



APRIL 2022

BRIEFING PAPER | 03

AMO.CZ

Czech–German Dialogue on Russia: In Need of Reinforced Cooperation

Pavel Havlíček, Kai-Olaf Lang



Hanns
Seidel
Stiftung



Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí
České republiky



Publikace byla podpořena z prostředků v rámci dotačního programu Ministerstva zahraničních věcí České republiky Priority zahraniční politiky ČR a mezinárodní vztahy./ The publication was supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic in the framework of the grant program "Czech Foreign Policy Priorities and International Relations.

Gefördert vom Auswärtigen Amt aufgrund eines Beschlusses des Deutschen Bundestages./ Supported by the Federal Foreign Office based on a resolution of the German Bundestag.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary2

Introduction: Russia as a Factor of Divergence and Cooperation between Germany and the Czech Republic.....3

2. Germany and the Czech Republic vis-à-vis Russia: Traditions and Context.....4

3. Russia’s War against Ukraine: Effects of the Aggression for Germany and the Czech Republic .6

4. Overlaps and Differences between Germany and the Czech Republic.....9

Instead of conclusions: Convergence, Divergence and the Need for Reinforced Dialogue in German-Czech Relations 10



Summary

- Czechia and Germany have a long history of troubled relations with Moscow, though stemming from very different starting points, which influences the current state of mutual relations.
- In Czechia, relations with Russia were profoundly affected by last year's Vrbětice affair, which served as a turning point in mutual ties and helped Czechia to prepare for the current escalation.
- Historically, in relations between Berlin and Moscow, there was a different dynamic, which had a downward trend but did not experience such a major rupture as in Czechia, where the Vrbětice affair influenced the perception of Russia's activities in Eastern Europe as well as bilateral cooperation.
- The new phase in relations since the Russian war against Ukraine has helped Czechia and Germany to come closer together in their understanding of Moscow's position in the world and opened new opportunities in bilateral ties.
- Even if Czechia and Germany differ in the level of their response to the Russian war, they still consider each other useful allies and necessary partners for dialogue on future conflict resolution.
- Open and frank relations now are helping to find new common ground for a joint response, such as in the area of energy, support to Ukraine or the humanitarian aspects of the ongoing war.



Introduction: Russia as a Factor of Divergence and Cooperation between Germany and the Czech Republic

Despite fundamentally different historic and geopolitical contexts, both Germany and the Czech Republic have a longstanding, intensive and difficult set of relations with Russia. Although in both countries there has been a strong element of “pragmatism” in relations with Russia, perceptions and policies towards Russia have been far from congruent. Even though the Czech Republic in the past has not considered itself a “frontline state” of NATO, politicians and the foreign policy community have been highly sensitive about possible threats and destabilizing measures originating from Russia. Germany, particularly since 2014, has shown solidarity with the countries of the Eastern flank, has ensured EU unity on sanctions and has supported Ukraine, but it was always eager to avoid confronting Russia and it tried to maintain elements of cooperation (e.g. in the energy sector).

It is true that differences did not turn into divergence - nor into major policy disputes between both countries. This is partially due to the domestic preconditions of policies towards Russia as well as to broader foreign and security policy positions: Germany's Ostpolitik and Russlandpolitik have not been shaped by Russlandverstehers exclusively, there was also a skeptical strand arguing for the enlargement of NATO and at the same time considering Russia a relevant actor, but also a source of tensions. Also, particularly after 2004 (EU enlargement and the Orange Revolution) Germany steadily “discovered” Ukraine and supported the Eastern Partnership. After 2014, Germany also continued to advocate for strong transatlantic relations, even though during the Trump era German-US-relations were under strain. Also in the Czech Republic policies towards Russia have been shaped by different currents - proponents of a consistent policy of hedging Russia, adherents of pragmatic cooperation and those who have been ambivalent.

