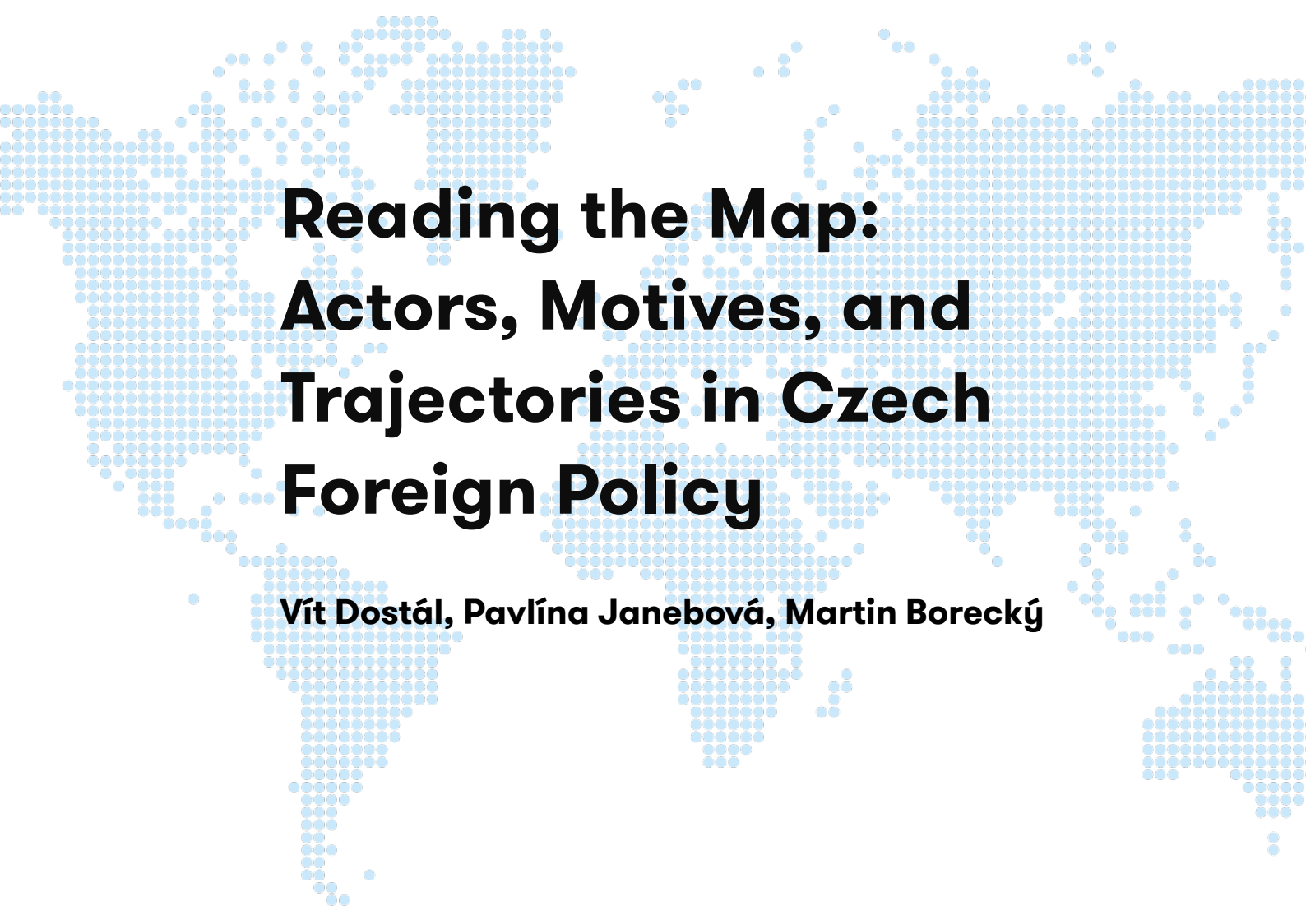




Reading the Map: Actors, Motives, and Trajectories in Czech Foreign Policy

Vít Dostál, Pavlína Janebová, Martin Borecký





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary	1
Introduction	2
1 ANO	4
2 Motorists for Themselves	5
3 Freedom and Direct Democracy	7
4 The President	8
5 Parliamentary opposition	9
6 The civil service	11
7 The private sector	11
8 Outlook	12
8.1 Czech Foreign Policy Constants	12
8.2 Wildcards and Question Marks	17



Summary

- The Babiš coalition government is ideologically incoherent and has deliberately sought discontinuity from the previous government; in practice, however, Czech foreign policy so far has produced a mix of continuity and change.
- Continuity with the previous government's positions is to be expected regarding EU and NATO membership in general and continued support for Israel.
- A clear change of direction which is expected to last for the entire government term is in the lukewarm approach to supporting Ukraine, a more short-term transactional and economically oriented approach and a persistent multi-track foreign policy.
- Areas in which further developments remain uncertain are the Czech future position within the EU and the relationship with the European institutions, defence spending and the substantive importance of Visegrád cooperation.
- Though this is not a desired direction according to the governmental programme, the Czech Republic's standing in the EU faces potential destabilization should the government come into conflict with EU institutions over rule-of-law issues.
- Escalating conflicts of interest and disputes over EU subsidies linked to Babiš could push him toward political isolation, though Babiš is unlikely to become an ideological leader of the Patriots for Europe-aligned ideological stream.
- Although NATO membership discussions remain off the table, the coalition parties systematically seek the least costly and least binding defence options, actively hedging on higher defence spending. Under this approach, the government aims to keep defence spending around 2% of GDP while deferring higher NATO targets to future administrations.
- This strategy could be disrupted by stronger allied pressure or political marginalisation if allies eventually write Prague off. Most significantly, a shift could be driven from within by an increased perception of the Russian threat among the domestic public.
- Although the Babiš government prioritizes revitalizing Visegrád cooperation – finding strong common ground with V4 partners on the EU budget, cohesion funds, industrial policies, and migration – this regional renaissance faces significant structural vulnerabilities.
- President Pavel remains an independent foreign-policy actor, particularly on Ukraine and defence; the parliamentary opposition pursues alternative positions to the government, while remaining weak and largely reactive. Business and the professional state apparatus act as constraints and sources of continuity.



Introduction

In December 2025, after a four-year interlude as leader of the opposition, Andrej Babiš returned to head the Czech government. His catch-all populist party, **ANO**, formed a governing coalition with the far-right, anti-immigration, and nationalist **Freedom and Direct Democracy** movement (SPD), and the right-wing populist, anti-green **Motorists for Themselves** party.

This development has sparked a range of concerns and expectations on the European stage. First, while Babiš had clearly stated that a referendum on **leaving the EU or NATO is out of the question** for him, he remained indifferent in his pre-election statements on a number of other issues – particularly **support for Ukraine**. Second, he entered into a coalition with parties that are **more ideologically defined in foreign and European policy** and have **more radical demands**. Third, the shift in the Czech Republic reflected the **broader rise of the new populist far right**, which materialized at the European level in the form of the EP political group Patriots for Europe, of which both ANO and Motorists are members. Andrej Babiš also is – after the departure of Viktor Orbán – Patriots' only representative at the European Council.

Upon taking office, Babiš spoke of a strong message of discontinuity from the previous government of Petr Fiala, a coalition of mainstream political forces, including in the areas of foreign and European policy. Strong political statements are common in campaigns. A cursory glance at the Czech foreign policy over the past months shows **elements of continuity and change intertwined**.

None of the sitting coalition members had a coherent and comprehensive foreign policy strategy when they entered the government. In spite of this, particularly the **SPD and the Motorists were determined to make rapid and profound changes** to distance themselves from previous administrations.

Now, almost a year after the elections, and bearing in mind that international issues are something the government must constantly address given the global situation, it is time to assess the government's track record. Doing that will help us **understand the logic behind the government's – and other actors' – foreign policy choices**, and estimate what the Czech Republic's role on the international stage might look like for **the remainder of its term**. In spite of the Czech Republic not being, as a medium-sized country, among the top European players to shape the big strategic discussions of today, the way its foreign and European policies develop is indeed **relevant in the context of Central Europe and can influence decision making at the EU level**. While the Czech Republic is a specific case, some of the dynamics and mechanisms described further might find **parallels in other EU countries**.

