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Executive summary

The NATO and EU accessions in 1999 and 2004 respectively represented an achievement of the most important foreign policy goal of the Czech Republic in the post-1989 period and left the Czech political elites unprepared for the future. The successive years were characterised by searching for a new foreign policy identity. Promotion of human rights and democracy, Eastern partnership and relations with the USA emerged as the important new priorities that the Czech Republic aimed at projecting also through the European Union. A more active foreign policy course was also activated with the run up to the Czech EU Presidency in the first half of 2009, which however showed a certain immaturity of Czech policy makers in dealing with complex issues and multiple crises. The subsequent fragile governments and growing polarisation of the political scene on foreign policy, not only inside the governing coalition, but also between the President and the government weakened the Czech Republic's foreign policy impact even further. The government emerging from 2014 elections, with a Social Democratic foreign minister after more than 10 years, put forward a few new ideas including a more active approach to CSDP, more emphasis on effective multilateralism, improvement of relations with China or a wider concept of human rights support. However, it was not always successful in explaining the change of course. Moreover, the multiple crises that emerged in the European neighbourhood since 2014 risk confining the Czech foreign policy in the next years to a reactive mode unless significant additional resources are mobilized and more consensus is forged across the political spectrum as well as among general public.

Introduction

The Czech foreign policy, upon the Czech Republic's accession to the European Union in May 2004, had to face a similar challenge as other post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe: the exhaustion of what can be called the Euro-Atlantic foreign policy consensus, both among politicians as well as among the general audience. The integration into NATO and the EU represented the primary foreign policy imperative of the 1990s, leading to some extent to neglecting other foreign policy priorities, with a possible exception of good neighbourly relations. By the time of the EU accession in 2004, the Czech foreign policy was *inter alia* confronted with the question of where to find its added value for the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), as the membership in the EU also provided for opportunities of projecting foreign policy through the CFSP toolbox. The tenure of EU Council presidency relatively early into Czech EU membership in the first half of 2009 (the Czech Republic was the second CEE country after Slovenia to execute this task), with preparations starting well ahead, thus pushed the Czech policymakers into deliberating and formulating its goals and priorities in the EU external relations realm. It is not without significance that the Czech EU presidency was the only one out of the V4 EU presidencies exercised in the pre-Lisbon framework, since it conferred on the Czech leadership much broader responsibilities in the area of external relations than in case of Hungarian or Polish EU presidencies in 2011. "Europe in the World" was identified as one of the main priorities of the Czech presidency programme. On the other hand, the actual conduct of EU presidency in the foreign policy domain then illustrated certain immaturity of the Czech leadership in terms of its capacity of being an impartial broker in external relations, dealing with complex crises (Russia-Ukraine gas dispute, the conflict in the Gaza Strip) or representing the EU vis-à-vis the major powers, such as the USA, Russia or China.
The main foreign policy priorities in the first ten years of membership

The identification of the three top foreign policy priorities for the EU in the 2004-2014 period is not outright clear-cut. The two that can be identified with relative certainty are Eastern Europe (namely Eastern Partnership) and democracy and human rights. As to the third one, looking at the political statements or foreign policy strategic documents, it could be considered Western Balkans or the EU enlargement at large. But these issues remained a priority more on paper than in reality. On the other hand, it seems that the relations with the United States retained higher significance for the Czech foreign policy than the aforementioned. Other important elements of foreign policy included the relations with Israel, the Middle East Peace Process and broader region of Middle East and North Africa, relations with Russia and the development of attitudes towards the creation of EEAS.

Eastern Partnership

Although the relations with Eastern European countries were neglected by the Czech policymakers in the pre-accession period, certainly compared to the other Visegrad partners, they came to the forefront of the Czech attention after 2004 as a possible niche for EU foreign policy where the Czechs possess certain expertise and knowledge and where they could contribute to the formulation of the EU policy towards the region.

The idea of enhancing the EU relations with its Eastern neighbours already appeared in 2007 when the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs circulated a non-paper titled “The European Neighbourhood Policy and Eastern Neighbourhood: Time to Act”. Simultaneously, the Czech presidency in the Visegrad group (2007-2008) tried to ensure the support for its initiatives towards Eastern neighbours among the V4 partners, with a clear link to the ambitions of the upcoming EU presidency in 2009. The non-paper was also consulted with other important EU countries considered as like-minded, particularly Germany, Sweden and the three Baltic countries. All of these endeavours paved the way to the subsequent Polish – Swedish proposal, tabled in the Council in 2008 on basis of which the Eastern Partnership (EaP) was conceived and embraced as EU policy. Another important incentive to the creation of the Eastern Partnership came with the French proposal for the Union of the Mediterranean, which was endorsed by the EU in March 2008, and launched at the Euro-Mediterranean summit in July 2008. This gave the incoming Czech EU presidency an additional argument for a balanced approach to the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), envisaged already in the December 2007 European Council conclusions which mandated for the development of both Southern and Eastern dimensions of the ENP. This was finally achieved through the inaugural Eastern Partnership summit in Prague in May 2009. The Eastern Partnership thus became a top foreign policy priority of the Czech EU presidency. It was supposed to be clearly linked to the ENP (unlike the Union for the Mediterranean), and in addition to that included the co-operation in multi-lateral format, as finally expressed in the communication of the European Commission from December 2008 to which the Czechs contributed. It is also interesting to see that the design of these multilateral platforms was linked to the other priorities of the Czech EU presidency. For instance the idea of the integration of Eastern partners into the European economy through Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs) complemented the idea of Europe without barriers, or the idea of energy co-operation acknowledging the central role of energy security and the role of Eastern partners as energy corridors to the EU.