Irrespective of the specific domestic contexts and the overall policies towards Russia, the particular approaches towards Russia for a long time have not been an issue which has driven Germany and the Czech Republic apart - as has been the case for example with Germany and Poland, where Eastern policies and security issues have caused substantial quarrels. However, in recent years German and Czech approaches have diverged somewhat: Germany tried to advance Nord Stream 2 (with the Czech Republic not as staunchly opposed as Poland or other CEE countries), in the Czech Republic bilateral disputes with Russia and particularly the Vrbětice explosions strengthened doubts about Russia. With parliamentary elections in fall 2021 and new governments in both countries since the end of that year, both countries could have tried to find new commonalities in policies towards Russia.

However, Russia's war against Ukraine brought a completely new situation and huge challenges - not only for Germany and the Czech Republic, but also for NATO and the EU. Given the new Russian threat and bearing in mind the particularities of German and Czech interests, both countries should reinforce their efforts to coordinate responses and turn related considerations into cooperation – on a bilateral level and in NATO or the EU. Otherwise, indifference or playing the blame game might lead to drift on this highly relevant issue. In order to detect commonalities it is imperative to look at specific traditions and features of both countries' relations with Russia. Taking into account differences and shared interests, it is possible to point at factors of divergence, but also to identify opportunities for more togetherness.



2. Germany and the Czech Republic vis-à-vis Russia: Traditions and Context

Germany's Russlandpolitik: Of High Ambitions and Shattered Dreams

German-Russian relations have a long and intensive history. It is marked by periods and moments of cooperation, by wars and catastrophes, by sometimes close personal bonds and by a feeling of mutual linkage stemming from a difficult fate and the challenges of being a great power. Whereas the latter, i.e. the mythical spiritual kinship (*Seelenverwandtschaft*), has often been constructed and instrumentalized to legitimize special relations, the other factors have created ties that bound both nations together.

Even during the Cold War elements of cooperation were established. It was in this era that the image of the Soviet Union as a reliable provider of energy resources emerged. The famous strategy of *Wandel durch Annäherung* (change through rapprochement) of the socialist-liberal governments of the 1970s went along with the quest for *détente* in East-West relations. Even though Germany's *Ostpolitik* was superseded by phases of a returning conflict (e.g. deployment of US missiles on German soil), a posture open for *Realpolitik* remained.

After 1989/90/91 a well-developed set of contacts and cooperation emerged. Mutual trade and investment of German companies in Russia increased, German NGOs, political and other foundations became active in Russia, municipalities began to establish partnerships and contacts between societies were institutionalized (German-Russian forum in the early 1990s, Petersburg Dialogue 2001).

On the political level, Russia from a German point of view appeared to be a country busy with itself, but a potential partner and an indispensable factor for Europe's security. Whereas the Yeltsin era was ambivalent, there were high ambitions for the future of German-Russian or EU-Russian relations in the early years of Vladimir Putin. A centralized, but modernizing Russia seemed to offer new opportunities for cooperation. That is why Germany supported the development of new frameworks of EU contacts with Russia – the so-called Four Common Spaces. Germany even proposed a “partnership for modernization” (first as a bilateral project, then as an initiative of the EU). At the same time, Germany was reluctant to antagonize Russia in security affairs. Whereas Germany had pushed for the 1999 NATO enlargement round, it was more hesitant to bring in the Baltic states, although after some time it supported the decision. Above all, Germany (together with France) rejected a green light for NATO membership of Ukraine and Georgia. Also, Germany tried to embark on trilateral talks between the EU, Russia and direct EU Eastern European neighbors in order to establish economic areas, which would not hamper trade flows. The idea of a huge economic space from Lisbon to Vladivostok was popular in German political and expert circles.

However, with Russia's increasingly aggressive foreign policy since at least the mid-2000s the scope of cooperation diminished and a gradual, but steady and substantial deterioration of relations began. There is no doubt that the Russian annexation of Crimea and the destabilization of Eastern Ukraine also dealt a blow to German-Russian relations. Germany endorsed EU sanctions against Russia, sent Bundeswehr troops to NATO's eFP mission in Lithuania and supported Ukraine, expressing their continued backing for Ukraine's association with the EU. At the same time Russia also appeared as a malign actor in Germany. Various cyberattacks against the German Bundestag or members of parliament were thought to have had their origin in Russia. The worsening space for independent societal activities in Russia, restrictions, which also have concerned Russia-based German organizations, and the fate of opposition activist Navalny put additional strain on bilateral relations.