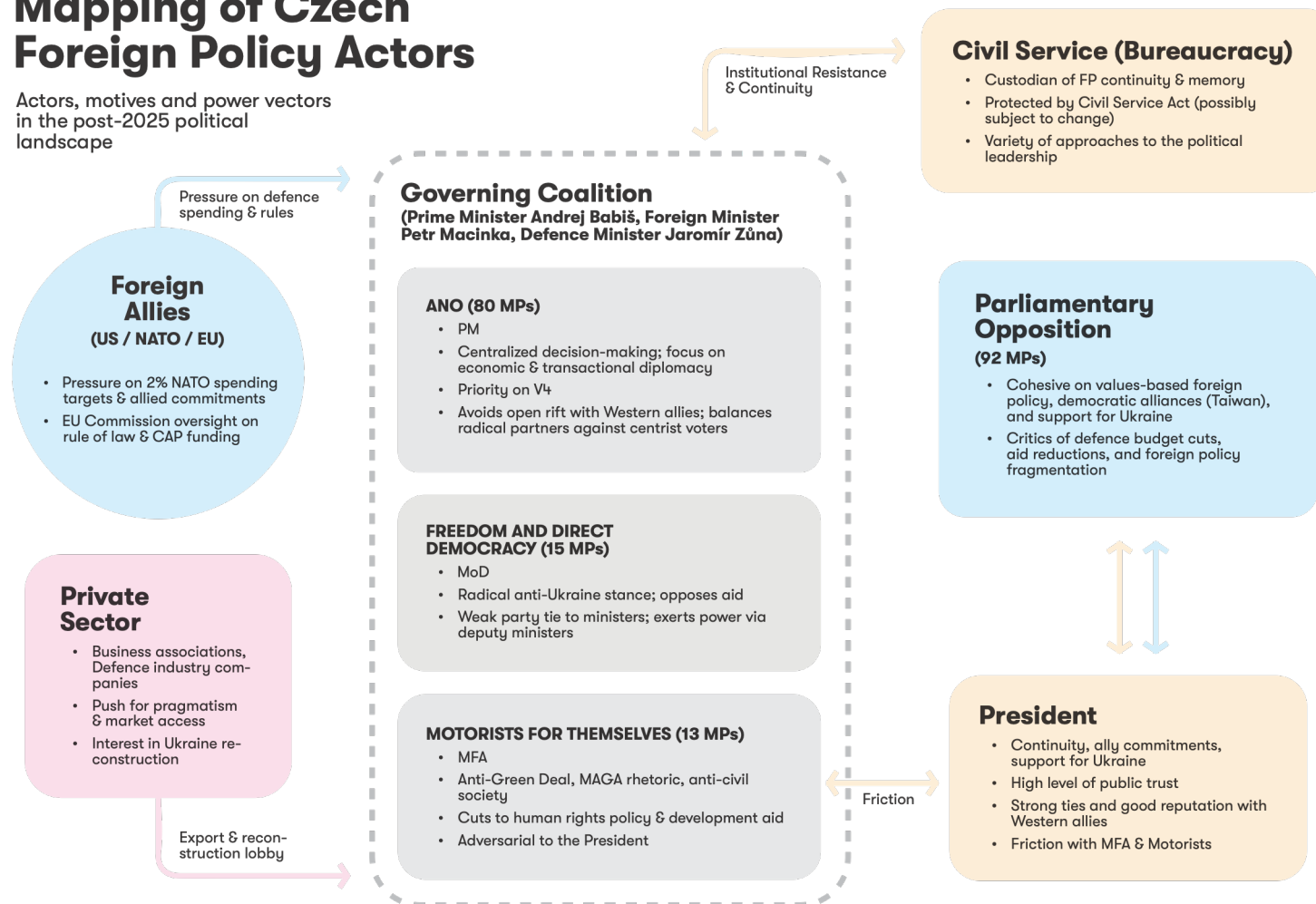
In this analysis, we first introduce selected political actors, as well as their political motivations, key actions and mutual dynamics within this new political landscape. Understanding their motivations is essential, as these often do not centre on foreign policy as such, but rather reflect domestic political struggles or efforts to appeal to public sentiment or their supporters. In the second part, we then offer an outlook on possible future developments in Czech foreign policy.



Figure 1

Mapping of Czech Foreign Policy Actors

Actors, motives and power vectors in the post-2025 political landscape



Source: authors



1 ANO

With 35% of the overall vote in 2025 and 80 out of the 200 available seats in the lower house of Parliament, ANO is by far the strongest political party in the Czech Republic and the leader of the coalition.

Despite a preference for a single party government, stated by the party's chairman and the Prime Minister Andrej Babiš during the 2025 campaign, **a coalition with two junior partners was the only way for ANO to build a stable government**, to – among other things – make sure that Babiš retains his immunity and does not get prosecuted for alleged subsidy fraud.

As a catch-all populist party, ANO is **not fully aligned with the programmes and ideologies of either of its partners**, particularly the SPD. While this has occasionally led to conflicting positions publicly expressed by the leaders of the three parties – and open frustration on the side of the Prime Minister – the coalition holds. Furthermore, this **partnership did not undermine ANO's strong standing among its supporters**. After nine months in office, ANO is still polling above 30%.¹

Foreign policy in general has a significantly lower priority than domestic issues on ANO's agenda. The Prime Minister fulfils his foreign policy responsibilities and addresses current key issues, but his primary interest generally lies in the **economic and trade dimensions** of foreign policy. When speaking about key foreign policy issues, Babiš tends to stick to **a short-term, transactional and mostly economical perspective, rather than framing them with a longer-term strategy or even the national interest**. This applies to assistance to Ukraine.² Reviving the **Visegrád cooperation** has been a priority for ANO, together with an emphasis on bilateral relations between the Czech Republic and Slovakia. ANO acknowledges the importance of the **transatlantic relationship**, even though Babiš' enthusiastic support for Donald Trump has been somewhat toned down, given the low popularity of the US administration's policies towards Europe among ANO voters.³ Babiš also declared his interest in **strengthening Czech relations with China**.⁴ He, however, does not show much initiative in foreign policy beyond these issues, yielding the floor to ANO's coalition partners. The case is different with EU policies, to which Babiš and people close to him pay a great deal of attention – like the negotiation of the **EU Multiannual Financial Framework 2028–2034** (see chapter 8.2).

Also different is the defence policy. Given the importance of the ministry, among other things regarding defence spending where the government openly does not come close to meeting the NATO-agreed targets, Andrej Babiš decided to bypass the SPD-selected minister by appointing a special government envoy for NATO commitments. Later, the same person was appointed the director general of the crucial defence policy and strategy division at the ministry, ensuring **ANO's influence over the sensitive agenda**, where the government will have to tread lightly vis-à-vis other allies, mainly the United States.

¹ MEDIAN, Sněmovní volební model: červen 2026 (MEDIAN, July 10, 2026),

https://www.median.eu/cs/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/Volby_PS_2026_06_vo3VD.pdf.

² Ondřej Houska, "Babiš se spojil s Orbánem a Ficem, Česko už nepomůže Ukrajině: Ostatní státy unie jí naopak půjčí desítky miliard eur," Hospodářské noviny, December 22, 2025,

<https://domaci.hn.cz/c1-67827150-babis-se-spojil-s-orbanem-a-ficem-cesko-uz-nepomuze-ukrajine-ostatni-staty-eu-ji-naopak-pujci-desitky-miliard-eur>.

³ Jan Tvrdouš, "Pohled na Trumpa štěpí voliče ANO, ukazují data. Co to může znamenat pro Babišovu kampaň?" Deník N, March 1, 2025, <https://denikn.cz/1665037/pohled-na-trumpa-stepi-volice-ano-ukazuji-data/>.

⁴ Pavel Vrabec, "Babiš jede do Číny: Agrofert rozjíždí byznys s čínskými auty," Neovlivní, July 29, 2026, <https://neovlivni.cz/babis-jede-do-ciny-agrofert-rozjizdi-byznys-s-cinsky-mi-auty/>.



In the expectations of ANO voters – people of diverse socioeconomic and educational backgrounds⁵ – **foreign policy is important mainly to the extent it impinges on domestic issues** – above all living costs and energy prices.⁶ At least in the first months of the government's term, ANO could afford to be rather permissive to the foreign policy-related activities of its junior coalition partners without significant electoral cost, be it the radical changes performed at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by the Motorists or the publicly pronounced anti-Ukrainian tendencies of SPD. At the same time, Babiš seems to be relatively **perceptive to the voices of other EU and NATO leaders**. Pressure by European allies has successfully contributed to preventing the abolition of the ammunition initiative to help Ukraine.

Decision-making in ANO is strongly **centralized in the hands of Andrej Babiš**, which applies also to matters of foreign policy. Ever since the election campaign, Babiš has declared his ambition to manage Czech foreign policy himself. While the ultimate direction of foreign policy on the issues that he deems important indeed is steered by Babiš, his occasional gaffes⁷ suggest that he **does not fully grasp the profound change of the international environment** since his last term as Prime Minister. This is reflected in his **foreign and security policy advisory team** (see below) **which does not seem sufficient to the high stakes and complexities of current international politics and security**, contributing to an often confusing image of Czechia among its allies.

Babiš has appointed an official **national security adviser, Hynek Kmoníček**, a seasoned diplomat formerly connected to the previous President Miloš Zeman. In practice the role seems to be fulfilled by the **head of the Office of the Government Tünde Bartha**, Babiš's long-time confidant. She allegedly actively engages also in EU politics, whilst not directly being a part of the dedicated apparatus, occasionally overlapping with **the official sherpa Milena Hrdinková**, an experienced professional in EU affairs, who had worked with Babiš already during his first government and was his personal pick for this position. Finally, the **Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Industry and Trade Karel Havlíček** speaks mostly on issues of the economy, relevant for the declared pivot to economic diplomacy.

2 Motorists for Themselves

Motorists for Themselves represents a new political force on the Czech political scene. With 13 seats, it is the **smallest party in the Chamber of Deputies** and one of the junior coalition partners in the government. It can be classified as a **right-wing populist** party that believes radical left-wing ideologies are gaining too much influence and negatively affect the everyday lives of citizens.⁸ Their ideological background can be traced to the former Czech Prime Minister and later President Václav Klaus.

This approach includes a **rejection of the climate crisis** and scientific knowledge in this area as such. Consequently, they **oppose decarbonization** measures and call for a **revision of the relevant policies at both the Czech and**

⁵ STEM, "Volební model: rozdíly podle pohlaví, věku, vzdělání a materiálního zajištění," May 14, 2025, <https://www.stem.cz/volebni-model-rozdily-podle-pohlavi-veku-vzdelani-a-materialniho-zajisti/>.