The Eastern partnership (EaP) remained a top Czech priority for EU external relations even after the EU presidency. The Czech Republic remained an active co-shaper of the EaP and participated in a number of initiatives aimed at its enhancement. It contributed substantively to the EU position after the Ukrainian elections in 2012. In spring 2012, in its capacity of holding the V4 presidency, it organized a high-level meeting involving, apart from other V4 members, Denmark (EU presidency), the Baltic countries and European External Action Service (EEAS) and Commission representatives (High Representative/ Vice President Ashton and Commissioner Füle) to discuss
the roadmap to the Vilnius summit in 2013. This meeting was instrumental in securing the extension of International Visegrad Fund (IVF) funding for civil society projects in EaP countries and facilitating the contribution of external donors - namely the Netherlands. Czech foreign policy vis-à-vis EaP countries maintained an active approach even in the run up to the Vilnius summit, with numerous consultations being held in Brussels, EU capitals and partner countries, and the co-sponsorship of the joint German-Swedish-Polish-Czech non-paper titled "Reinforcing the Eastern Partnership with the run-up to the 3rd EaP summit", circulated in early 2013.

The rather cautious approach of the Czech administration towards visa liberalisation with Moldova has been overcome by the eventual convergence of originally different policy lines of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Interior. The introduction of a visa-free regime for Moldovan biometric passport holders was thus given headway, although the Czech Republic cannot be considered as a policy driver in this respect.

The failure of the Vilnius summit to deliver the desired outcome (especially the initialisation of the Association Agreements with Ukraine and Armenia) came as a disappointment to the Czech foreign policy elites and led to a certain "reflection period" in the Czech attitudes towards Eastern Partnership. Especially the ensuing events in Ukraine (protests in Maidan and their violent suppression, subsequent Russian annexation of Crimea and the Russian involvement in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine) led to the conviction, shared by a large part of the Czech diplomacy that the EaP concept had to be rethought before the Riga summit scheduled for summer 2015.

**Human rights and democracy support**

The second top priority of the post-2004 Czech foreign policy, including activities at the EU level, includes the support of human rights and democracy in external relations. This priority was picked up firstly on basis of the Czech experience with the transition from totalitarian regime to democracy and market economy which Czech policy-makers believed could be shared with other countries undergoing a transition process. Secondly, because communist Czechoslovakia experienced grave human rights violations despite its international commitments (especially the two international human rights covenants of 1966 which it ratified¹), and thus felt obliged to contribute to the improvement of human rights’ situation worldwide.

Another main incentive for making human rights and democracy assistance an important part of the Czech foreign policy had to do with the Czech involvement in the reconstruction of Iraq after 2003. Apart from the need for physical reconstruction, the Czech government felt the need to support education, civil society and rule of law and thus funded, in the first place, activities such as internships and trainings. Soon afterwards, the Czech government has increased the funding and created a special unit (Transition Promotion unit) within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to run the application process, administer and disburse funds for projects in this area, aimed primarily at the support of NGO activities. The Transition Promotion Programme was finally set up in April 2005 and its strategic concept determined the priority policy areas and target countries.

Further institutional changes followed in 2007, when the transition unit was merged with the Human Rights Department into Human Rights and Transition Policy Department (LPTP). This practice distinguished Czech policy significantly from the other CEE countries, as well as other EU member states, where the support of democracy and human rights is usually tackled under the development cooperation (in terms of projects) or under general multilateral issues (e.g. the United Nations agenda). The decision to keep the human rights and transition promotion separate from the development assistance and other multilateral agenda illustrates that the Czech Republic viewed human rights, democracy and transition as separate foreign policy areas that deserve specific treatment. The Czech foreign policy also saw causal interconnection between human rights and democracy: democracy is based

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¹ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
on respect for human rights, and the enforcement of human rights cultivates democratic governance.

The Czech human rights and transition policy used various tools and instruments. The multilateral format mainly included engagement through the international organisations, such as the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), Council of Europe or Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In 2011, the Czech Republic succeeded in being elected into the UNHRC after several years of effort, despite the opposition from some authoritarian countries. The membership in UNHRC was also viewed as a way of wielding more influence worldwide and being able to promote its human rights agenda more effectively within the EU. The main bilateral tool was represented by the already mentioned Transition Promotion Programme, a grant-making mechanism in support of various thematic as well as geographic priorities (target countries). The thematic priorities included the support to human rights defenders, civil society development, free media, rule of law and democratic governance, electoral processes and equality and non-discrimination. Geographic priorities classified the target countries into two categories. The first was the category of countries in a transition process where the transfer and sharing of the Czech transition experience could have a significant added value to the local transition process. It included mainly countries that were geographically and culturally close to the Czech Republic, such as select Eastern Partnership countries (Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova) and select countries of the Western Balkans region (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo). The second category were the so-called "hard case" countries, which have not yet started their transition process and where the human rights were severely violated: these included Cuba, Belarus and Myanmar.

The Czech Republic also brought the issue of transition, democracy and human rights forward as an important priority for its EU policy. One of its first strong statements in the EU foreign policy was on the Spanish proposal of lifting the diplomatic sanctions imposed on Cuba in 2003 after the arrest of 75 dissidents, some of which were released in 2004. The Czech Republic, supported by a handful of member states (including Poland) insisted that the restoration of diplomatic relations has to be re-examined and for this reason the Council deferred its decision on easing the sanctions by six months.