Yet, for a long time Germany signaled openness for dialogue and at least sectoral cooperation. However, economic cooperation lagged far behind expectations. Sanctions and counter-sanctions were not the only reason, but they complicated trade and investments. It has become commonplace in economic debates that German exports to both Poland and the Czech Republic are higher than those to Russia. But many in Germany saw considerable potential for future growth. Also, Russian fossil fuels were regarded as key for the German economy and gas in particular has been considered an important element for Germany's energy transition. A new climate policy partnership, proposed to Russia even in the days of diplomatic attempts to avert the war against Ukraine, was supposed to be a new important domain of German-Russian cooperation. The most prominent example for maintaining a cooperative component in mutual relations was the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. Even though Germany emphasized that the pipeline system was a purely commercial project, Russia obviously treated it as a symbol that cooperation in a key domain is possible and that Germany, as the most important partner in Western Europe, would permit a rerouting of pipelines, which is harmful for Ukraine.

From a Russian point of view, Germany used to be an important “anchor” or at least a country of reference in the EU. Moscow emphasized the high relevance of bilateral relations with a key country in the Western part of Europe, thus trying to complicate the emergence of a cohesive policy of the EU (or NATO) towards Russia. In doing this Russia attempted to appeal to different parts of the political class or the public, which for different reasons were or could have been interested in a “pragmatic” relationship. This included the business community, those segments of the security policy community which stood in the tradition of *détente* or disarmament, vested interests in some of the German *Länder* (West and East), all those, who called for German self-restraint towards Russia due to Germany's historic guilt (often neglecting German responsibility for victims of other nations, which belonged to the Soviet Union), and of course *Russlandversteher* from the radical right and left of the political scene. However, despite some pro-Russian undercurrents in German society, Russia's assertive and later destructive behavior has led to a constant decline in mutual relations, also before the 24 February 2022.

A Mixed History with Growing Difficulties: Czech-Russian-Relations

In April 2021, Czech-Russian relations reached their lowest point since 1993 when the Russian involvement in the Vrbětice explosions affair was officially confirmed and the Kremlin labelled Czechia a ‘unfriendly’ nation, together with the United States as the only two countries in the world at that time. As a result of this, the bilateral ties reached their biggest crossroads before the current aggression against Ukraine. Nevertheless, for quite some time, bilateral ties had been following a negative trend and the attribution of attacks on ammunition depots on the Czech territory to Russia's military intelligence GRU only delivered the last nail to the coffin of the bilateral relationship.

Before that, during the 1990s, Czech-Russian relations had experienced a positive dynamic, when the leadership of the then Czech state signed an Agreement on Friendly Relations and Cooperation with Yeltsin's Russia.¹ During this period, Russia and Czechia put behind them their historic animosities and resolved some bilateral conflicts. Although not successful in cutting all dependencies, such as diplomatic asymmetry or continued Czech dependence on Russian oil and gas, the 1990s were a period of attempts to normalize relations after several decades of Soviet rule over Czechoslovakia, intensified by the military presence from 1968.

¹ Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic - Digital Repository, Agreement between the Czech Republic and the Russian Federation on Friendly Relations and Cooperation, https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1993ps/tisky/t1382_oo.htm.



Nevertheless, the strategic choice was clearly to integrate in the EU and NATO and come “back to Europe” as the popular slogan of that time proclaimed. Based on the same logic, Czechia already in the 1990s began investing in energy diversification in order to limit its ties with Moscow.