⁶ Petr Švihel, "Rozdělení volbou: Co zlákal příznivce ANO a na co slyšeli Fialovi fanoušci," Seznam Zprávy, October 5, 2025, <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/volby-do-poslanecke-snemovny-rozdeleni-volbou-co-zlakalo-priznivce-ano-a-na-co-slyseli-fanousci-fialy-288244>.

⁷ EUalive with Update EU, "Europe's Missile Defence Ambitions: Babiš's Europatriot vs. the Anti-Ballistic Coalition," EUalive, July 21, 2026, <https://eualive.net/europes-missile-defence-ambitions-babiss-europatriot-vs-the-anti-ballistic-coalition/>.

⁸ "Boris Štastný: Radikální levicové ideologie zasahují do každodenního života Pražanů," advertisement, Metro, September 30, 2025, https://www.metro.cz/kraje/stredocesky-kraj/boris-stastny-radikalni-levicove-ideologie-zasahuji-do-kazdodenniho-zivota-prazanu.A250930_121856_metro-praha-zpravy_pecve.



European levels.⁹ They claim that European policies in fact do not protect the environment, but instead destroy local industrial bases and damage competitiveness. Similarly, they hold a **negative view of civil society**. Motorists openly state that they are **inspired by the MAGA ideology**. The party leader Petr Macinka has cited the US Vice President J.D. Vance's 2025 Munich speech as an example of the ideological alignment between the Motorists and the Trump administration.¹⁰ They often use expressive language; for example, claiming that "green blood" will flow at the Ministry of the Environment under their leadership,¹¹ or that there are "parasites" in the civil service, by which they mean civil servants who do not share the Motorists' worldview.¹²

In doing so, they speak primarily to their supporters, as opposed to the broader public, and build an image of themselves as **a strong player in the alternative media arena**. They mock and delegitimize their opponents or experts who do not share their point of view. Rather than traditionally conservative, they offer a **simplistic view of the world and politics** and claim that it has only been made complicated by various left-wing ideologies (gender, environmental, human rights, etc.).

Motorists have placed their chairman **Petr Macinka in the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs**. Initially, the party's most prominent figure, Filip Turek, was nominated for this post; however, the President refused to appoint him due to his unacceptable conduct, which included sympathizing with Nazi ideology. Petr Macinka thus became Minister of Foreign Affairs rather by coincidence. He had not previously sought this post.

Foreign policy under the Motorists' leadership involves **continuity with the previous government wherever they have their – sometimes perceived rather than real – allies**. There is a visible emphasis on **transatlantic ties**, friendly relations with **Israel**, and the **Visegrád cooperation**. All of these are based on ideological background as they believe that a global neo-conservative MAGA-like renaissance is needed in order to fight liberal internationalism and so-called "left extremism".¹³

More significant are the areas in which the Motorists are pushing for a departure from the existing foreign policy canon. So far, they have drastically **cut Czech humanitarian aid, development and democracy transition cooperation, and support for human rights defenders**, including those dedicated to Ukraine. Moreover, they did so in a mocking manner that potentially endangered fighters for human rights, as the Minister read out individual projects during a live broadcast on an alternative YouTube channel and derided their implementers.¹⁴ Macinka also stated that the **MFA will centre on economic diplomacy**. This pivot is heavily framed in **acknowledging a multipolar world**, where the focus needs to be shifted toward non-European markets, particularly in Asia, and where **values-based policy is supposed to give way, and priority, to economic interests**.

As a result of the protracted conflict with the President over ministerial nominations, the Motorists have an **adversarial relationship with the Prague**

⁹ Motoristé sobě, Volební program 2025, 2025, https://motoristesobe.cz/wp-content/uploads/Volebni_program-2025_MOTORISTE-SOBE.pdf.

¹⁰ Petr Macinka, "The West Needs a Return to Realism and Responsibility" (speech, CEVRO Institute, Prague, June 3, 2026), https://mzv.gov.cz/jnp/en/about_the_ministry/organization_of_the_ministry/minister/speeches_and_articles/speech_by_minister_petr_macinka_at_the_1.html.

¹¹ Petr Kolář, "Poteče zelená krev: Chceme porazit ODS a vládnout, říká šéf Motoristů Macinka," iDNES.cz, December 9, 2024, https://www.idnes.cz/volby/petr-macinka-motoriste-politika-volby-filip-turek-ods.A241208_183414_domaci_stud.

¹² Karolína Brodničková, "Úředníci jsou paraziti k deratizaci a novináři chátra, řekl Turek: Motoristům to nevadí," Novinky.cz, April 23, 2026, <https://www.novinky.cz/clanek/domaci-urednici-jsou-paraziti-k-deratizaci-a-novinari-chatra-rekl-turek-motoristum-to-nevadi-40574914>.

¹³ Macinka, "The West needs a Return to Realism."

¹⁴ Xaver Live, "Lipavského miliony na vývoz Dobra z českých neziskovek | Petr Macinka | Přísně tajné #165," YouTube video, 2:19:40, January 20, 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lsHRyJB5hHM>.



Castle. This “extreme cohabitation” – as Macinka infamously described his approach in a published late-night text message to the President’s foreign policy advisor – involves a rejection of the President’s authority and various acts of defiance.¹⁵ As a result, communication between the Castle and Czernin Palace is at a very poor level, resulting in coordination between the government and the President being handled from the level of the Prime Minister and his office.

3 Freedom and Direct Democracy

The third party forming the Czech government is SPD (Freedom and Direct Democracy). Ideologically, SPD fits within the broader category of the **nationalist, eurosceptic, anti-Islam and anti-LGBT far-right populist parties** that gained prominence across Europe in the wake of the 2015 refugee crisis. In recent years, the defining ideological position of the party has been its **opposition to support for Ukraine** in all its forms: be it support for Ukrainian refugees, financial or military aid.

In the 2025 parliamentary elections, the party recorded its **worst result since first entering parliament in 2017**, receiving roughly 8% of the vote and earning 15 seats.¹⁶ Aware of the party’s declining polling numbers before the elections, chairman Tomio Okamura opened SPD’s ballot to candidates from other smaller right-wing parties. As a result, **one third of the MPs elected on the SPD ballot are not members of the party**, potentially limiting party discipline in parliament or even posing a challenge for Okamura’s leadership. Current polling places SPD slightly above 6.5%, suggesting little change since the elections.¹⁷

Having spent the two previous legislative periods in opposition, the party leadership heavily favoured participation in the government. Although SPD is ideologically the most radical party in the coalition, it demonstrated a **willingness to make concessions to secure its place**. In the end, SPD received 3 ministerial posts out of 16, one fewer than the Motorists for Themselves Party, despite winning more votes.

The most telling dynamic, however, is that **the party’s most important figures are not in the government** at all. Chairman Tomio Okamura opted for the position of Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies. While not a cabinet seat, the role lends him significant standing, including in foreign policy, where it allows him to engage **in parliamentary diplomacy** and gives his voice international recognition. Vice-chairman Radim Fiala similarly stayed outside the government, instead chairing the SPD parliamentary club.

Furthermore, **the ministers nominated for SPD have very little connection to the party itself**. To the Ministry of Defence, **SPD nominated Jaromír Zůna**, a non-partisan retired army lieutenant general. In office, his statements on Ukraine have diverged so sharply from the party line that the SPD leadership took the rather remarkable step of **barring him from commenting on foreign policy**.¹⁸ **The Minister of Agriculture, Martin Šebestýán**, illustrates a different problem. Before taking ministerial office, Šebestýán served as the chairman of the board of directors of a lobbying group representing the interests of the country’s largest agribusinesses, including Babiš’s Agrofert holding. This is especially relevant for

¹⁵ Seznam Zprávy, “Dokument: Co ministr Macinka napsal prezidentovi,” January 27, 2026, <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-politika-precete-si-co-ministr-macinka-psal-prezidentovi-pavel-ho-obvinil-z-vydirani-297439>; Petr Kolář, “Pavel je obvykle mimo realitu: Macinka o cestě na summit NATO, Číně i placení ČT,” iDNES.cz, June 4, 2026, https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/petr-macinka-petr-pavel-klempir-ceska-televize-summit-nato.A260603_173437_domaci_jans.

¹⁶ Czech Statistical Office, “Volby do Poslanecké sněmovny Parlamentu ČR 2025,” Volby.cz, accessed August 1, 2026, <https://www.volby.cz/app/ps2025/cs/home>.

¹⁷ MEDIAN, Sněmovní volební model: červen 2026.

¹⁸ “Zůna se bude vyjadřovat k armádě, zahraniční věci bude řešit premiér,” České noviny, December 22, 2025, <https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/2763641>.



Czech EU policy, **particularly regarding the agricultural funds**. The weak attachment of SPD to its ministers leads to a situation in which the **SPD exerts its influence at the ministries through its deputy ministers** rather than, as one would expect, through the ministers themselves.