The Czech Republic likewise managed to make the issue of human rights and democracy promotion one of its priorities for the EU Council presidency, albeit not as visible as other issues (such as Eastern Partnership or transatlantic relations). Lining up with Sweden, which took over the presidency from the Czechs in July 2009, the two countries put the issue of democracy support in EU external relations on the EU agenda. The Czech presidency organised a conference in Prague in March 2009 called "Building Consensus about EU Policies on Democracy support" that primarily focused on the issue of consolidation of various EU foreign policy instruments in support of democracy. On the basis of this endeavour, the Commission and the Council Secretariat put forward a joint paper on Democracy Building in EU External Relations, which included an overview of instruments available in the EU policy toolbox and some proposals on how to make them more effective. The paper also became a basis for the Council Conclusions on Democracy Support in EU’s External Relations, entitled "Towards Increased Coherence and Effectiveness" and adopted in November 2009 under the Swedish EU presidency, which was eventually accompanied by an action plan proposing specific steps towards increasing the coherence and effectiveness of EU democracy support. The Czech Republic was also very much engaged in the negotiations of the reform of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), the main EU financial instrument devoted to the support of democracy and human rights worldwide. The main elements of the Czech proposals for the reform included the necessity of consultations with local NGOs and democratic forces throughout the programming process of EIDHR in a given location, the responsibility of European Commission (later EU) delegations to maintain regular contact with such entities, the possibility for non-registered associations to receive funding under EIDHR, and the simplification of grant-making procedures and more flexibility in terms of response to changing circumstances in the target countries. Most of the Czech proposals were accepted with one notable exception: the Czechs were opposed to
the possibility of state entities receiving funding under the reformed EIDHR, which was eventually accepted nonetheless.

On the contrary, the Czech Republic was not initially very supportive of the establishment of the European Endowment for Democracy (EED), the Polish initiative tabled and adopted during the Polish EU Council presidency in 2011. The reason behind the rather lukewarm Czech attitude was that the Czech Republic, during its presidency in 2009, supported another already existing foundation (European Partnership for Democracy, EPD) to execute similar tasks, including funding of projects in support of democratic governance in third countries along with EIDHR. The Czech Republic was, however, not successful in its attempts to bring the EPD under the EU framework and to secure funding for it from EU budget as well as from other member states (the Czechs were the only country to contribute to its funding). From this perspective, the EED was seen as a competing initiative to the Czech proposal, which at the time of the EED establishment, however, lost its momentum. The original Czech opposition was withdrawn mainly for tactical reasons since the Czechs did not want to undermine the Polish EU presidency; eventually, the Czech Republic became one of the 17 founding members of the EED.

**Relations with the USA**

The importance of the relationship with the USA for the Czech foreign policy in the 2004 – 2014 period can be best explained by the rather Atlanticist inclinations of Czech governments, or at least the foreign ministers, during the whole of this ten-year period. The United States were viewed as the most credible ally, the guarantor of European (and thus Czech) security and the global promoter of the values of liberal democracy with whom the Czech Republic should try to develop a special relationship. The mutual relations were free of any contentious issues, especially after the Czech Republic had been placed on the US visa waiver programme along with other countries of Central and Eastern Europe (with the exception of Poland, Bulgaria and Romania) in late 2007.

Despite the rather lukewarm support to the US-led invasion in Iraq in 2003, the Czech Republic participated in its reconstruction (as already mentioned) and supported other US and NATO efforts, particularly the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. However, the main glue of the US-Czech relationship became the proposal for placing elements of the missile defence system in the Czech Republic and Poland, which was interpreted by the Czech Atlanticists as fostering this special relationship. The treaty, apart from the agreement on missile defence, provided for an enhanced co-operation in military research and technologies and was viewed as creating a strategic partnership with the USA. The treaty signed shortly before the end of George W. Bush’s second term in the office (July 2008), however, became a subject of a controversial domestic debate in the Czech Republic and its ratification turned out to be very complicated (see further in the consensus chapter). The issue was eventually resolved with the change in US leadership in late 2008, after which the Obama administration decided not to go ahead with the ratification in the Congress as part of its reset with Russia and pivot to Asia policies.

The change of the US administration came right before the Czech EU presidency, which placed transatlantic relations high among its foreign policy priorities. While the very good relations with the USA could have made it arguably easier for the Czech Republic to give a fresh boost to EU-US relations, some issues that resonated in the US-Czech relations made this more difficult to achieve. Firstly, the Czech government at the time was concerned with the Obama administration’s plans to pull out of the missile defence treaty. Secondly, the sceptical Czech attitudes towards climate change (and especially that of President Vaclav Klaus) made it more difficult to co-operate in joint EU-US preparations towards the Copenhagen climate summit, scheduled for December 2009. The Czech government also disapproved of some US moves in the context of the financial crisis, when Prime Minister Topolanek undiplomatically called the US rescue packages a “road to hell”. The EU-US summit held in Prague in April 2009 amounted to nothing but a brief courtesy meeting between President Obama and the EU leaders, making it important symbolically rather than substantively.
The Czech fears concerning the US pivot to Asia seemed to have materialised with the Obama administration eventually deciding to pull out of the missile defence treaty in September 2009. Eventually, however, it might have come as a bit of a face-saving gesture to the Czechs, as the ratification in the Czech parliament would have been extremely problematic, if not at all impossible. In any case, the intensity of the US-Czech relations had decreased considerably since the US pivot to Asia and inability to find a common voice on many global issues. The only significant issue that helped retaining the US eye on the Czech Republic were the plans of Prime Minister Nečas’ government to pursue the extension of Temelin nuclear power plant, where US energy company Westinghouse was among the bidders. However, after the decision to put the extension on halt in April 2014, the last strategic moment has been removed from the relation.