Czechia perceives Russia’s behavior in the international arena from the perspective of revisionism and efforts to rebuild the position of power that Russia lost 30 years ago with the collapse of the USSR. This brings a direct conflict between the foreign policy and security interests of Russia and Czechia, the latter of which is directly dependent on the rules-based multilateral system of compliance with the international order co-created by the EU. This discrepancy between Czech and Russian perceptions of foreign policy is also reflected in the Czech foreign policy concept of 2015.² It, together with the latest Security Strategy³ speaks of Russia as an actor destabilizing the European security architecture, but also as a major player represented on the UN Security Council, with which it is somehow necessary to cooperate. The Strategy mentions Russia in the context of global instability, new security challenges and an authoritarian model of governance opposing the liberal democratic order. Historically speaking, Czechia has had good experience of cooperation with the “other Russia” represented by the non-governmental sector and rather strong people-to-people contacts, which it has long supported.

On the other hand, the Kremlin does not view the Czech Republic as a major player in the international arena or as a powerful actor. In its understanding of international relations, Czechia falls into the buffer area, which after 1989 leaned towards Brussels and the United States by joining NATO and the EU. In this view, the Czech Republic does not have its own foreign policy agenda, but copies the US political stances. Also because of this, various initiatives of the Czech-Russian dialogue have not met with significant success and Russia considered them only as an opportunity to promote its own interests.

Even before April 2021, Czech-Russian relations were framed by numerous conflicts over historical memory and different interpretations of common history, including the Soviet intervention against the Prague Spring in 1968 or affairs associated with the relocation of historical monuments, such as the statue of Marshal Ivan Koněv in Prague and the dismantling of monuments dedicated to Czechoslovak legions in Russia.⁴ This is also common to many European countries, including the Baltic states, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine or Germany. Due to the lack of political will on the part of Russia, bilateral initiatives to “normalize” relations have not met with any understanding despite repeated attempts, which illustrates the current state of play.

3. Russia’s War against Ukraine: Effects of the Aggression for Germany and the Czech Republic

Russia’s war against Ukraine means a profound caesura for security in Europe and a disjunction in relations between the West and Russia. At the same time, the war is also a disruptive moment for both the Czech Republic and Germany in their relations with Russia. In both countries, there is a dominant attitude that Russia has ceased to be even a sectoral partner and transformed into not only a rival, but an open threat. For that reason, profound changes have to be initiated – from reducing dependence to strengthening security. Whereas Germany and the Czech Republic from the

² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, “Concept of the Czech Republic’s Foreign Policy”, https://www.mzv.cz/file/1574645/Concept_of_the_Czech_Republic_s_Foreign_Policy.pdf.

³ Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic, “Security Strategy of the Czech Republic”, https://www.army.cz/images/id_8001_9000/8503/Security_Strategy_2015.pdf.

⁴ Pavel Havlicek, “Russian Spring Offensive - An Unlikely Skripal 2.0 Case in Prague”, *Visegrad Insight*, <https://visegradinsight.eu/russian-spring-offensive-czechia/>.



beginning of the conflict have been committed to a bold response from the West, and both countries have been actively contributing to ensuring the unity of NATO and the EU, supporting Alliance measures on the Eastern flank and EU sanctions imposed on Russia, there are particularities and even discrepancies in the respective reactions – in domestic affairs as well as on the European or international level.

In Germany, immediate effects of the war include the commitment to step up long-neglected defense spending (by establishing a special fund for the armed forces and increasing annual defense budgets to the level of 2% of GDP) and the objective to embark on a way towards the diversification of imports of fossil fuels and the building of respective infrastructures in order to substitute supplies from Russia. Also, Germany decided to contribute to better deterrence capabilities of NATO on the Eastern flank (by strengthening enhanced Forward Presence in Lithuania, establishing an enhanced Vigilance Activity Battlegroup, additional aircraft for enhanced Air Policing in Romania or a naval presence in the Baltic Sea). After a long period of hesitance, Germany began to send arms to Ukraine, even though to a much more limited extent than the US or other allies did or could do.