Despite the SPD's structural weakness in the coalition, **the government's foreign policy has largely aligned with the party's central aim: limiting aid to Ukraine**. The government has refused to guarantee EU loans to Ukraine and has sharply cut the budget for reconstruction projects in the country. The ammunition initiative continues, but its long-term future is in doubt. However, the limits of this alignment surfaced in July 2026, when the Babiš government redirected roughly €6 million into the American Prioritized Ukraine Requirements List (PURL) programme, which finances US-made weapons for Ukraine, ahead of the NATO summit in Ankara. Okamura stated that he disagreed with the step, and complained that SPD was not consulted before the decision was taken.¹⁹

4 The President

The competences of the Czech president in foreign policy are delineated by the constitution which, among other things, states that the **president represents the country abroad**. In doing this, he (or she) should **stay within the policy framework defined by the government as the main foreign policy actor in the political system**. In practice, however, the Czech Republic has a tradition of strong personalities with their own opinions on foreign policy in the presidential office who have tended to assert their influence largely by informal means. The political position of the president within the system has been further strengthened by the introduction of the **popular vote** in 2013.

President Petr Pavel continues this tradition built up by previous democratically elected presidents in being active and opinionated in matters of foreign policy. As a retired army general, he has security and defence relevant experience both from the Czech Armed Forces and NATO HQ, where he served in the position of the Chairman of the Military Committee. During his time in office as the President, starting in 2023, Petr Pavel has put emphasis on **maintaining the Euro-Atlantic alliance, with the Czech Republic being a reliable partner for international allies, including support for Ukraine and the need to strengthen the Czech Republic's defence capabilities**. He has also publicly supported the Czech Republic's **accession to the Eurozone**, albeit without particular success or significant support from other political actors.

Prioritising defence measures and support for Ukraine, together with stressing the general importance of continuing the Czech foreign policy emphasis on human rights made him **aligned with most of the positions of the Fiala government. The President's relationship with the Babiš government is much less peachy**. It got off to a bad start when Petr Pavel refused to appoint the first candidate of the Motorists for the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs.²⁰ This incident started a long-term conflict with the Motorists whose chairman and the eventual appointee to the post of foreign minister, Macinka, decided to extend this domestic political dynamic into the field of foreign policy and made it his mission to curb the President's manoeuvring space there. In doing so, he cites the role of the government as the main foreign policy maker, with whose policy the President is clearly at odds. Whereas at the start of the term the Prime Minister clearly preferred that relations

¹⁹ "Okamura: Na Ukrajinu šlo 140 mil. Kč, je třeba takové věci konzultovat," České noviny, July 10, 2026, <https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/okamura-na-ukrajinu-slo-140-milkc-je-treba-takove-veci-konzultovat/2848493>.

²⁰ ČTK and Seznam Zprávy, "Pavel v dopise Babišovi rozepsal, proč Turka nejmenuje ministrem," Seznam Zprávy, January 9, 2026, <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-politika-pavel-v-dopise-babisovi-rozepsal-proc-turka-nejmenuje-ministrem-295858>.



between his government and the President be civil, **over the months of escalation he seems to have personally identified with Macinka's combative position.**

In the conflict with the government, the President can rely both on the strong standing that the institution of the president historically has with the Czech public, and on his own popularity. Three years after being elected, the President still enjoys the trust of 56% of the population, which shows a much higher level of trust towards him than to that which the government enjoys. However, the numbers are significantly higher among supporters of the current opposition parties than those of the coalition.²¹ An earlier poll suggests that 67% of the population assess positively the President's representation of the Czech Republic abroad.²² This indicates that the **President holds a strong position in the current political scene.** While an assertive stance toward the President will not win the government any support among opposition voters, this tough approach will likely resonate well with their own base, even though a big part of the ANO voters tend to remain neutral in the conflict.²³ Another factor playing in the President's favour is his good reputation among the Czech Republic's allies, making it potentially **difficult for the government to try and isolate him in foreign policy.**

5 Parliamentary opposition

The current opposition in the lower chamber of the Parliament consists of **five parties**, together occupying 92 seats. Of these parties, three are rather **conservative leaning** (the Civic Democrats, the Christian Democrats and TOP 09, who ran together in the elections under the brand of "Spolu"), the Mayors and Independents are **centre-right liberal** and the **green progressive** Pirates. All of these parties initially made up the Fiala government, though the Pirates split from the coalition later during the term.

Foreign policy was a clear priority for the Fiala government in the aftermath of the full-scale invasion of Russia into Ukraine, occurring just two months after the government took office. During the entire term, coalition politicians put emphasis on assistance for Ukraine (albeit at times more rhetorical than practical),²⁴ security and the need for international cooperation in general. It should be noted that despite programmatic differences among the parties on other issues, including particular EU policies, **all five of them share a more or less similar attitude to foreign policy, and as such are a more cohesive block in this regard than the sitting coalition.** At the same time, the previous government showed shortcomings in communication with the public and addressing socioeconomic issues, including domestic impacts of the war – rising living costs and energy prices.²⁵ This dichotomy was used in the election campaign by ANO and other then-opposition parties, criticising the Fiala government for not paying enough attention to the needs and

²¹ STEM, "K institucím s nejvyšší mírou důvěry veřejnosti setrvale patří bezpečnostní složky a ČNB," July 2, 2026, <https://www.stem.cz/k-institucim-s-nejvyssi-mirou-duvery-verejnosti-setrvale-patri-bezpecnostni-slozky-a-cnb/>.

²² STEM, "Hodnocení prezidenta tři roky od zvolení," March 9, 2026, <https://www.stem.cz/hodnoceni-prezidenta-tri-roky-od-zvoleni/>.

²³ Zuzana Najvrtová, "Ve sporu s Macinkou vede Pavel: Ministra podporuje jen polovina vládních voličů," Seznam Zprávy, July 3, 2026, <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-politika-ve-sporu-s-macinkou-vede-pavel-ministra-podporuje-jen-polovina-vladnich-volicu-309814>.

²⁴ Arianna Antezza et al., Ukraine Support Tracker Data, release 29, Kiel Institute for the World Economy, June 6, 2026, <https://www.kielinstitut.de/publications/ukraine-support-tracker-data-6453/>.

²⁵ Barbora Kučerová and Jiří Kropáček, "Víc nesplněných slibů než Babiš: Co Fialova vláda dotáhla a v čem selhala," Seznam Zprávy, September 18, 2025, <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/volby-do-poslanecke-snemovny-vic-nesplnenych-slibu-nez-babis-co-fialova-vlada-dotahla-a-v-cem-selhala-286231>; Demagog.cz, "Inflace během Fialovy vlády," CEDMO, June 10, 2025, <https://cedmohub.eu/cs/inflace-behem-fialovy-vlady/>.



interests of the Czech citizens, arguably contributing to SPOLU and their coalition partners losing the elections.

Foreign policy is one of the key areas where the current government attempts to draw a clear distinction between itself and the current opposition.

Lacking executive power, the five opposition parties have only limited channels to defend their track record and react to the government's handling of emerging international issues. They can do so during **parliamentary debates** in both chambers, as members of relevant parliamentary committees, and also via interpellations to members of the government. Available records show that interpellations concerning issues relevant to foreign policy or security account for only a small share of the overall number.²⁶ While limited in their impact on the foreign policy practice, these channels, together with **media appearances and personal social media** of individual representatives, are also an instrument to address the public. The opposition has spoken up mainly **against the government's limiting of support for Ukraine, budget cuts in development assistance and failure to meet NATO spending targets**. Notably, TOP 09 offered their cooperation to ANO, should it ever need to bypass its coalition partners in issues of national security, defence and general pro-Western orientation.²⁷ In terms of personalities, arguably the biggest – if largely symbolic – asset for the opposition and their shared foreign policy views in Parliament is the speaker of the Senate Miloš Vystrčil (ODS). A vocal proponent of foreign policy entailing democratic values, he found himself at odds with the first Babiš government in 2020 because of his official visit to Taiwan which was not appreciated by China. For now, Vystrčil is staying the course, with another visit to Taiwan in June 2026, criticized by both Babiš and Macinka.

Months after the lost elections, **the opposition in general is not in a good shape**. After the necessary recovery from the lost elections, accompanied by changes in leadership in three of the five parties, the opposition parties struggle to find an attractive vision to offer the voters. Putting foreign policy, in which they are mutually aligned, to the forefront of the previous government's political successes, has prevented them from showcasing a substantive programme on domestic issues in which their mutual differences remain. As a result, they are essentially **aiming at the same electorate, thus competing among themselves rather than against the government parties**.²⁸ None of the parties has been able to shape the political agenda or even take advantage of some of the governing parties' scandals and evident missteps.

What is more, the **agreement among the opposition parties on foreign policy issues is rather superficial, largely reactive and somewhat rudimentary, often wrapped in lofty rhetoric of values too vague for a big part of the electorate to grasp**, and the legacy of Václav Havel. While these undoubtedly constitute a legitimate starting point for formulating Czech foreign policy, it is still a task for the opposition parties to expand them to a more comprehensive vision of the place of the Czech Republic in the world that would be accessible and appealing to the voters.

²⁶ Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, "Ústní interpelace," accessed August 1, 2026, <https://www.psp.cz/sqw/interp.sqw?o=10>.

²⁷ Barbora Kučerová, "Pokud bude chtít Babiš obejít koaliční partnery, jsme tady, hlásí šéf TOP 09," Seznam Zprávy, May 2, 2026, <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-politika-pokud-bude-chtit-babis-obejit-koalicni-partnery-jsme-tady-hlasi-sef-top-09-305256>.

²⁸ Zuzana Najvrtová and Barbora Doubravová, "Rozložená opozice, voliči jsou zklamaní," Seznam Zprávy, July 13, 2026, <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-politika-neviditelna-opozice-preslapuje-na-miste-vlade-prochazi-prehmaty-310543>.