Other important issues

One of the foreign policy areas where Czech diplomacy has been traditionally active and arguably fares over its potential is the Middle East. The Czech Republic enjoys a long-standing and traditional “special relationship” with Israel which can be considered strategic in nature: it is one of the few countries in the world that holds joint government meetings (G2G) with Israel. Due to the close relationship, the Czech Republic was often perceived as communicating in favour of Israel including in the EU, and it has been dubbed by some as the Israeli “Trojan horse” in Europe. The most visible example was the vote in the UN on Palestinian membership in UNESCO, where the Czech Republic was the only EU member state to vote against, similarly as against the observer status in the UN, or its rejection of compulsory labelling of products produced in the Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

Despite this, the Czech Republic managed to retain relatively good relations with the Palestinian Authority, having made it one of the programme recipients of its development co-operation. Likewise, the Czechs maintain traditionally strong especially economic links with many Arab countries in the Middle East. In a response to the Arab spring, the Czech Republic started to swiftly support transition projects in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia as early as in 2011, and offered assistance in security service reform in Egypt and Libya. On the contrary, it was quite lukewarm towards NATO engagement in Libya, towards the EU reaction to the military coup which ousted president Morsi in 2013 or the Franco-German proposals for the EU arms embargo in Syria in May 2014. In relation to Syria, the Czech Republic is the only EU member state that retains a residential embassy in Damascus despite the escalating conflict in the country, where it also serves as the Protecting Power of the United States.

Relations with Russia represent another important element in the Czech Republic’s post-accession foreign policy. The complexity of attitudes can be illustrated by two rather diverging trends. On the one hand, a booming mutual trade which ten years after the EU accession had turned Russia into the country's main non-EU trading partner. On the other hand, the predominantly centre-right governments were taking a critical attitude towards Russian intrusion in its neighbours’ affairs as well as on the state of human rights in Russia. The plans for missile defence shield in the Czech Republic and the Russian – Georgian war in August 2008 (which earned a strong reaction of the then government of Prime Minister Topolánek) brought the political relations to a low point. For this reason, the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) in its EU-Russia power audit in 2007 classified the Czech Republic as a “frosty pragmatist” vis-à-vis Russia (along with e.g. Sweden, the Netherlands or the UK) – a group of EU states that promotes its business interests but also speaks up against Russian behaviour. During the Czech EU presidency in 2009, the government tried to take a less hawkish approach on Russia to reconcile the diverging attitudes in the EU. Prime Minister Topolánek also engaged strongly (together with the European Commission) in the January 2009 gas dispute between Russia and Ukraine, for instance.

2 http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR-02_A_POWER_AUDIT_OF_EU-RUSSIA_RELATIONS.pdf
he brokered a deal between Ukraine and Russia on the conditions of a monitoring mission in the Ukrainian territory.

The human rights in Russia featured rather high in the Czech foreign policy agenda, an issue which the Czech Republic raised both bilaterally and through the EU. For instance, in 2010, it lobbied for the EU condemnation of the “climate of impunity” (i.e. tolerance of the selective law enforcement by the Kremlin) in the Northern Caucasus at the EU-Russia summit. In 2012, largely in reaction to a backlash following the presidential election, the Czech government initiated a process of the assessment of legislative changes in Russia in course of 2012, and it requested the EEAS to analyse and evaluate the changes and to come up with the proposals and recommendations for the EU in how to respond to the aggravating situation regarding human rights in Russia. It also managed to gather support from like-minded EU member states (mainly from the CEE region) to put in place a permanent mechanism of monitoring of human rights in Russia by the EEAS. The Czech Republic was particularly vocal regarding the media and press freedom in Russia – it alluded to this issue several times in the UN Council of Human Rights. The particular position of the Czech Republic is also given by its hosting of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, which broadcasts also to Russia. It also awards Vaclav Havel Fellowships to independent journalists from Russia (3 in the last two years). Prague serves as “shelter” city for Russians (and EaP countries journalists) who can come for up to three months to continue their work there.

The support to Russian civil society was also in the focus of the Czech foreign policy. A Czech organisation DEMAS - network of democracy and human rights NGOs, established with the support by the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs - was one of the initiators of EU-Russia Civil Society Forum, an endeavour similar to Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, and acted as its secretariat in the 2011-2014 period. In 2014, the project of Prague Civil Society Centre was launched in Prague with the support of Czech and Swedish governments and two US foundations to support civil society activities in Russia as well as in the EaP countries.

Apart from human rights issues, energy has topped the Czech-Russian agenda. The Czech Republic is still strongly dependent on imports of natural gas and oil from Russia, but it made some important steps to improve its energy security since the EU accession, especially as far as the import of natural gas from Russia is concerned: e.g. by increasing storage capacity, increasing the capacity of reverse flows, building more interconnectors with neighbouring countries, integrating the gas market with Western Europe (which allows to buy natural gas at lower prices than those offered by Gazprom on basis of long-term contracts) or connecting the Czech gas pipeline system to Nord Stream through Gazela. The Czech governments have also been staunch supporters of Nabucco pipeline project as opposed to Russian-backed South Stream. Generally, limiting the dependence on Russian gas was supported by the Czech governments, who believed that Russia can always use energy as leverage in international relations.

Another important element with regard to EU foreign policy was the relations with Western Balkan countries. The Czech Republic was from the moment of its EU membership strongly supportive of the EU enlargement that would include all the countries of the region. This was reiterated by the nomination of Stefan Füle who was charged with the Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy portfolio in the European Commission between 2009 and 2014. The Czech Republic was among the group of like-minded countries who supported opening of accession negotiations with Croatia in October 2005. It consistently supported the opening of the accession negotiations with Macedonia since 2005 when the Commission recommended starting negotiations despite the lack of settlement over the name issue. Czechs supported the candidate status of Montenegro and Serbia and

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successive opening of negotiations. However, the support often remained at a declaratory level. Although the country did recognize the independence of Kosovo in 2008, it was not among the frontline recognizers and did so with no great cheer, which shows that the issue was divisive internally. The Czechs tried to keep the Western Balkan enlargement on the agenda even during their EU presidency but without visible achievements. The inability to make a difference at the EU level in relation to Western Balkans was further coupled with the fact that bilateral relations were also below potential, despite the fact that Serbia, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina are target countries of the Czech transition assistance and Bosnia and Herzegovina is even among the programme countries of Czech development co-operation. In 2014, the Czech government was hesitant on the Albanian candidate status because of the dispute relating to CEZ (majority state-owned energy company) investment in Albania, whereby the Albanian government was considered as unable to provide sufficient investment guarantees.