With regard to energy, Germany has decided to reduce dependence on Russia. Attempts to diversify Germany's energy imports include an exit from Russian coal deliveries after summer 2022, the end of most oil imports by 2023 (starting from a level of 35%, the share of Russian oil has been reduced to 25% in spring 2022) and finishing purchases of Russian gas by mid-2024. This also requires major investments in infrastructure, e.g. the building of stationary and floating terminals for the import of liquefied natural gas (LNG).

At the same time, Germany has tried to combine determination with prudence. So far, it has shied away from imposing a swift embargo on Russian oil and particularly on gas, as this might mean a major blow to the German economy. It has also been eager to avoid any debates which could lead to an active involvement of NATO states in the war (like the Polish idea of a NATO or international peacekeeping mission). In spite of Germany's political, humanitarian and limited arms support for Ukraine, Germany has been reluctant towards Kyiv's wish to get candidate status for EU-membership. Even though Germany has endorsed the Versailles summit confirmation of Ukraine belonging to the "European family", Berlin has been cautious in setting Ukraine (and Moldova or Georgia) on the accession track.

It is obvious that Russia's war against Ukraine also destroyed or at least questioned basic assumptions which governed Germany's Russlandpolitik for many years. They include: the supposition that Russia will always be a stable partner for energy supply, as Russia would not want to hurt itself by playing with the gas tap; the idea that interdependence will nurture stability; the belief that a firm posture, a position of strength on the part of the West would provoke Russia, hence a prudent and self-limiting West would be best to counter Russia's assertive politics. As a result, the old paradigm of dialogue, interdependence and cautious countering in a Russia-first context of Ostpolitik has fallen apart – without a new paradigm having emerged yet. This does not mean that now a search for a new concept in full political harmony has begun.

What can be observed is rather intensifying debates between those, who are – in the light of Russian indiscriminate attacks or atrocities like those committed in Bucha – ready to step up sanctions and military efforts to support Ukraine, and those who, for various reasons, still remain more reluctant.

In this context, the thorough domestic debate about whether or not to provide Marder type armored infantry vehicles (or other heavy weapon systems) to Ukraine is emblematic. It reveals how difficult the transition from broad solidarity (including humanitarian aid or accepting refugees) to military support is in a country with a security culture that is firmly based on negotiations and ensuring peace by civil means. Moreover, elaborate clearance rules for arms (re-)exports and a detailed discussion about the usability of old equipment or training requirements for Ukrainian troops have created the impression that Germany is at least indecisive



when it comes to weapons deliveries. Even though Germany has supported Ukraine with different types of military equipment and does rather more than less as compared to many Western European countries, Germany's posture in this area clearly varies from the Czech approach, which has delivered T-72 tanks and other types of more sophisticated military aid to Ukraine. It has to be noted, that Germany at the beginning of April 2022 did give its permission to send 58 PzV-501 armored infantry vehicles (which in the past had belonged to the GDR armed forces) from the Czech Republic to Ukraine. Germany's consent was rather a non-issue in the public debate as compared to former squabbles with partner countries concerning the deliveries of arms to Ukraine, where Berlin's agreement was necessary.

For Czechia, Russia's war against Ukraine meant a final break in its relations with the regime, which brought even its formerly fiercest advocates around to a hawkish standpoint. A major difference in the Czech position was the existence of a wide public and political debate on Russia since last year and the Vrbětice affair, which had already shifted the approach towards Russia and brought, for example, an end to flirting with Russia's Rosatom in the Czech nuclear tender and also the final word on the ongoing debate about whether to take the Russian Sputnik-V vaccine or not. The rupture in diplomatic relations and expulsion of dozens of Russian diplomats from Prague as well as establishing an ultimate diplomatic parity, as only the second country in Europe after the United Kingdom to do so, as well as the placing of Czechia on the list of unfriendly nations already constituted a significant departure in the bilateral ties.