6 The civil service

The civil service is a **key collective actor essential to the implementation of any policy**. In the field of foreign policy, the Czech Republic has civil servants who have shaped the country's international profile since the early 1990s. Unlike other Central European countries, the civil service and diplomatic corps have not undergone any brutal politically motivated purges or the demonstrative departure of a significant share of civil servants. **The civil service is thus an important custodian of continuity.**

As such, the bureaucracy has played a significant role in shaping the Czech foreign policy mainstream. From surveys conducted, we have learned that this mainstream includes a firm **anchoring in NATO and the EU**, an emphasis on **partnerships with the United States, Germany, or Israel**, support for **Central European cooperation**, **caution toward Russia**, and, conversely, **support for the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of Eastern European countries** (including Ukraine) and a commitment to human rights policy.²⁹

Any changes in foreign policy that disrupt these constants must be implemented **against prevailing bureaucratic views and in contradiction to existing institutional memory**. In the context of current policies, this primarily involves the reduction of support for Ukraine and the abandonment of human rights policies.

At the same time, the civil service's independent position is enshrined in the **Civil Service Act**, which protects it from political pressure. **The governing coalition seeks to amend this law**; under the proposal, staff changes would be made easier to implement. However, it may be problematic for the government to ensure that the amendments are compatible with the European Commission's requirements, which were the very reason the law was introduced years ago.³⁰

The bureaucracy is certainly not a monolith. Broadly speaking, four types can be identified within it: 1) **loyalists who professionally carry out political directives when assigned to them, even if they do not necessarily agree with them, otherwise holding back**; 2) **people who are convinced of the need to maintain continuity with previous foreign policy but, for various reasons stay within the bounds of plausible deniability**; 3) **officials who enter into conflict with the political leadership and actively advocate for continuity with previous policies**; 4) **allies of the new leadership**. The latter group serves as a guide for the government through the state apparatus and shows the government how to push through changes. On the other hand, those people may also explain the potential impacts of radical measures and the possible collateral damage they may cause.

7 The private sector

Business is an important actor in shaping foreign policy, albeit not a unified one. It is a **heterogeneous group, varying in size, interests, and power, bound only by a shared interest in commercial outcomes**.

Business actors most relevant to foreign policy fall into the following three categories: 1) The **large associations**, such as the Confederation of Industry and Transport and the Chamber of Commerce. Since their membership is broad by design, their preferences remain general: **predictable regulation, open export markets, lower energy prices**, and so on. 2) The **sectoral lobbies**, such as the

²⁹ Association for International Affairs, "Trends of Visegrad Foreign Policy 2019," accessed August 1, 2026, <https://trendy.amo.cz/trendy2019/other>.

³⁰ Robert Břešťan, "Nový služební zákon? Posiluje politiky, oslabuje profesionální státní správu," Hlídací pes, May 23, 2026, <https://hlidacipes.org/novy-sluzebni-zakon-posiluje-politiky-oslabuje-profesionalni-statni-spravu/>.



Automotive Industry Association, the Agrarian Chamber, and the Defence and Security Industry Association. This is where **specific interests are formulated and pursued**. 3) The **large individual companies**, capable of direct influence. These categories are not rigid: many companies belong to several organizations, associations and sectoral lobbies at once.

Support for business has been the area where the new government has been most eager to demonstrate its commitment. Petr Macinka, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, has placed **economic diplomacy at the centre of his agenda at the ministry**. Likewise, the merger between CzechTrade and CzechInvest, launched on the 1st of August, has been presented as a major simplification for Czech firms.³¹ **Yet the support has hardly been uniform**. The growing influence of the defence industry in recent years has sat uneasily with the Prime Minister, who has accused the sector of profiting excessively from war.³²

The Babiš government's relationship to business cannot be separated from **Agrofert**, one of the country's largest agricultural holdings, founded by the Prime Minister. The holding's interests run through multiple European files, crucially **the Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) and agricultural funds** within it. Although Babiš transferred his Agrofert shares into a trust in February 2026, at the time of writing of this paper, the European Commission has not concluded its assessment of whether this resolves the conflict of interest. Beyond Agrofert, he retains ownership of companies active in healthcare and real estate.³³ As a result, the distinction between the businessman and the policymaker is particularly hard to maintain.

8 Outlook

8.1 Czech foreign policy constants

The preceding chapters introduced the actors that shape the foreign policy of the new Czech government. They are: the three parties of the governing coalition – ANO, SPD and the Motorists – the President, the parliamentary opposition, business, and the professional apparatus across the ministries. In this chapter, we shift away from the individual actors and instead examine the foreign policy that their complex interplay has produced.

Across the first months since the government took power, we identified a series of patterns we call "Foreign Policy Constants". A constant, as we use the term, is defined by three characteristics. First, it has to be **central to Czech foreign policy**, with sufficient **political and public salience**. Second, it is expected to **last throughout the whole legislative term**, absent a black-swan event significantly affecting the playing field. Third, a constant is not sustained by a single actor. Rather, it **rests on a configuration of interests and constraints** across several actors.

We identified five key foreign policy issues that fulfil this definition. Two of them – membership in the EU and NATO, and support for Israel – are not specific to the new government but rather a continuation of long-standing policies. As this paper is ultimately about changes in foreign policy under the new government, they will be given only a brief discussion.

³¹ Václav Jabůrek, "Místo dvou institucí jen jedna. Zahraniční obchod má hájit CzechBusiness," Seznam Zprávy, July 29, 2026, <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/ekonomika-firmy-namisto-dvou-instituci-jen-jedna-zahranicni-obchod-ma-hajit-czechbusiness-311995>.

³² ČTK, "Pokud někdo vydělá 30 miliard na úkor Ukrajiny a na válce, tak se nám to nelíbí," video, Aktuálně.cz, October 8, 2025, <https://video.aktualne.cz/pokud-nekdo-vydela-30-miliard-na-ukor-ukrajiny-a-na-valce-ta/r-a94ae6e2a42e11f09af20cc47ab5f122/>.

³³ Robert Břešťan, "Andrej Babiš vstává a usíná se střetem zájmů. A jeho vláda mu v tom pomáhá," Hlídací pes, May 11, 2026, <https://hlidacipes.org/andrej-babis-vstava-a-usina-se-stretem-zajmu-a-jeho-vlada-mu-v-tom-pomaha/>.



MEMBERSHIP IN THE EU AND NATO

Despite being formed largely by eurosceptic parties, the Czech government has maintained the Czech Republic's commitments to membership in the EU and NATO. Prime Minister Babiš has repeatedly stated that **membership in both organisations is not to be questioned**, and this is reflected in the government's programme statement.³⁴ The commitment does not rest on Babiš alone: **the single market is crucial for Czech business, and public support for membership remains solid**, despite Czechs being among the most sceptical of publics towards Brussels.³⁵ SPD, the only party advocating exit, has neither the votes nor coalition partners willing to pursue it. This said, the **individual EU policies and the future of European integration are being contested within the coalition**, with the government as a whole taking a **visibly more confrontational approach** than its predecessor. Nevertheless, **no explicit departure from the broader geopolitical West** is to be expected under the Babiš government.

SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL

Support for Israel is one of the few areas where the entire relevant political spectrum agrees that the Czech Republic should stand behind Israel. Because the **consensus runs across government and opposition alike**, no single actor can realistically shift the position.

COOLING SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

The first constant specific to the new government's foreign policy concerns its approach to Ukraine. **While SPD is the only party that is genuinely pro-Russian, no party in the government is meaningfully pro-Ukrainian either**; the positions range from SPD's open hostility, through ANO's more transactional scepticism, to the Motorists, whose resistance to certain kinds of aid is driven less by a view of Ukraine or Russia than by personal grievances against their political opponents.³⁶ **Under the new government, support for Ukraine has a ceiling and a floor.** The ceiling is set by the absence of any seriously pro-Ukrainian party in government: aid will not grow, and will most likely continue to erode. By contrast, the floor is held up by three mechanisms. First, **for ANO and the Motorists, embracing pro-Russian policies could alienate their more centrist voters**, leading to a more measured approach. Second, the floor is reinforced by **business interests**: Czech firms with a stake in the eventual reconstruction of Ukraine are wary of jeopardising their position in Kyiv, and so oppose an openly hostile turn. Third, **allied pressure works in the same direction**. Together, these mechanisms make it unlikely that the Czech Republic will fall into openly pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian policies, despite SPD's efforts.

The effect of these mechanisms is illustrated by **the ammunition initiative**, which was not cancelled – as Babiš had declared it would be before the elections – but only stripped of its Czech financial contribution.³⁷ Similarly, the Czech

³⁴ Government of the Czech Republic, Programové prohlášení vlády, January 5, 2026, <https://vlada.gov.cz/cz/vlada/programove-prohlaseni/programove-prohlaseni-vlady-224629/>.

³⁵ Naděžda Čadová, "Členství České republiky v Evropské unii očima veřejnosti – srpen 2025," Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění, October 30, 2025, <https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/cz/tiskove-zpravy/politicke/mezinarodni-vztahy/6181-clenstvi-ceske-republiky-v-evropske-unii-ocima-verejnosti-srpen-2025>; European Parliament, Spring 2026 Eurobarometer Survey (European Parliament, 2026), <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3752>.

³⁶ Seznam Zprávy, "Co ministr Macinka napsal prezidentovi".