 Issues of consensus

All the major political parties support EU enlargement, although the reasons behind sometimes vary: it could be argued that e.g. ODS instrumentalises enlargement to prevent further deepening of EU integration, while for ČSSD enlargement represents a potential problem from this perspective. The only visible contentious issue was the issue of Turkey, which is on a long-term basis opposed by KDU-ČSL because of its largely Muslim identity. In recent years, the attitudes towards Turkey have changed even within ČSSD, as negotiations remain in a stalemate: for example, the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, Jan Hamáček, advocated during the 2014 annual meeting of Czech ambassadors that Turkey and the EU should abandon negotiations and look for another arrangement.

 Principally all the major political parties support the idea of Eastern partnership, including the eventual perspective of membership for the Eastern partners. Dissonance might arise as to the possible consequences of the EaP impact on the relations with Russia. The illustration of this can be the rather difficult ratification of the Association Agreement with Ukraine in the Chamber of Deputies: due to the obstructions from the Communist Party and reluctance also on part of the Social Democrats, the Czech Republic was one of the last EU countries to give its assent.

 The issue of human rights is another relatively consensual issue, whereby most of the political parties were shaping their new foreign policy priorities and expertise. Some of the dissonance also has to be attributed to the fact that for most of the post-accession period, centre-right parties were in power (ODS, KDU-ČSL, TOP09, SZ): in this context, the opposition (mainly ČSSD) tried to distinguish itself from the government on some foreign policy lines.

Internal foreign policy consensus

This chapter discusses, in a very simplified manner given by the scope of this paper, convergence on foreign policy among different actors and their possible impact on the Czech activities at the EU level. Firstly, we examine the attitudes of political parties, secondly we account for the specific roles represented by the presidents Klaus and Zeman.

The consensus on EU and NATO accession (or the Euratlantic consensus), mentioned in the initial part of the paper, was largely shared by all the principal political parties, with the exception of the Communist party. However, after the EU accession the dividing lines started to appear more visibly as the political parties were shaping

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4 ODS = Občanská demokratická strana (Civic Democratic Party); KDU-ČSL = Křesťansko-demokratická unie – Československá strana lidová (Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People’s Party);

5 ČSSD = Česká strana sociálně-demokratická (Czech Social Democratic Party)
acknowledge the specific Czech stake in their promotion. Slight dissonance, as indicated later on, relates to the scope and methods of their promotion. Centre-right parties mainly emphasize the promotion of political and civil rights, for which their main partner is civil society (especially in the so-called "hard cases" such as Belarus, Cuba or Myanmar). On the contrary, the left wing parties (mainly ČSSD) attach more importance to the economic and social rights, and prefer promoting them (albeit not exclusively) through government-to-government dialogue.

From this perspective, the two most important priorities (EaP, human rights) and a side issue (enlargement) were rather consensual among the main political parties in 2004-14 period.

**Issues of disagreement**

The relations with the USA were a matter of disagreement, mainly due to the plans for missile defence which were supported by the right-wing parties but strongly opposed by ČSSD and even more so by the Communists. More broadly, disagreements were also reflected by the attitudes towards the US global engagement of George W. Bush administrations (the intervention in Iraq was strongly criticised by ČSSD and Communists) and the role that the parties attach to NATO (more supported by the right) or EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) (more supported by the left).

Relations to Israel and Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) are also a matter of dissonance. The right-wing Czech parties show strongly pro-Israeli, sometimes blatantly uncritical attitudes, which several times drove the Czech Republic into isolation in the EU. ČSSD, as the main left-wing party, has always advocated a more balanced approach towards MEPP, critical of unilateral actions of Israel. Despite this, there are issues on which both the left and the right agree, for instance on the two-state solution as the desirable outcome of the Middle East Peace Process.

Attitudes towards Russia represent another area of disagreement between the Czech political parties. The right-wing parties were always in favour of a more hawkish approach towards Russia, viewing it as a threat, being suspicious of its actions vis-à-vis Eastern European countries and considering it a rather unreliable partner, especially after the 2008 aggression against Georgia. ČSSD has advocated for a unified EU stance towards Russia, dialogue over confrontation, and for paying attention to possible negative spillover into the economic realm. However, Czech policy, regardless of government has eventually always been a mixture of pragmatism and idealism.

Kosovo was one of the issues where there was a political disagreement despite general support for EU enlargement. Its independence was supported by some right-wing parties (ODS, TOP09), although not without reservations (part of the opposition was represented by the "Christian" stream in those parties). Opposition came also from then-government party KDU-ČSL and by the left-wing opposition (ČSSD and Communists).

**The Presidents**

Despite the fact that, according to the constitutional, the government assumes accountability for the conduct of foreign policy, Czech presidents have also traditionally played an important role in this domain. The two post-accession presidents – Václav Klaus (2003-2013) and Miloš Zeman (elected in 2013) - however, have played a divisive rather than a unifying role in Czech foreign policy. Although they dispose of limited means to influence foreign policy, mainly through the ratification of international treaties and vesting of ambassadors, their statements are often – especially abroad – perceived as the voice of Czech diplomacy. In the case of both Václav Klaus and Miloš Zeman, the fact that they broke up from the parties that they founded or led in 1990’s (ODS and ČSSD respectively) added even more to the complexity of the picture.

