can bring more flexibility but at the same time challenge the implementation of key principles, such as effectiveness of development. One of the main objectives of both initiatives is the broad integration of climate, gender and migration issues into EU external cooperation. However, some development organizations express disap-

pointment at the EU's low climate ambitions and recommend a greater emphasis on the complex development of the beneficiary population, not purely on their economic gain. Taking into account the views of Prime Minister Babiš, the documents on assistance to migrants in the countries of origin are crucial for Czech foreign policy, since this idea has in the past been formed the basis of a strict government policy of rejecting quotas and the very limited use of humanitarian asylum. However, the Czech Republic should promote a broad definition of assistance in the countries of origin, which would also include managing internal migration, supporting host communities and addressing specific local causes of migration. For the Czech Republic, adoption of the agreements could also usher in the need to revise planned development projects in order to increase the emphasis on poverty reduction and strengthening the resilience of local communities, especially in case of technical assistance programs. The planned policy of greater involvement of the private sector in the implementation of development aid requires strengthening of the physical presence of the CzDA in the target countries or, for example, closer cooperation with the local NGO sector.

In pursuit of Sustainable Development Goal 5 (gender equality) and in line with international commitments, the Czech Republic should adopt a gender mainstreaming strategy for development cooperation and further work to remove obstacles to reconciling family and working life of diplomats, particularly in relation to maternity and the rights of accompanying persons. Furthermore, the ratification of the Istanbul Convention needs to be completed in order to strengthen, among other things, the rights of victims of physical and sexual violence, which, according to data from the Czech Women's Lobby, affects over 34% of Czech women.

If the Czech Republic does not want to lose its strategic position as one of the centres of the European space program, it should not only create suitable conditions for the expanding EU Agency, but also have a meaningful international space policy. In practice, this means increasing support for the space industry (in particular through ESA programs), centralizing research and innovation activities and strengthening the institutional and financial security of this agenda. At international level, this implies the promotion of a global regime in new space areas, such as space extraction or space security, while respecting the principle of international space law, particularly the peaceful use of space. In the next five-year period, the Czech Republic should focus on making progress with the implementation of its National Space Plan.

Due to the structure of the workforce, the Czech Republic is one of the countries potentially facing the greatest negative impacts of artificial intelligence and automation

technologies on the labour market. The slow legislative process and the unclear trajectory of future developments will lead to the failure to completely eliminate some of the threats and will therefore put pressure on flexibility and self-regulation, e.g. in the form of good practices and codes of ethics. The Czech Republic must continue to actively engage in cooperation at the international level and coordinate the procedure with domestic companies and research institutions. The building of competitive national capacities, effective use of EU financial and administrative support and consistent implementation of the National Strategy will be essential for success. However, it should not favour innovation and economic growth at the expense of national security or citizens' rights and freedoms. The Czech Republic should also formulate a clear and coherent position on ethically problematic ways of using artificial intelligence, including autonomous weapons.

## CONTEXT

- Unfolding climate crisis and increasing pressure on global political action
- A more stable migration situation in the Mediterranean and the adoption of two migration- related Global Compacts
- Negotiation of the new EU Multiannual Financial Framework linked to a shift in development policy
- Persistent under-representation of women in high diplomatic posts

## PRESENT

- Efforts to simplify the use of European funds for development cooperation, potentially undermining the basic principles of aid
- Suspension of all efforts to reform the Common European Asylum System following European Parliament elections
- Keeping the seat of the expanding European GNSS Agency in Prague
- Dynamic developments in artificial intelligence, including the adoption of a National Strategy

## RECOMMENDATION

- Join the emerging European consensus on achieving carbon neutrality by mid-century
- Play a constructive role in the pursuit of a fair and functional reform of the Common European Asylum System
- Complete the ratification of the Istanbul Convention and take steps to increase the representation of women in diplomacy
- Take a position on ethically problematic uses of artificial intelligence

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

**AMO**

Association for International Affairs

**ČR**

Czech Republic

**EU**

European Union

**NATO**

North Atlantic Treaty Organization

**MFF**

Multiannual Financial Framework

**V4**

Visegrad Group

**TEU**

Treaty of the European Union

**ODS**

Civic Democratic Party

**KDU-ČSL**

Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party

**SPD**

Freedom and Direct Democracy

**KSČM**

Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia

**ČSSD**

Czech Social Democratic Party

**MFA**

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**CDU**

Christian Democratic Union

**NDICI**

Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

**EaP**

Eastern Partnership

**GDP**

Gross Domestic Product

**PESCO**

Permanent Structured Cooperation

**OCCAR**

Organization for Joint Armament Cooperation

**ENISA**

European Union Agency for Cybersecurity

**EP**

European Parliament

**PROPED**

Projects of economic diplomacy

**CEFC**

China Energy Company Limited

**PRC**

People's Republic of China

**IPCC**

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

**SDGs**

Sustainable Development Goals

**ESA**

European Space Agency

**UN**

United Nations

**CzDA**

Czech Development Agency

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## **ASSOCIATION FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS (AMO)**

Association for International Affairs is a non-governmental non-profit organization founded in 1997. The mission of AMO has been to contribute to a deeper understanding of international affairs through a broad range of educational and research activities. We offer space for the expression and realization of ideas, thoughts and projects for the development of education, understanding and tolerance among people.

AMO is a unique transparent platform that brokers dialogue between the general public, academia, civil society, politics and business. It has a tradition of promoting the interest of Czech citizens in international affairs and provides information necessary for forming independent opinion on current events both at home and abroad.

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- creates vital conditions for growth of a new expert generation;
- promotes interest in international relations in the wider public domain;
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The Research Center of the Association for International Affairs is a leading Czech think-tank, which is not bound to any political party or ideology. With its activities, it supports an active approach to foreign policy, provides an independent analysis of current political issues and encourages expert and public debate on related topics. The main goal of the Research Center is systematic observation, analysis and commentary on international affairs with special focus on Czech foreign policy.

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