³⁷ ČTK, "Babiš: Muniční iniciativu ČR rušit nebude," České noviny, January 6, 2026, <https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/2768445>.



government refused to join as a guarantor of the EU's loan to Ukraine, but unlike Hungary under Viktor Orbán, it did not block it.³⁸

CENTRALITY OF BUSINESS

The second constant of the Babiš government is the declared **primacy of business interests over a values-based approach to foreign policy**. This marks a clear break from the previous Fiala government, which, despite its own synergies with particular businesses, prided itself on its commitment to the international rules-based order and human rights. Under Babiš, by contrast, foreign policy is treated as **an extension of economic interests**. Babiš's quote from shortly before his trip to Central Asia and the Caucasus, his first outside the EU, sums up the new approach: "We will do pragmatic foreign policy... for our companies... not the values-based policy, which has brought nothing and only hurt our companies."³⁹

This constant is held in place by the agreement of several actors. For Babiš, coming from a billionaire background, **business-first is the natural approach to foreign affairs**. The Motorists hold the same line: their leader Petr Macinka, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, frames the approach as a **return to pragmatism** and to the support of Czech firms, casting the Fiala government as having placed values over business: "We were long exporters of truth and love; we'd like to add goods and services to that portfolio".⁴⁰ For SPD, business-first is a useful tool to turn against **the values-based approach long opposed by its voters and the party elite**. Finally, the government's promise to open international markets to Czech companies sits well with the **export-oriented business sectors**.

The business-first constant should be viewed as a **disposition rather than a coherent programme**, since business interests vary widely and on certain issues the government defies them. For instance, while business overwhelmingly favours adopting the Euro, the government abolished the annual report assessing the country's readiness to join the Eurozone, asserting that the currency simply will not be adopted.⁴¹ Similarly, the government denied a plane to a delegation of businesspeople and academics to Taiwan led by Miloš Vystrčil, the President of the Senate. The government stated that it did so to protect trade with China; **Czech industry, however, called for a coordinated approach to both markets**.⁴²

³⁸ Paul Kirby and Chris Graham, "EU Agrees €90bn Loan for Ukraine but without Using Russian Assets," BBC News, December 19, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3eo25vyppeo>.

³⁹ "Babiš: Děláme pragmatickou zahraniční politiku, hodnotová nic nepřinesla," České noviny, April 19, 2026, <https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/babis-delame-pragmatickou-zahranicni-politiku-hodnotova-nic-nepřinesla/2814626>.

⁴⁰ Petr Macinka, "Projev ministra zahraničních věcí a předsedy Motoristů sobě Petra Macinky při žádosti o důvěru vládě" (speech, Prague, January 13, 2026), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, https://mzv.gov.cz/jnp/cz/o_ministerstvu/archivy/clanky_a_projevy_ministru/clanky_a_projevy_ministra_macinky_2026/projev_ministra_zahranicnich_veci_a_predsedy.html. A reference to Václav Havel's famous sentence from the 1989 Velvet Revolution, "Truth and love must prevail over lies and hatred." Among its critics, it is used as a byword for moralising liberal circles.

⁴¹ "Vláda už nebude každoročně zpracovávat zprávu o připravenosti k přijetí eura," České noviny, May 11, 2026, <https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/2823829>; PwC Česká republika, "PwC CEO Survey: 7 z 10 šéfů českých firem chce euro," May 5, 2025, <https://www.pwc.com/cz/cs/blog/byznys-a-spolecnost/pwc-ceo-survey-7-z-10-sefu-ceskych-firem-chce-euro.html>.

⁴² "Expert: Tchaj-wan dodává ČR čipy, bez kterých se žádné auto nevyrobí," České noviny, April 20, 2026, <https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/expert-tchaj-wan-dodava-cr-cipy-bez-kterych-se-zadne-auto-nevyrobi/2815189>.



MULTI-TRACK FOREIGN POLICY

The preceding constants concerned specific policy choices. This one, by contrast, concerns how policy is made.

Under the current Babiš government, the foreign policy of the different constitutional actors runs in competing directions. A multi-track foreign policy is nothing new in Czech politics – recall the first year of the Fiala government, when it found itself at odds with then-President Zeman. However, the current situation marks a clear break from the rest of the Fiala period, when the different tracks largely reinforced one another.

Several mechanisms hold the division in place, making it a durable constant of the Babiš government. First, Babiš's tendency to **centralise decisions runs against a more even division of powers**, leading to clashes. Second, the Motorists' rejection of the other tracks stems from their **antagonism towards the establishment** and from their habit of turning political opponents into personal enemies. Third, **SPD's pro-Russian and deeply eurosceptic position** leaves little room for cooperation with the other tracks on foreign policy issues.

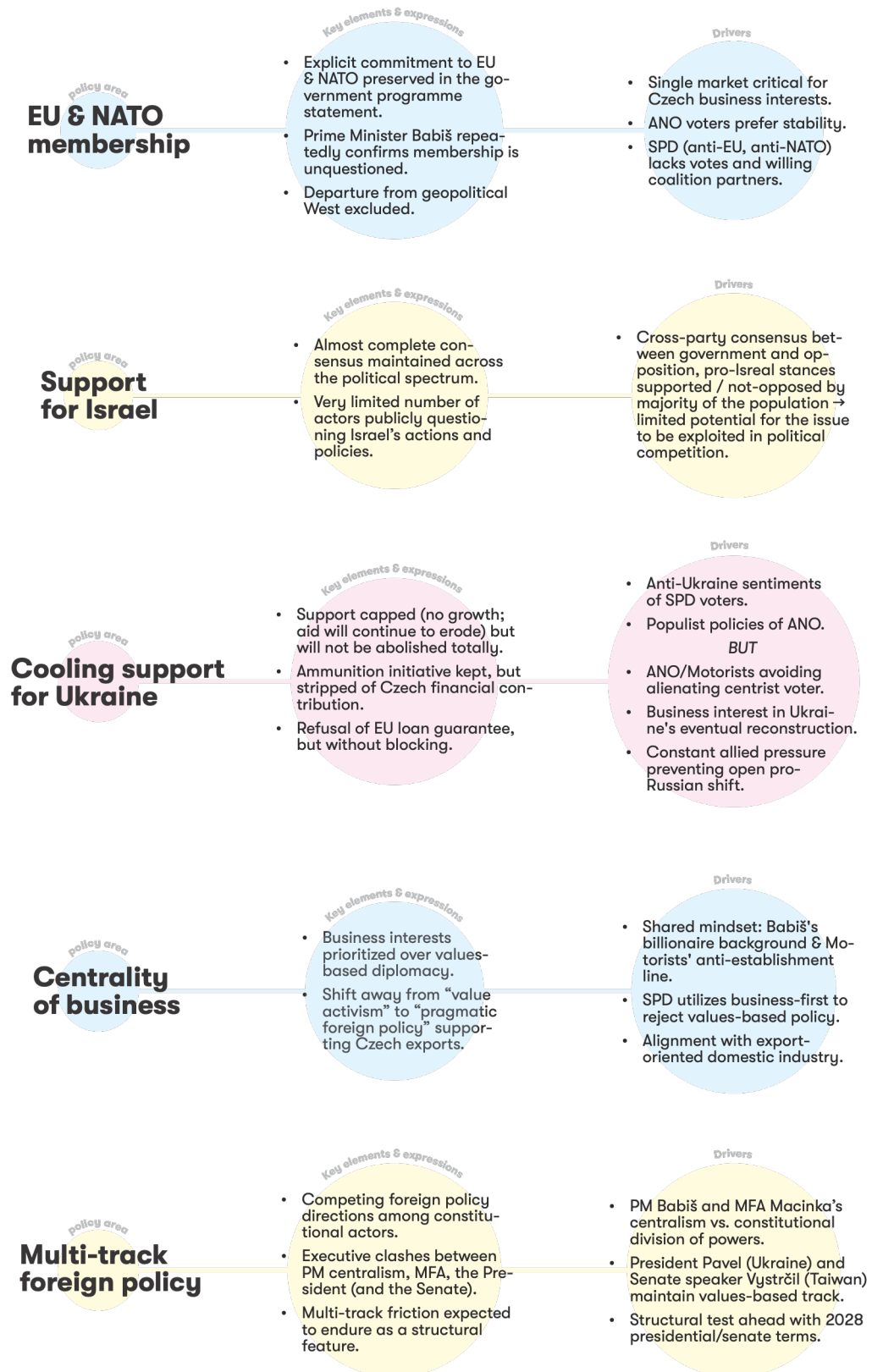
However, the multi-track structure is not sustained by the government alone: **both Senate President Vystrčil and President Pavel have been willing to independently pursue foreign policy positions at odds with it**. Vystrčil, the only opposition figure with some representative role on the international stage, rejects the government premise that values-based and pragmatic diplomacy are mutually exclusive.⁴³ Similarly, President Pavel has shown no inclination to stay quiet on foreign policy issues, particularly regarding Ukraine and defence.

The multi-track foreign policy is unlikely to disappear. At most, the different parties will find a modus operandi that somewhat reduces the severity of the clashes, rather than removing the divergence. This constant faces **a structural test before the end of the legislative term**, as both Vystrčil's and Pavel's terms end in 2028, with roughly one and a half years remaining for the Babiš government. Nonetheless, it will most likely endure given Pavel's probable re-election and the opposition's long-term control over the upper chamber of parliament.

⁴³ "Jedu dělat hodnotovou pragmatickou politiku, řekl Miloš Vystrčil před odletem na Tchaj-wan," iRozhlas, May 31, 2026, https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/jedu-delat-hodnotovou-pragmatickou-politiku-pronesl-milos-vystrcil-pred-odletem_2605311006_bva.