Václav Klaus was opposed to the government mainly on the grounds of the EU agenda, but in relation to internal EU issues (Lisbon Treaty, Fiscal Compact, Euro Plus Pact) rather than in foreign policy. Most of the foreign policy issues, including the Eastern Partnership, relations with the USA or human rights, did not cause tensions between Klaus...
and the government. The most visible example of his disagreement with the government was over the recognition of Kosovo, which he criticised the decision of, openly admitting to the Serbian ambassador in Prague to be ashamed\(^6\) of it; until the end of his term in office, he would refuse to appoint an ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary in Pristina (footsteps President Zeman has followed in). The second notable example was the Russia-Georgia war in August 2008, where he accused Georgia of having caused the conflict – a statement strongly contested by Prime Minister Topolánek. Generally speaking, the end of Klaus’ tenure was characterised by strongly pro-Russian stances, which went even further after he stepped down, leading to some allegations of his connection to Russian businesses (e.g. the translation of his book “Blue, not Green Planet” was paid by Lukoil)\(^7\).

President Miloš Zeman, despite his relatively short tenure in office, has already managed to create tensions with the government (led by his former ČSSD party) several times since his election. First, he is renown for his strong pro-Israeli stances, often going beyond those advocated by the government. For instance, he has proposed that the Czech embassy be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, which caused an outrage in the Palestinian Authority, whereas his fervently anti-Muslim rhetoric has had negative impact on Czech relations with some Arab countries, especially the Gulf monarchies\(^8\). The most important controversy came about with his remarks in relation to the Ukrainian conflict. Despite his initial calls for NATO to intervene in Ukraine in case that Russia sends troops there (April 2014)\(^9\), he subsequently made several controversial statements: calling for federalisation of Ukraine\(^10\) (generally ruled out by the EU), or its “finlandisation”\(^11\) (November 2014), denying the presence of unmarked troops and calling the conflict a pure civil war (which led to an oral confrontation with Carl Bildt at the NATO summit in September 2014\(^12\)), or calling for the lifting of sanctions against Russia.

The increasingly frequent disagreements between the President, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister over foreign policy, which are very damaging for the image of Czech foreign policy, have led the main stakeholders (including the defence minister and speakers of both chambers of the parliament) to design a new format whereby this group should meet three times a year in an attempt to co-ordinate the key foreign policy massages. However, as this process, agreed upon in December 2014, has just started, it remains to be seen whether it will make a difference.

### Outlook beyond 2014

The course of the Czech priorities for EU foreign policy in the next 10 years is likely to mark some difference compared to the previous period. First, the Czech political landscape has changed significantly after the October 2013 elections, with most of the right-wing parties that were shaping Czech EU policy in the previous period losing badly and not likely to make a comeback in the near future. Thus, much will depend on the foreign policy course of some of the new actors on the Czech political scene, especially the ANO (“YES”) movement, which is at the moment still quite difficult to predict. Second, and also as a result of these changes of the Czech political landscape, Czech foreign policy (as well as other areas) is likely to take a more pro-European course. In this respect, it is more likely to follow the EU mainstream and be generally more supportive.

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of CFSP, including the EEAS, and especially of CSDP. Third, it goes without saying that the profound changes in the EU neighbourhood in 2014, especially Russia’s involvement in the Ukrainian conflict and generally in Eastern Europe as well as the rise of radical Islam across the area stretching from Sahel to Pakistan are bringing to the table new set of challenges which need to be addressed with different intensity and in a different manner than during the first ten years of membership.

Eastern Partnership is likely going to remain among the top Czech foreign policy priorities. The main concern of the Czech Republic in 2014 concerns the extent to which it will be possible to keep the multilateral format of the initiative, as there exists now a visible differentiation: Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia having signed Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (AA/DCFTA), Armenia and Belarus having joined the Eurasian Union while Azerbaijan calling for strategic partnership for modernisation with the EU. Implementing the incentive-based approach will be quite challenging vis-à-vis countries that are opting for integration with Russia. The main task for Czech foreign policy will be to assist the three most advanced countries with the implementation of the AA/DCFTA and providing them with sufficient technical as well as financial assistance by the EU, while trying to keep the other three on board and providing them with tailor-made arrangements (such as enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, in the case of Armenia).

Relations between the EU and Russia are likely to be much more important, not only because it is today quite clear that Russia is openly hostile towards Eastern partners, pushing them to choose between EU and Eurasian integration and using various forms of pressure (economic, intelligence, energy, media) to force them towards the latter. The use of force, and especially hybrid warfare, by Russia in Eastern Ukraine represents a significant element in Czech foreign policy. Politicians face an uneasy choice: on the one hand, they have to show empathy towards EU members and NATO allies that are most exposed to possible Russian pressure (Baltic countries, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria). On the other hand, they have to address the issue of the perceived negative impact of anti-Russian sanctions on the Czech businesses (which was arguably stronger at the early stage of their introduction than at the time of publication of this paper). The priority will be to preserve the unity of the EU towards Russia that was generated around the sanctions. It is likely that over a longer period, the Czech Republic would like to reset the relations (especially economic) with Russia. Dialogue and diplomatic endeavours are still considered important, as Russia holds the keys to many crucial issues not only in Eastern Europe but globally, the Syrian conflict being one of the prime examples. This, however, should not be considered equal to doing “business as usual”. On the other hand, the support of civil society and free media in Russia is going to remain an essential item, especially in the context of a lack of political dialogue. The Czech government will, however, have to reconcile its stances with the overly pro-Russian positions of President Zeman: for instance, Zeman was the only EU head of state who accepted Putin’s invitation to Moscow to commemorate the anniversary of the end of the Second World War in May 2015, and he also met President Putin at the margin of the similar celebrations in Beijing at the end of August 2015.