Due to the profound shift in political and diplomatic relations between both countries already last year, it was relatively easy to push for a stronger reaction of Czechia towards the Russian aggression against Ukraine and bring the country's foreign policy stance closer within the EU and NATO framework and also fully into the Ukraine-first approach. This has been symbolized by the Czech push for Ukraine's EU membership, endorsed even by the country's President Miloš Zeman, an unprecedented scale of support in terms of arms deliveries as well as humanitarian aid, which can only be compared with that of the 2002 floods of national scale. In addition, Czechia developed a unique collaborative military aid scheme between Ukraine's Embassy to Prague, the Ministry of Defence as well as Czech industry, in which the resources raised are swiftly processed by the companies and certified by the officials. The recent visit to Kyiv of Czech PM Petr Fiala is a clear symbol that Czechia is standing firmly next to Ukraine in a common conflict with the aggressive Putin regime. One could even say that within the five-party-government, there has been a competition of who is able to promise and deliver more in terms of the individual ministries and national agencies.

The Czech response to the Russian aggression has been multi-level and ambitious in its scale. Within the diplomatic ranks, Czechia decided to close its two consulates in St. Petersburg and Yekaterinburg and order Russia to do the same in Brno and Karlovy Vary. The government promised to offer shelter to those fleeing the war and commit financially to their well-being, despite some pressure and financial constraints in the domestic debate. Czechia has also taken a lead on the European level by promising to organize a high-level conference dedicated to the war in Ukraine and put together an international donor conference dedicated to the restoration of the country.⁵ Much of its upcoming EU presidency is going to be devoted to the Russian aggression and supporting Ukraine, which has welcomed more Czech political delegations recently. In addition, Czechia has taken the leadership of the NATO battlegroup in Slovakia, which also hosts German, Dutch and US soldiers in its ranks, as a sign of a new level of ambition in response to the threat from the East. Last but not least, the PM Petr Fiala has announced a five-year-plan for a complete cut from Russian energy supplies, primarily of oil and gas, which are

⁵ Kateřina Šafaříková, "Přestat se bavit s Orbánem? Nevím, co by se muselo stát, abych to premiérovi poradil, říká Fialův klíčový muž", *Hospodářské noviny*, <https://archiv.hn.cz/c1-67055500-prestat-se-bavit-s-orbanem-nevim-co-by-se-muselo-stat-abych-to-premierovi-poradil-rika-fialuv-klicovy-muz>.



sensitive for Czechia. This includes expansion of the oil transport infrastructure coming through Germany from Italy as well as establishing new partnerships in the domain of natural gas and building new routes to get it.

This all means that we not only see much more leadership from the current Czech government than was the case with the previous one, but also a full acknowledgement of the Czech place on the margins of the Eastern flank of the EU and NATO, which means an increased responsibility in times of unprecedented threat and instability in Eastern Europe. In this way, the Czech foreign policy and security outlook is drawing closer to the Polish or the Baltics', rather than that of Hungary or other countries in the Western part of Europe. This is important especially before 1 July 2022 and the official start of the Czech EU presidency, which is going to place the conflict in Ukraine at the heart of the EU debates. The NATO Summit in Madrid will present yet another opportunity to bolster the Western military response to the Russian aggression and the Czech voice is going to advocate for further strengthening of the Eastern flank of the Alliance.⁶

4. Overlaps and Differences between Germany and the Czech Republic

Concerning the responses and approaches of the two countries, there are both overlaps and elements of disparity. What brings both countries together is that they have a common interest in a strong and coherent reaction from the West. Both countries want NATO and the EU not only to stay united, but to embark on a path of change to appropriately counter Russia's behavior. Germany and the Czech Republic are also trying to work for more security and resilience in NATO and EU member states – enhancing domestic efforts and improving bilateral or multilateral collaboration. Also, both countries share the objective of reducing dependency on Russia regarding imports of energy and other raw materials, facing a difficult process of disconnection and reorientation due to considerable levels of Russian oil and gas imports and challenges with regard to building new infrastructure and finding new sources of supply.