Figure 2: Czech foreign policy constants



Source: authors



8.2 Wildcards and question marks

EUROPEAN UNION

Besides the issues described in the previous chapter, which are likely to remain relatively constant in Czech foreign and European policy in the short and medium term, there are also areas where either the positions of the key actors are ambivalent or relevant developments are too dynamic for clear predictions. In this section, we focus on some of these issues and identify the factors that are most likely to shape future developments.

One of the most complex and consequential issues the Czech government will have to navigate concerns the Czech Republic's **position within the European Union, particularly its strategic alignment and reputation among the other member states and the EU institutions**. These relationships have an important impact on the Czech Republic's ability to promote its interests within the Union, shape EU decision-making, and influence key policy debates. In an extreme scenario, they could even lead to disputes over compliance with EU law. In this regard, Hungary provides a useful recent point of comparison.

The Czech Republic's standing within the EU could suffer if the government comes into **conflict with the EU institutions over rule-of-law issues**, potentially following a trajectory similar to that of Hungary. Since taking office, the Babiš government has pursued **legislation affecting the civil sector and non-governmental organisations, public media, the independence of public institutions, and the civil service**. Taken together, these initiatives – along with conflicts with the President and questioning of the impartiality of the Constitutional Court⁴⁴ – suggest a **willingness on the part of the coalition to alter some of the core principles of liberal democracy**.

A further escalation of the **Prime Minister's conflict-of-interest allegations**, together with a **possible financial dispute** between the European Commission and the Czech Republic over Common Agricultural Policy payments and other subsidies linked to businesses formerly or still owned by Babiš,⁴⁵ could reinforce this trajectory. Although Babiš appears to value his standing among other EU leaders, **an escalating conflict with the EU institutions could gradually push him into the position of a pariah within the Union**, following the example of Viktor Orbán. Such a development might suit the coalition's junior members. At the same time, it remains unlikely that Babiš would assume the role of the intellectual and political leader of the Patriots for Europe or of the broader MAGA-inspired current in European politics, given his different political style and level of ambition to that of Orbán, as well as the fact that Czech voters, including ANO supporters, generally hold unfavourable views of Donald Trump.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, **further radicalisation of ANO's rhetoric towards the current direction of European integration could strengthen the party's alignment within the Patriots for Europe group**.

Finally, the Czech government's relations with other EU member states could deteriorate if the war in Ukraine ends and **negotiations begin on European security guarantees, including the possible deployment of military personnel to Ukraine**. Participation in such a mission by the Czech Armed Forces has repeatedly been ruled out by Babiš⁴⁷ and is categorically opposed by SPD. If only a limited

⁴⁴ "Ústavní puč, tvrdí Macinka. 'Není to namístě, takhle silná slova je třeba odmítnout,' míní právník Preuss," iRozhlas, June 24, 2026, https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/ustavni-puc-tvrdi-macinka-neni-na-miste-takhle-silna-slova-je-treba-odmitnout_2606242005_jar.

⁴⁵ Lukáš Valášek, "EU pozastavila dotace pro firmy spojené s Babišem: Platilo by je Česko," Seznam Zprávy, May 25, 2026, <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-kauzy-eu-pozastavila-dotace-pro-firmy-spojene-s-babisem-platilo-by-je-cesko-306963>.

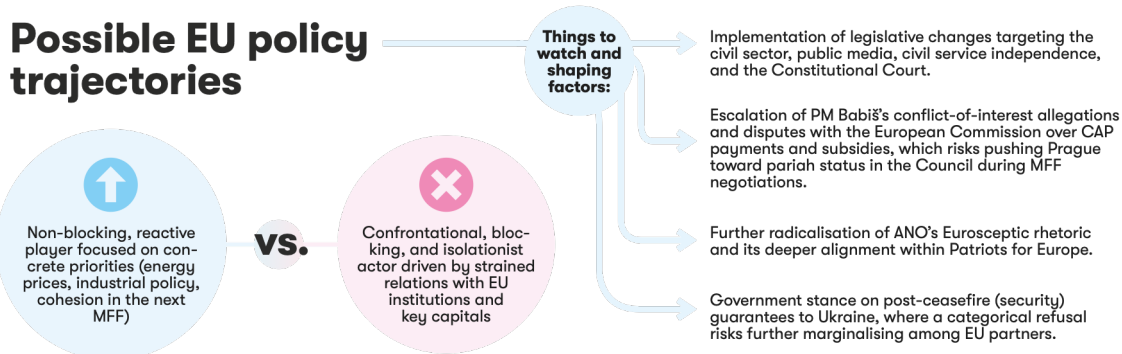
⁴⁶ Tvrdou, "Pohled na Trumpa štěpí voliče ANO."

⁴⁷ Eva Pospíšilová et al., "Naši vojáci na Ukrajinu nepůjdou, bez Trumpa mír nebude, řekl Babiš," iDNES.cz, January 6, 2026, https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/babis-koalice-ochotnych-pariz-jednani-ukrajina-valka.A260105_163037_domaci_aoc.



number of EU member states adopt a similar position, the Czech Republic's standing within the Union could be further undermined.

Figure 3



Source: authors

DEFENCE SPENDING

Another contested area concerns defence spending and the fulfilment of the Czech Republic's NATO commitments. Though membership in the organisation is beyond dispute, as discussed in the preceding chapter, the question of how much the Czech Republic should spend on its defence is very much alive. It has been a **principal source of friction between Prague and its allies** in recent months, most visibly with Washington, and has **drawn criticism from President Pavel** at home. We argue that **the story of defence spending under the Babiš government is one of external pressure**: so far, pledges of increases have come as a reaction to allied pressure.

The clearest indication of where defence sits among domestic priorities for the Babiš government is its budget for 2026. After a period of provisional financing, the government adopted a budget allocating roughly **1.8% of GDP to core defence spending, some €830m less than in the 2026 draft budget prepared by the outgoing Fiala government**. The Babiš government has nonetheless presented the budget as fulfilling the 2% of GDP target, claiming total defence spending to be around 2.1% of GDP.⁴⁸ This figure, however, is reached by **counting expenditures from other areas**, most notably the construction of highways and railways, including the D11 highway to the Polish border.⁴⁹ Babiš himself has since admitted that NATO is unlikely to recognise such items, and that Czech defence spending would fall below the 2% target in 2026.⁵⁰

While the coalition publicly claims it is committed to the 2% of GDP target, the parties differ in the way they approach it. For SPD, 2% is sufficient for the Czech Republic's defence, and the party leadership rejects any increases beyond

⁴⁸ Ministry of Finance of the Czech Republic, "Ministerstvo financí zrevidovalo rozpočet na rok 2026 podle usnesení Poslanecké sněmovny," January 26, 2026, <https://mf.gov.cz/cs/ministerstvo/media/tiskove-zpravy/2026/mf-zrevidovalo-rozpocet-na-rok-2026-62672>.

⁴⁹ Kateřina Gruntová, "Vrtulníky policie i dálnice: Co chce Česko podstrčit NATO jako výdaj na obranu," Seznam Zprávy, March 6, 2026, <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-zivot-v-cesku-vrtulniky-policie-i-dalnice-co-chce-cesko-podstrcit-nato-jako-vydaj-na-obranu-300636>.

⁵⁰ "Letos dvě procenta HDP na obranu nebudou, řekl Babiš," České noviny, July 8, 2026, <https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/letos-dve-procenta-hdp-na-obranu-nebudou-rekl-babis/2848466>.



that point in the future.⁵¹ Motorists and ANO state that the 2% target is the maximum currently feasible. However, unlike SPD, the two parties do not rule out future increases entirely.⁵² The coalition parties also share the same discourse strategy; **when discussing defence spending, they argue that they focus on capabilities and effectiveness, rather than on headline figures**, a framing that avoids any binding commitment to a specific number and ignores the link between defence spending and actual military capabilities. The same reluctance extends to the Czech Republic's commitments abroad. As discussed in the previous section, Babiš has ruled out the participation of Czech troops in any post-ceasefire mission to Ukraine as well as Czech participation in the €70bn NATO pledge to Ukraine.⁵³ Underlying these choices is **a narrow understanding of defence policy**: defence begins and ends with the Czech Republic itself. In short, across defence issues, the government consistently aims for the least costly and least binding options available.

The degree of external pressure is likely to set the trajectory of defence spending. The most likely scenario is that spending will hover at or slightly above the 2% of GDP target, enough to satisfy the allies for now, with the increase to 3.5% of GDP on core defence, pledged at the 2025 Hague summit, deferred to future governments. This is, in effect, the government's own plan; its mandate for the Ankara summit reaffirms the commitment to 3.5% – a commitment the government had previously denied being bound by – while keeping spending around 2% until the end of the decade.⁵⁴

We foresee three potential developments that could upend this balance. First, **should the Czech Republic remain among the last allies without a significant increase and begin to be singled out, the resulting pressure could push spending beyond the government's plan.** Second, **should the pressure fail to produce results, allies could write the Czech Republic off entirely.** External pressure would then weaken significantly, allowing the government to let defence spending drift even below the 2% target. The cost would be exclusion from new defence initiatives and broader political marginalisation. Third, should the Czech public begin to perceive the Russian threat as far more acute, **domestic support for higher defence spending could rise.** Though the coalition's own voters are currently the least inclined to support such increases, they could come to demand them, creating pressure that Babiš could not ignore.⁵⁵

⁵¹ "Vláda nebude navyšovat výdaje na obranu: Dvě procenta HDP stačí, řekl Okamura," iRozhlas, January 26, 2026, https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/vlada-nebude-navysovat-vydaje-na-obranu-dve-procenta-hdp-staci-rekl-okamura_2601261231_elev. The stance of the Minister of Defence, Jaromír Zůna, is less categorical. For his position within the party, see Chapter "Freedom and Direct Democracy."