In the context of the erosion of statehood and the rise of radical Islam in many areas of the Middle East and in the Sahel, Czech foreign policy is also likely to remain actively engaged in the area, acknowledging the limitation of its human as well as financial resources. Yet, some elements of change are already clearly visible. Firstly, although the Czech Republic is going to maintain its strategic partnership with Israel, it will probably advocate for a more balanced approach to the Middle East Peace Process and be more critical of Israel on issues such as settlements in the West Bank or the humanitarian consequences of operations against Hamas. It becomes difficult to foresee the Czech Republic voting on Israel-Palestinian issues differently from all the other EU member states, as sometimes seen in the past. Secondly, Czechs are more likely to be supportive of possible CSDP operations in the EU neighbourhood, including Sahel and the greater Middle East. The mandate for deployment of Czech troops in 2015-16 already acknowledges the possibility of deployment in the Sahel area, in the context of the Czech
participation in the EU Training Mission in Mali, to be followed by the deployment of troops in the MINUSMA mission of the UN in 2015. Thirdly, the Czech diplomacy is probably going to stress the necessity of a comprehensive EU approach towards the Middle East and Sahel, which will link co-operative security with development and humanitarian activities, as well as co-operation on the issue of combating radicalisation and managing migration – which goes in line with the approach proposed by HRVP Mogherini.

On the other hand, and probably also as side effect of more emphasis on the EU, the relations with the United States are likely to be less important than in the previous period. Although bilaterally the Czech Republic will most probably preserve its strategic dialogue with the US on defence, human rights and economics, the big issues such as missile defence are not likely to come up as much as in the past. Even the most important EU-US issue in 2015 – TTIP – will not be as important for the Czechs as for the Germans, French, or British, due to a relatively limited mutual trade volume (although indirect effects can be significant, especially in terms of strong interconnectedness between the Czech and German economies). Also, the capacity to shape the EU policy towards the US without bilateral issues of strategic importance on the table is probably going to be rather small.

The Czech Republic is also likely to pursue an active human rights policy in the upcoming period. In 2014 there has been some debate in the country implying that the government is giving up on the human rights agenda, which was illustrated by several issues: rapprochement with China, desired upgrade of diplomatic relations with Cuba to the ambassadorial level or alleged abandonment of President Havel’s legacy, especially in terms of political and civil rights. However, the changes will more likely be in emphasis rather than meaning a U-turn. First, the centre-left government is more willing to promote economic, social and cultural rights than the previous governments, which almost exclusively focused on the so-called first generation of human rights. Second, the MFA wants to use different tools for the promotion of human rights, such as government-to-government dialogue, as opposed to government-to-society dialogue that prevailed almost exclusively in the past ten years. The importance of the human rights agenda is illustrated by the candidacy for membership in the UN Human Rights Council in 2019, the introduction of human rights diplomats in some embassies and also by a desire to pursue this issue more actively in the EU, through a stronger engagement of EU the special representative, or even aspiring to putting forward a candidate for this post.

The Western Balkans are also going to remain a focus of Czech foreign policy in the next ten years, but probably not to a much greater degree than in the previous period, or if so mainly rhetorically. The Czech Republic is likely to remain a supporter of enlargement in principle, coupling the political support with technical and transition assistance to countries to implement reforms required by the EU. It will probably oppose any additional conditionality imposed on the candidate countries, yet it will insist on full compliance with the EU requirements and will not support speeding up of the process at any cost. On the other hand, it might motivate the Czech NGOs and businesses to make better use of the Instrument of Pre-Accession (IPA).

Worth mentioning are some other elements in which the Czech foreign policy might evolve differently from the first ten years of membership, with possible spill-over to CFSP and EU external action realms. The Czech Republic is gradually changing its stance on sustainable development and climate change. Centre-right governments of 2004-14 did not taking this issue seriously, with the notable exception of the EU presidency period. However, the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals agenda that top the UN debates in 2015 has already impacted the Czech foreign policy debate, as these goals for instance reflected in the new Czech foreign policy strategy. Although the Czech Republic will not become a big player or advocate of sustainable development in the EU, a gradual change of attitude is already visible.

Another element already mentioned is the “fresh start” of relations with China, which was started in 2014, after several years of a complete absence of political dialogue. The probability of making an impact at the EU level is negligible, although the participation in the “16+1” format (bringing together 16 Central and Eastern European
countries in a dialogue with China) as the second biggest economy of the group after Poland might make some difference, although bilaterally rather than in terms of the EU. The government is aware of the negative reception of this format among older EU member states whose concerns it will try to contain, for example by supporting the participation of the Commission/EEAS in the meetings.

Finally, the Czech diplomacy will probably strive to devise a new, more active strategy towards the EEAS, especially when it comes to the promotion of Czech diplomats into senior posts in the service - both in the headquarters and as ambassadors.

Czech Allies in the Pursuit of Foreign Policy Priorities

It is difficult to see one obvious coalition of countries with whom the Czechs would align to project their priorities. However, going through the individual issues that were discussed, one can see that the Visegrad group actually represents a format where many foreign policy priorities are shared. This is explicable by reasons such as geographical location, a common history of transition from totalitarianism to democracy, a similar level of economic and social development as well as similarity in terms of the relative weight in the international arena.

When it comes to the Eastern Partnership, the Czech Republic aligned with the other Visegrad countries to support the Eastern dimension to the European Neighbourhood Policy as opposed to the so-called "Club Med" which favored a focus on its southern dimension. The Visegrad countries also managed to make the Eastern Partnership a priority of the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) and succeeded in getting other countries on board to contribute financially to IVF projects. However, Czech activism was not confined solely to the Visegrad group, as it worked closely with Poland and Sweden to launch the EaP initiative and often consulted with Germany in subsequent years. The V4, for instance, jointly elaborated several non-papers with ideas on how to further enhance the policy. Close co-operation with the Baltic countries or other like-minded countries (for instance, Denmark was eluded to by the Czech Republic during its previous V4 presidency in 2012) has also been common.

The Visegrad countries shared the priority of the promotion of human rights and democracy in the EU external relations. The Czech Republic often perceived itself as a leader of the group due to the relatively early conception of its Transition programme, as well as thanks to its active participation in multilateral formats, especially in the UNHRC. However, a competition with Poland recalled earlier in the paper (Czech support for the European Partnership for Democracy versus the Polish support for the European Endowment for Democracy) illustrates that even the alliance with the other V4 partners was not as smooth as one might have expected. Apart from the other Visegrad countries, the Czechs aligned closely with Sweden (representing the following EU Council Presidency) to push the adoption of Council conclusions on democracy support. Czech alignment with other like-minded countries, particularly the Netherlands or the UK, was also quite common in situations where these countries wanted to see a strong reference to human rights violations, pitfalls of democratic governance in the EU common positions or ahead of important meetings with third parties, for instance Russia.

When it comes to the relations with the United States, the Czech Republic represented (and in fact still represents) an intuitive Atlanticist. It aligned strongly with the other Atlanticist countries, which include the Visegrad group, but also other countries of the region of Central and Eastern Europe (namely the Baltic countries and Romania), the UK or the Netherlands. The aim of these countries can be described as retaining a strong transatlantic bond and in relation to European security to ensure complementarity, not competition between NATO and the CSDP.

When it comes to Western Balkans, apart from the Visegrad group, the closest allies of the Czech Republic have been Austria and Slovenia. Both of them for instance strongly pleaded for the opening of accession negotiations with Croatia in 2005. However, as was mentioned, Czech
policy towards the Balkans was more active on a declaratory level rather than in concrete terms.

When it comes to the relations with Russia, the situation in the Visegrad group was more complicated than in other cases. Firstly, the policy varied more significantly with different governments in power (which is also the case in other V4 countries), secondly due to the numerous discords between the president and the government. The closest alignment of the Czech foreign policy in 2004-2014 period was generally with the more “hawkish” countries in the EU: Poland, the Baltic countries, the UK.

After the change of government in 2014, Czech policy towards Russia mainly mirrors the German position of the two-track approach – supporting the sanctions while limiting contacts at the highest level (with the exception of the President).

Conclusion

After a short period of “soul searching” following the EU accession in 2004, the Czech foreign policy succeeded in identifying new niches to pursue through the EU. The promotion of democracy and human rights and the Eastern Partnership probably represent the most important pieces of identity of post-accession Czech foreign policy. The Czech Presidency of the EU Council in the first half of 2009 (the only one of a V4 country in the full-fledged pre-Lisbon format) made the Czech foreign policy more active and exposed it to new challenges. At the same time, however, it demonstrated the limits of the Czech political representation to tackle the complex foreign policy issues of European importance in the difficult environment of the financial crisis, the escalating conflict in the Gaza Strip, the Russian-Ukrainian energy dispute and the US pivot to Asia.

The assessment of the overall performance of the Czech foreign policy in the EU for the last ten years is rather mixed. On the one hand, the Czech Republic managed to contribute in a constructive way to the EU policy towards Eastern Europe by helping to create and supporting Eastern Partnership throughout. It helped to put the issue of human rights and democracy support higher on the EU agenda and make the EIDHR more flexible. It supported the EU enlargement policy towards the Western Balkans, participated in CSDP operations well outside its traditional areas of interest (for example in Mali) or contributed to the EU's (and especially Central Europe’s) energy security, especially by increasing the capacity for reverse flows.

On the other hand, the leverage of the Czech foreign policy after 2004 in the EU was limited by several factors. The first was an apparent lack of foreign policy consensus among important actors – both inside the governing coalition as well as between different presidents and governments. For a middle-sized country, the foreign policy coherence and consistency is of paramount importance. The message many of the EU partners were getting from Prague was often that of a cacophony. Secondly, the largely sceptical stance towards the EU in most of the post-2004 governments explains why the Czech Republic often preferred to deal with foreign policy issues separately rather than through the EU framework. The Czechs also did not attach adequate importance to the creation of the EEAS and the support for its candidates for higher managerial positions within its hierarchy – a trend that might change after 2014. Thirdly, the Czech foreign policy did not see any significant rise in resources, either human or financial, in the incriminated period. On the contrary, the financial crisis and subsequent austerity measures brought significant cuts to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ budget. This concerns even areas where the Czech Republic could be considered a leader in the CEE region, for instance in development assistance and humanitarian aid.

The new centre-left government that came into power in 2014 announced a more pro-active course in foreign

13 For instance at the end of 2015, a Czech career diplomat Edita Hrdá was appointed managing director for the Americas within the EEAS, also thanks to the strong support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
policy and some significant shifts also motivated by the desire to bring the country more to the EU mainstream in foreign policy: EU as the basic framework for the Czech foreign policy (clearly articulated in the new foreign policy concept adopted in July 2015), more attention to sustainable development and climate change, fresh start of relations with China, broader concept of human rights support or more emphasis on effective multilateralism. However, the changes put forward were not well explained and articulated, which led to allegations that the new government is breaking away from the human rights and democracy-driven policy and putting its economic interests first, which in turn did not contribute to forging a stronger internal foreign policy consensus.

The main challenges for the Czech foreign policy for the upcoming period are thus going to remain the same: the polarisation of the domestic political scene as well as broad public on key foreign policy issues, especially Russia, Eastern Europe (especially Ukraine), the role of NATO and the EU or human rights, as well as the enduring lack of resources for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and for foreign policy in general. Furthermore, an additional challenge stems from the multiple crises that appeared in the EU neighbourhood since 2014 from Ukraine to the Sahel region. The risk for the Czech foreign policy is that due to these developments it will be increasingly confined to a reactive mode and crisis management rather than a pro-active stance that the government has announced.