However, there are also current and potential factors generating differences. What might drive both countries apart is:

- The future of the Eastern flank. Although both countries agree that there is a necessity to enhance defense on the Eastern flank, differences about the scope and the intensity of reinforcements might appear – with Germany being more hesitant to see massive, substantial and permanent defense capabilities deployed in the respective countries and the Czech Republic calling for exactly this (together with other countries from the region).
- European prospects for Ukraine. The Czech Republic belongs to those countries which support a membership prospect, whilst Germany is not enthusiastic about candidate status and possible accession in the future.
- The debate about energy imports. Given its dependence on Russian oil and gas, Germany has tried to avoid an immediate stop of imports from Russia. Whereas there have been Czech voices asking for a boycott, looking at the structure of their energy imports the Czech Republic and Germany are basically in the same boat. However, if there are more vocal calls from Prague

⁶ Discussion has also been started on establishing a US military presence on Czech soil. Jaroslav Gavenda, "Černochová: Základna USA není na stole, ale já ji chci", Seznam zprávy, <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-politika-obrat-zakladna-usa-v-cesku-neni-na-stole-tema-vzniklo-v-atmosfere-kongresu-198014>.



(and other Central European countries) demanding an embargo against Russian fossil fuels, Germany might be framed and perceived as standing on the brakes.

- Climate policies. In Germany, efforts to counter Russia in defense and in the energy sector are seen as something that should not be detrimental to the climate-oriented transformation of the economy and the society (e.g. due to military funding). On the contrary, ambitious climate policy goals are considered a stimulus as e.g. more RES and more energy efficiency mean less fossil fuels from Russia. This equation is less prominent in the Czech Republic. Here, climate policies are accepted in principle, but they are perceived as expensive and potentially cost-driving for the economy and households. There might be a tendency in Prague to call for a slowdown of CO₂-reduction-paths and a more “realistic” approach.
- Russia’s place in European security. In Germany, the old paradigm of Russia being seen as a difficult, but necessary partner to a “European security order” has been overcome. However, in spite of (or even because of) Russia’s harmful behavior, there might be a strand, which also conceives a sort of security dialogue with an aggressive Russia to be a necessary element of creating stability. Such an approach might face less and less understanding in the Czech Republic, which obviously prefers containment and protection as main features of the Western posture towards Russia.

Instead of conclusions: Convergence, Divergence and the Need for Reinforced Dialogue in German-Czech Relations

Looking at the broader picture, the implications of the war for German-Czech relations are quite ambiguous. On the one hand, we can observe a shared attitude, when it comes to the basics like the response of NATO and the EU, ensuring the unity of the West, counteracting a destructive Russia and improving efforts in defense and energy security. However, there are some developments, which constitute disparity. On a strategic and foreign policy level, the Czech Republic has moved closer to Poland, the Baltic states and Romania and other more “hawkish” countries from Central and South Eastern Europe, when it comes to dealing with Russia. Germany, in spite of its profound reorientation in relations with Russia and the proclaimed reset of its security policies faces a number of structural, hard and soft components of its domestic, foreign and security policy, which make a “grand shift” in its behavior more difficult. From the point of view of the Czech Republic, this raises a number of questions: Is Germany’s security transition deep and irreversible? Is it possible that a more “pragmatic” approach to Russia might resurface in the future? Will German politics and society pay the price for security and solidarity? From a German perspective, there are also highly relevant issues: Will the Czech Republic continue its rapprochement with the proponents of a hardline against Russia? Will it move away from a Euro-Atlantic posture in security to one which refers primarily to the US and the UK? Will it continue its strategic closeness to Germany, if its doubts about German reliability are growing? In any case, there is a need for reinforced dialogue and cooperation between both countries with regard to the consequences of Russia’s war against Ukraine and in general with regard to security in Europe. If Germany and the Czech Republic, both absorbed by enormous domestic and international challenges, move to protracted indifference, divergence might prevail over convergence.



Given all this, it might be worthwhile to think particularly about the following areas of exchange and collaboration.

First, it is crucial to see high-level dialogue and mutual exchange as a good starting position in bilateral ties. Security and energy issues should have a more prominent role in the Strategic Dialogue between Czech Republic and Germany. Security should be seen as a cross-cutting and long-term priority area. In this context the debate with the expert community and the Discussion Forum should be deepened.

Second, energy security might provide another area for closer cooperation. Whereas Germany plans to build new LNG terminals, the Czech government committed in its Policy Statement that it was going to invest funds in an LNG terminal “in a neighboring country”⁷, which could bring a common Czech-German investment project that would help to bring US and other overseas resources. First talks about possible Czech involvement in German projects have taken place. A Czech stake in one of the planned LNG terminals in Germany would also be a flagship project for common diversification efforts in Central Europe that might also include other countries from the region, e.g. Slovakia. Also, diversification of crude-oil flows, i.e. possibilities of strengthening the throughput through the TAL-pipeline, which supplies southern German and Czech refineries might be a topic.

Third, the Czech state has a lot to learn in terms of crisis management of the huge inflow of refugees, which has so far benefited mostly from the help of the Czech civil society, activists and companies involved. The state has played a secondary role and showed that it has only limited capacity to cope with the enormous challenge. This is true both for the legal issues as well as the wider topic of integration and providing safe spaces for a larger community of refugees, which Germany has managed to tackle very well and has considerable experience with. Unlike Czech Republic, Germany is also more flexible regarding assisting emigration from Russia.

Fourth, security and defense cooperation, which has been a successful area of bilateral relations in the context of NATO and the EU, offers some new opportunities with increased German investment in these areas and with Germany’s reinforced engagement on the Eastern flank. Following cooperation in NATO’s eFP mission in Lithuania, the new battlegroup in Slovakia will be an endeavor which is based very much on close military cooperation between Czech Republic and Germany. Both countries should consider what capabilities will be necessary for the effective defense of the Eastern flank and how this relates to their defense and armaments planning. Also, Germany could discuss with the Czech Republic what its planned increase of defense spending means for partners and neighbors, particularly for common endeavors. Both countries should also strengthen their dialogue about military mobility - with regard to their location and relevance for the Eastern flank of NATO and within the EU and its CSDP, where both countries take part in the PESCO platform on these issues.

Finally, support for Ukraine and the long-term European prospects of Ukraine should be a prominent topic of German-Czech debates. Both countries could discuss projects where they (governments, civil society, companies) see priorities and where they could cooperate e.g. in the framework of a future EU reconstruction and solidarity plan for Ukraine. Also, given the differences on Ukraine’s EU-aspirations, Germany and the Czech Republic could talk about common initiatives for deepening relations with the associated countries of the Eastern Partnership. It might be useful to organize such debates together with Poland and other Central European countries.

⁷ “Policy Statement of the Government,” <https://www.vlada.cz/en/jednani-vlady/policy-statement/policy-statement-of-the-government-193762/>.



Association for International Affairs (AMO)

AMO is a non-governmental not-for-profit Prague-based organization founded in 1997. Its main aim is to promote research and education in the field of international relations. AMO facilitates the expression and realization of ideas, thoughts, and projects in order to increase education, mutual understanding, and tolerance among people.

 +420 224 813 460

 www.amo.cz

 info@amo.cz

 Žitná 608/27, 110 00 Praha 1

 www.facebook.com/AMO.cz

 www.twitter.com/amo_cz

 www.linkedin.com/company/amocz

 www.youtube.com/AMOCz

Pavel Havlíček

Pavel Havlicek is Research Fellow at AMO. His research focus is on Eastern Europe, especially Ukraine and Russia, and the Eastern Partnership. He also deals with questions of strategic communication and disinformation as well as democratization and civil society support. In May 2020, he was elected to serve a two-year-long-term as the Board member of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum. Since August 2020, he is also the Russia research coordinator within the MapInfluenCE project.

 pavel.havlicek@amo.cz

 [@Pavel_Havlicek_](https://twitter.com/Pavel_Havlicek_)

Kai-Olaf Lang

Kai-Olaf Lang is a Senior Fellow at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP). His areas of expertise include Baltic countries, Central and Eastern Europe, Eastern Partnership and enlargement policy.

 kai-olaf.lang@swp-berlin.org