⁵² "Letos dvě procenta HDP na obranu nebudou, řekl Babiš"; Anna Nováková, "Na vyšší výdaje na obranu nemáme peníze, hájí rozpočet Schillerová," Seznam Zprávy, March 15, 2026, <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/ekonomika-finance-na-vyssi-vydaje-na-obranu-nemame-penize-haji-rozpocet-schillerova-301659>.

⁵³ ČTK, "Babiš řekl, že ČR se nebude podílet na pomoci 70 miliard eur pro Ukrajinu," Seznam Zprávy, July 8, 2026, <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-zivot-v-cesku-babis-rekl-ze-cr-se-nebude-podilet-na-pomoci-70-miliard-eur-pro-ukrajinu-310446>.

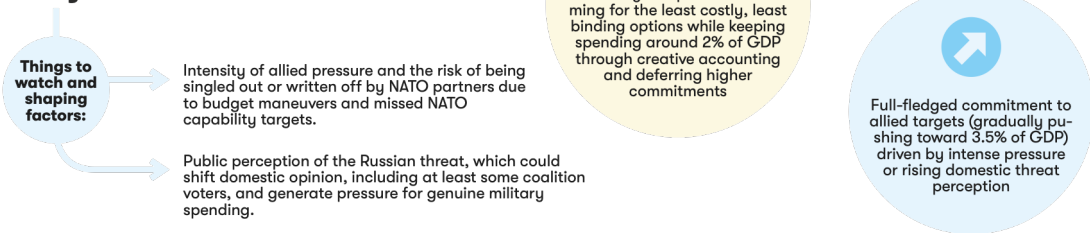
⁵⁴ Pavel Otto, "NATO chtělo víc, tak Babiš nasliboval miliardy: Odpověď na klíčovou otázku ale chybí," E15, July 10, 2026, <https://www.e15.cz/byznys/obrana-a-zbrojni-prumysl/nato-chtelo-vic-tak-babis-nasliboval-miliardy-odpoved-na-klicovou-otazku-ale-chybi-1434206>; Pavel Nádvorník, "Žádný závazek nemáme, říká Babiš: Obranný rozpočet na požadavky NATO reagovat nebude," Novinky.cz, February 1, 2026, <https://www.novinky.cz/clanek/domaci-zadny-zavazek-nemame-rika-babis-obranny-rozpocet-na-pozadavky-nato-reagovat-nebude-40560363>.

⁵⁵ Zuzana Najvrtová, "Exkluzivní průzkum: Vládní voliči nechtějí víc peněz na obranu," Seznam Zprávy, July 8, 2026, <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-politika-exkluzivni-pruzkum-vetsina-cechu-chce-vic-penez-na-obranu-310011>.



Figure 4

Possible defence spending and NATO commitment trajectories



Source: authors

VISEGRAD GROUP

The government's policy statement notes that "an important priority of our foreign policy is to restore and **strengthen strained relations within the Visegrád Group, based on mutual respect, shared interests, and effective regional cooperation.**" All three parties also agree that Central Europe is important to them. They argue that Fiala's previous governments underestimated these ties, and they see a number of shared interests and potential ideological allies in the region. In its first months, Andrej Babiš' government focused on restoring government-level contacts with Slovakia, but it was only the outcome of the Hungarian elections that gave new momentum to Visegrád cooperation. First, Péter Magyar declared this cooperation to be his priority; second, Fidesz's defeat paved the way for a revitalization of contacts between Poland and Hungary.

Although the Czech government openly supported Orbán during the elections, **contacts with the new Hungarian cabinet began to be established rapidly**, and the Czech Republic also welcomed the renewal of Visegrád cooperation at the highest political level. However, questions remain behind this declarative support: **what will the Czech Republic seek to use the V4 for?** Will this perspective be consistent with that of the other countries, or will there be a new rift within the V4?

It is clear from initial discussions that the Visegrád Group will find **common ground on the issue of the next Multiannual Financial Framework**, as it will seek to preserve as large a share as possible of the allocation for cohesion and agricultural policy and strive to maintain flexibility in the spending of European funds. Another common theme in European policy will be **industry, including adjustments to the EU's decarbonization plans**. Other common themes may include migration or EU enlargement toward the Western Balkans.

However, an important factor in further raising the V4's profile in European politics will be the **overall position of the Czech Republic (and Slovakia) within the EU**. If relations between the European institutions and the Czech Republic deteriorate according to the scenario described above, it will be particularly problematic for Poland – and to some extent Hungary – to present Prague as an ally.⁵⁶

This issue will be particularly sensitive for Tusk's cabinet ahead of the Polish parliamentary elections next autumn. **Among the Central European countries, relations with Warsaw remain the least developed.** No bilateral visit by the Prime Minister has taken place yet, nor have joint Czech–Polish government meetings restarted.

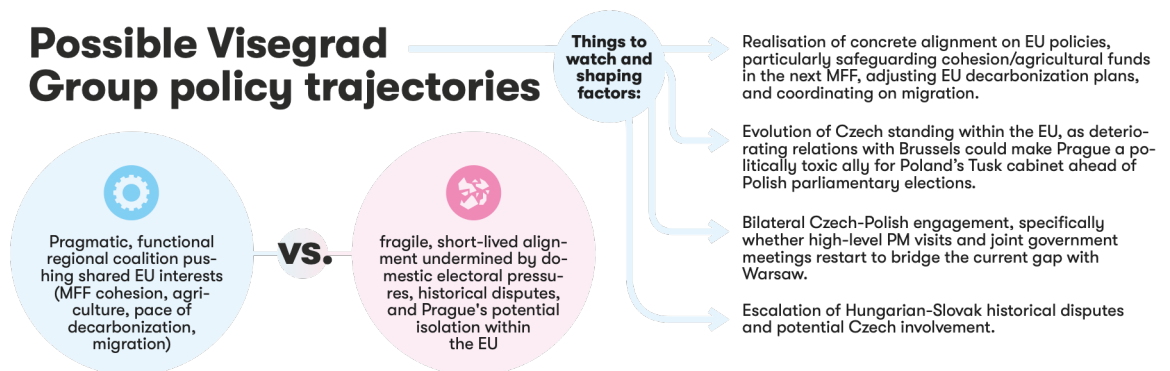
⁵⁶ Pavlína Janebová, "Guess Who's Back: After Years of Division, the Visegrád Group Is Moving beyond Ideological Battles to Pursue Common Interests in Europe," *International Politics and Society*, July 7, 2026, <https://www.ips-journal.eu/topics/european-integration/guess-whos-back-9174/>.



Not least, **further escalation in relations between Hungary and Slovakia could stir up Central European cooperation.** Given that Magyar is raising the issue of the Beneš Decrees a topic still frequently exploited in Czech politics – and given that parliamentary elections are also approaching in Slovakia, any potential Czech interference in this dispute could cause complications in the development of the V4.

Although the Visegrad Group is a priority for the Czech government and it has favourable conditions for its revitalization – including the willingness of all partners and suitable common topics – there are other, more destructive reasons why this renaissance may be short-lived. And the Czech Republic could play an important role in determining the outcome.

Figure 5



Source: authors



Association for International Affairs (AMO)

AMO is an NGO dedicated to research and education in the field of international relations. As a leading independent foreign policy think tank, AMO publishes analyses and provides a platform for informed discussion among actors in foreign, European, and security policy. It also explains current issues to the general public. Its mission is to improve Czech foreign policy and contribute to the creation of a world that respects the values of freedom, democracy, and sustainability.



www.amo.cz



info@amo.cz



Žitná 608/27, 110 00 Praha 1



www.facebook.com/AMO.cz



bsky.app/profile/amocz



x.com/AMO_cz



instagram.com/AMO.cz



linkedin.com/company/amocz

Vít Dostál

Vít Dostál is the Executive Director of AMO. He focuses on Czech foreign and European policy, Central European cooperation, and Polish foreign and domestic policy. He completed a doctoral program on European Studies at Masaryk University in Brno in 2017 with a dissertation on the “Paradiplomacy of Czech Regions – Regions as Actors of International Relations”.



vit.dostal@amo.cz



[@vitdostal](https://x.com/@vitdostal)

Pavlína Janebová

Pavlína Janebová is the Research Director at AMO. Her expertise lies in Czech foreign and European policy, as well as Central European cooperation. She is also involved in AMO's initiatives aimed at strengthening the voice of women in foreign and security policy.



pavlina.janebova@amo.cz



[@pavlinajanebova](https://x.com/@pavlinajanebova)

Martin Borecký

Martin Borecký is an intern at AMO. He focuses on Latin America and its role in global affairs. He holds a BA in International Studies from Leiden University, with a regional specialization in Latin America. Currently, he is pursuing a Master's degree in International Governance and Diplomacy with a concentration in global risks at Sciences Po Paris.



martin.borecky@amo.cz

The publication is supported by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom. The Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom is not responsible for the content of this publication, or for any use that may be made of it. The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) alone. These views do not necessarily reflect those of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom.