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Czechia and Germany in times of war: Time to act together

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Summary

- Despite historically positive relations between Czechia and Germany, there are some gaps between both partners on the issue of the Russian war against Ukraine, which could put a strain on the partnership.
- The political transition after elections and the preoccupation with crisis-management related to the Russian aggression in both countries hampered collaboration and coordination in the time before the war.
- Energy, security policy and modernisation of armed forces as well as the fight against hybrid threats and the dialogue on humanitarian problems caused by the Russian invasion represent particularly significant areas with untapped potential, which both countries should prioritise to achieve a more efficient cooperation.
- On the other hand, future relations of the EU with both Ukraine and Russia as well as certain aspects of the concept of EU Strategic autonomy (sovereignty) are among the possibly divisive issues, which should be firmly anchored in political consultations and in the Strategic Dialogue.
- Mutual respect, a more structured exchange of opinions - for example through a sort of Czech-German “mini-strategic-compass” or a 2+2 format of exchange between foreign and defense ministers - and deepened political engagement from both sides, are key for establishing an effective dialogue and preventing future misunderstandings and disagreements.
- The EU and the West must come out of this crisis stronger. A more efficient cooperation between Czechia, which is going to head the EU over the next six months, for which it is going to need partners, and Germany, which is the most powerful and economically relevant member in the community, can considerably contribute to ensuring the unity and effectiveness of the West.



Recommendations

In this time of crisis and war, Czech-German relations are in relatively good shape. The dialogue between the two countries is intensive and it is buttressed by a multitude of institutional and informal channels of communication. However, there is still a huge scope for cooperation. This also holds true for the Czech-German dialogue specifically regarding the ongoing war in Ukraine. Both countries have strengthened their exchange on the war and on how to deal with Russia, but they could and should do more. This requires a common strategic reflection, more political “investment” by Germany in bilateral ties and more Czech understanding regarding Germany’s behavior – which, due to its size and influence has a special role to play in the EU and in NATO, but which is also in need of time to carry out strategic reorientations in key policy areas. A crucial part of any stronger and more efficient partnership lies in better mutual understanding, sharing perceptions of threats and challenges as well as future opportunities and therefore:

→ If Ukraine receives candidate status, both countries should – together with other EU members – strengthen their efforts to support EU-related reforms in Ukraine (and Moldova and possibly Georgia) and to give more momentum to EU enlargement in the Western Balkans too. Irrespective of the candidate status Germany and the Czech Republic should work to swiftly open up new forms of inclusion for Ukraine into the EU, e.g. by bringing it into the single market and more and more policy areas.

→ Post-war relations with the Russian Federation represent one of the crucial challenges, where the perspectives of both partners could significantly differ in the future. Apart from ongoing issues related to the war, Czechia and Germany should start a debate soon on how to deal with Russia and Putin’s regime in the future. The Strategic Dialogue should be one platform for initiating such a conversation between both partners in a safe and confidential environment.

→ Czechia and Germany should more closely align their future plans for arms modernisation and investment in the area of security. Given the increasing amount of defense spending in the context of Germany’s Zeitenwende and Czech plans to enlarge its defense budget, it could be useful to look for synergies.

→ On the strategic level both countries should deepen their common reflection on NATO’s future orientation, particularly on the implications of the war for the new Strategic Concept of the Alliance. The common participation in NATO battle groups in Lithuania and Slovakia makes Czechia and Germany important contributors to security on the Eastern flank of NATO. Both countries should also reflect on their future capability developments in the context of deterrence and defense of NATO partners.



→ Czechia and Germany could initiate a process of establishing a “Mini-Strategic-Compass” for their cooperation, in which they - bearing in mind the main strategic documents of the EU and NATO - would try to develop a common threat assessment and define common efforts to international challenges, particularly related to Russia and Eastern Europe. This could be based on regular common meetings of foreign and security ministers (the so-called 2+2 format), which would send a strong political signal of the will to strengthen security policy cooperation..

→ In the field of energy, Czechia and Germany have to invest in deeper interconnectedness in the existing formats and to develop new opportunities, such as the LNG terminals in the north of Germany. Therefore a shared reflection about infrastructure planning and possible common projects should be anchored on the political and working levels of both governments.

→ Also, thematic German-Czech energy fora could be organized and be devoted to issues like smart-grids, decentralization of the energy market or energy efficiency in housing and industry as well as the use of hydrogen. This could be embedded in debates about the state of energy security and national diversification strategies in both countries.

→ Governments should also inform each other on a regular basis on objectives and projects planned in the context of the RePowerEU programme, which aims to reduce the energy dependency of the EU on Russia. Closer cooperation on the green and energy transition will be strongly beneficial based on the close interconnectedness of both economies, particularly from the Czech side.

→ It will be strongly beneficial for Czechia and Germany to promote a closer coordination and exchange of best practice in the area of humanitarian dialogue and integration of Ukrainian refugees in both societies, in particular in the areas of education, social and healthcare systems. This is also important for cross-border relations and preventing malign practices stemming from the uncontrolled flow of people around the Schengen zone. It is also important in order to prevent societal polarisation, especially in the Czech Republic.

→ Czechia and Germany should engage in a more intense dialogue on the future of Europe and should more closely align their thinking about concepts of Strategic Autonomy (sovereignty) and should try to come to at least similar conclusions for the period after the war, for which the upcoming Czech presidency of the Council of the EU represents a good opportunity.

→ The post-war reconstruction of Ukraine represents another major topic for bilateral relations. Based on the strong mutual ties between Czechia and Germany, it is essential to look for common opportunities and offer shared capacity in the reconstruction and rebuilding of Ukraine in order for it to have a strong, prosperous and resilient economy. Both countries should look for projects which could strengthen priorities and the process of the Europeanization of Ukraine in the context of future rebuilding efforts.



Czechia and Germany should exchange examples of best practice in the area of international justice and war-crimes investigation. Both countries have their own experience with transitioning from an authoritarian system of governance to a democratic and pluralist one, including investigating the perpetrators of crimes against human rights or war-crimes, particularly in Germany. The area of international justice and bringing it to the EU level could represent another point on the agenda of bilateral talks on Eastern Europe and post-war Russia.



Introduction

Russia's war in Ukraine is not only a brutal attack against a neighboring country, it is also a defining moment for the West. NATO and the European Union (EU) are looking for ways to respond to the combative violation of basic principles in international affairs and to improve security in Europe. Both the Czech Republic and Germany are engaged in searching for a more resolute response vis-à-vis an increasingly unpredictable Russia. That is why since Russia's assault both countries have endorsed the sending of messages of unity and determination from NATO and the EU to Moscow. This is no coincidence, since both in the Czech Republic and in Germany relations with Russia for a long time have been intensive and burdensome at the same time, with the latter element having substantially increased since 2014. This does not mean to say that the Czech Republic and Germany had similar approaches to Russia. Germany has a long track-record of cooperation with Russia, and it behaved – also due to difficult historical legacies – on the basis of a traditional predilection for a cautious “handling” of Russia, hoping an offer of constructive cooperation with the West, and particularly with the EU could at least provide for some stability in mutual relations. It is true that elements of a business-oriented approach of Realpolitik towards Russia have also been present in the Czech Republic to some degree, but calls for a more hawkish posture have risen considerably during the last years, especially after the so-called Vrbětice affair in April 2021. And of course, asymmetries have also left their marks on bilateral relations with Moscow: German-Russian relations after 1990 or 1991 have been of high relevance for Europe generally, both for EU-Russia contacts and for security on the continent; in contradistinction to that, Czech-Russian relations were unbalanced, and Russia, which invested (politically and financially) in cooperation with Germany, which it saw as an anchor in Western Europe, treated the Czech Republic as one of various medium-sized Central European countries of limited significance and space to maneuver on its own. However, all in all, Czech and German postures and policies towards Russia for many years since the early 1990s have been less divisive than, for example, in German-Polish relations, where quarrels around Russia have led to political dissonance and growing mistrust.

As a result (and as presented in an earlier briefing paper),¹ Czech and German approaches towards Russia and Eastern Europe have comprised both commonalities and differences, making the Czech-German dialogue on these issues multifaceted and differentiated. Russia's war against Ukraine has forced the Czech Republic and even more so Germany to rethink and overthrow many of their assumptions concerning Russia, Eastern policies and foreign policy in a broader sense. Bearing in mind the congruities and diversities, both partners should use Russia's operation against Europe's security and the tragedy of Ukraine to look for new ways and opportunities to come closer together. After years of a rather constructive exchange about Russia, Berlin and Prague should turn the response to the war in Ukraine into a mandate for substantial cooperation, filling the bilateral strategic partnership with new content that would suit its ambitions and that would embolden EU and NATO action. More than 25 years since the signing of the Czech-German Declaration on Mutual Relations and their Future Development, bilateral ties are close, friendly and built on a solid basis with a variety of common institutions. Whereas Russia's war initially caused some uncertainty regarding each other's behavior, strong ties and an openness for coordination on both sides have swiftly contributed to intense communication and attempts to overcome the disagreements.

A set of high-level visits of Czech PM Petr Fiala and FM Jan Lipavský to Berlin and many German politicians and representatives of the government to Prague

¹ Pavel Havlíček and Kai Olaf Lang, “Czech–German Dialogue on Russia: In Need of Reinforced Cooperation”, 2. 5. 2022, Association for International Affairs (AMO) in Prague, <https://www.amo.cz/en/czech-german-dialogue-on-russia-in-need-of-reinforced-cooperation-2/>.



clearly illustrate that there is a growing common understanding and widely grasped need to face shared problems and challenges, especially in the context of the Russian war against Ukraine. This sped up many ongoing processes and helped to overcome domestic and international limits, which could be seen still before 24 February 2022. Also, the meeting of the Strategic Dialogue at the beginning of May 2022 showed that the institutional substructure of mutual contacts is working and able to cover urgent questions related to the war.

While governments in both countries look for new ways to do more together in order to solve the ongoing crisis caused by the Russian war in Ukraine, they also need to reflect on the previous state of play inherited from past cabinets, especially when it comes to dependencies on Russia in particular fields. Putin's war is not only taking human lives in Ukraine, but also pushing millions of people to flee their country. The conflict is also escalating the tensions in the socio-economic systems of both actors, increasing the rates of inflation and pushing people into poverty, especially in the Czech Republic. In addition, Russian energy blackmail is causing a high level of unpredictability in the business sector and among households as well, particularly in Germany.

The following sections of the policy paper offer a deeper look into the bilateral dynamics in the energy and security sectors, as well as green and digital transformations, but also bring to the floor necessary debates on the post-war Ukraine and the future of Eastern Europe. There is also a broader discussion on the foreign policy perception of international relations, including the view on Russia, on which both actors should try to move closer to each other in order to promote more efficient policies, which could tackle the crisis.

Even if the process of re-establishing mutual links after the change of governments in Berlin and Prague took quite some time, Czech-German relations are now back to a productive setting with ongoing dialogue on burning bilateral issues.

The incoming Czech presidency of the Council of the EU is an occasion not only for reinforced cooperation, but also to equip Czech efforts with more political clout and to promote common ideas to the European level.

Bearing in mind the peculiarities and legacies of both countries, when it comes to relations with Russia and Eastern Europe, this paper outlines a variety of policy areas, where the Czech Republic and Germany might cooperate in order to further security and stability in Europe given Russia's war against Ukraine. Reflecting the potential for common action, the paper proposes ideas, tools and platforms, which could contribute to additional collaboration not only on a bilateral level, but also in NATO and the EU. It is particularly five fields, in which cooperation appears to have potential: security, energy, Ukraine's European prospects, humanitarian aspects and the reconstruction of post-war Ukraine. Finally the paper looks at possible challenges in dealing with Russia as well as Ukraine in the future.

Together for more security in Europe

The search for more security will be a leitmotif of European and transatlantic policy for many years to come. Unlike in the 1990s during the war in the Western Balkans and unlike in the phase of the "war on terror" after 2001, the issue now is not security through intervention and peacekeeping, but the protection of NATO's territory from "classic" military aggression. So in a sense the West, and particularly NATO, is going "back to its roots," that is, to a threat environment similar to that of the Cold War. The context has changed, of course, and new risks have been added, but the essence now is to make the West defensible and to protect its vulnerable zones.

The conditions under which the Czech Republic and Germany have entered the phase of new confrontation in Europe, which opened on 24 February 2022, differ less than might appear at first glance. It is true that in the Czech Republic, especially in the foreign policy establishment and in the current government, a determined course has been adopted that includes a policy of complex containment vis-à-vis



Russia, a rapid and sustained military reinforcement of NATO's Eastern flank, and overall a substantial upgrading of the Alliance and its capabilities. There is no doubt that Czechia has now moved closer to Poland or the Baltic states - a process that had been in the offing since the Vrbětice attacks of 2021, but which is now clearly visible. Even though the Czech Republic does not belong to the group of "frontline states" in a geographic sense, politically and mentally it is now part of it. From this point of view, Germany is observed to some degree with suspicion. For the Czech Atlanticists now in government, Berlin acts too hesitantly and too indecisively, because it shies away from Russia's threats of escalation. The internal German debates about arms deliveries to Ukraine or the laborious negotiations about additional defense spending (including a 100 billion euro special fund for the Bundeswehr) are a source of frustration for those who do not trust Germany and who regard the "turnaround" in security ("Zeitenwende") as a flash in the pan rather than a breakthrough in German security policy.

A second look, however, reveals that the Czech Republic and Germany share common ground in many respects. Both countries have historically been dilatory in meeting NATO's two percent target on military spending, albeit for different reasons. Their publics largely accepted a pragmatic policy toward Russia, with only certain segments of the societies seeing Russia as a threat to national security. And in the political landscape, there were proponents of both a realpolitik approach and a tougher approach to dealing with Russia. Especially in the Czech Republic, the debate has therefore been strongly polarising and politicians often instrumentalised it to achieve their own political goals.

Against this background, there are numerous opportunities for Czech-German cooperation. Both countries should consciously reflect on the strategic goals they pursue within the framework of NATO and the EU. In general terms, these would be the consolidation of the West as a Euro-Atlantic community and an improvement of alliance defense capabilities supported by strong messaging of political unity, internally and externally.

On a practical level, both countries can build on a variety of existing cooperation formats. For example, the Czech Republic and Germany cooperate in the Alliance's Battle Group in Lithuania as part of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence. Both participate in several parts of the PESCO initiative as part of the CSDP. Czech forces are an important part of the Framework Nations Concept and a Czech brigade is affiliated with a brigade with a German armored division. Within the Strategic Dialogue, a working group deals with the further development of defense and military cooperation. The establishment of a NATO presence under Czech leadership and considerable German participation in Slovakia in the wake of the Ukraine war has created a new component of German-Czech military cooperation, which has not been there in the past, especially when it comes to the new leadership of similar NATO missions on the eastern flank.

For the near future, the following projects, among others, could be pursued in the German-Czech dialogue. At the strategic level, NATO's orientation should be reflected on the basis of the new Strategic Concept and the decisions of the NATO Summit in Madrid. The Strategic Dialogue, as well as exchanges between foreign and defense ministries, could focus on discussing the special requirements of the Central European sub-region of NATO's Eastern Flank (i.e., the area between the Northeastern Flank and the wider Black Sea region) - also involving Slovakia and other NATO partners from the region. Bilaterally, Czechia has a positive experience with the 2+2 format of foreign and security ministers with, for example, Poland, which could be applied to Germany as well to complement the strategic dialogue high-level exchange. Moreover, parliaments could also play a role in deepening the dialogue on security issues. Common declarations of the committees in charge of security or foreign affairs (or their chairpersons) of the Bundestag, the Czech Chamber of Deputies or the Czech senate as well as common visits of members of



parliaments to countries like Ukraine, Moldova or Georgia could strengthen the parliamentary dimension of bilateral efforts for more security in Europe's East.

Cooperation on special capabilities such as Deployed Force Infrastructure or CBRN defense (the Czech Republic is home to NATO's Joint Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Centre of Excellence) developed in the context of the Framework Nations Concept should be consolidated in light of the new challenges, coming especially from Russia.

Emphasizing the key importance of NATO, both countries should explore how the EU's CSDP can be further developed, thereby strengthening the alliance. For example, further development of the European Peace Facility, which has supplied funding for purchases of Ukrainian military equipment, could be one concrete idea. Also, Prague and Berlin could initiate a reflection about what the Strategic Compass might do to enhance security in Europe's East or possibly in other vulnerable parts of the EU and its neighborhoods, e.g. by developing regionally focussed action plans for the Baltic Sea or the Black Sea. On a strategic level, the German-Czech axis and discussions on European defense could help to constructively bring together "European"-oriented countries (such as France) and "American"-oriented ones (such as Poland).

Defense spending priorities with regional, bilateral, or multilateral implications, any consequences for existing cooperation, and possible synergies related to increased defense spending could be debated between the MoDs and other relevant line ministries of both countries. This is particularly true since both countries are planning to quickly and substantially increase their spending but also suffer from weak and slow public tendering procedures. Therefore, an exchange of best practice could be strongly beneficial.

A new element is the delivery of 15 German Leopard 2 A4 tanks to the Czech Republic as a substitute for Czech tanks that have been provided to Ukraine. The so-called loop exchange creates new cooperation needs, for example in training, but also opportunities for armaments cooperation and maintenance, which could further empower bilateral ties.

Czech-German energy transitions

The Czech Republic and Germany are engaged in a profound restructuring of their energy sectors. Whereas until recently for Germany this meant primarily the way to sustainable and climate-friendly energy production, in the Czech Republic the position towards greening and a swift move to CO₂-reduction was more reluctant. In both countries, the question of security of supply appeared to be less salient as compared to e.g. Poland or the Baltic states, which felt themselves to be under long-term Russian pressure. Germany felt secure since it assumed that Russia would always be a reliable supplier. The Czech Republic considered itself to be a safe transit country, despite the delays to the Nord Stream system and its only having onshore connections, e.g. the Gazela pipeline, which delivers gas via Czech territory – even though in the opposite direction than that of traditional gas flows. With the political decision to phase out the import of Russian fossil fuels and with the reinforced commitment of the EU to reduce CO₂ emissions, the Czech Republic and Germany face the new common challenge of multiple and urgent energy transitions.

However, the circumstances in each country are quite different: Germany is a standard bearer of nuclear-free energy generation, and is calling for a rapid acceleration of RES and related changes in mobility, housing and energy networks. In contrast to that the Czech Republic, its politics and the broader mood in society, has been in the past less enthusiastic about RES and considers nuclear energy as the main component for reducing climate-damaging emissions.

What brings both countries together in the current situation is that both of them need time for decreasing imports of fossil fuels from Russia: Due to their dependency on Russian oil and gas and the lack of sufficient infrastructure for



diversification, a rapid reorientation is difficult and it would be costly to conduct the transformation now. This, together with traditionally strong infrastructure interconnections opens a variety of opportunities for cooperation and consultation in the field of energy.

Regarding the infrastructure, both countries can extend their cooperation, which started in the 1990s, when Germany became an important transit country for the Czech Republic: for gas from Norway and for oil, which since has reached the Czech refineries from Trieste via the TAL-pipeline and the IKL-system. The Czech Republic is now in talks with Germany on participating in the investments into LNG-terminals on the shores of the North Sea or the Baltic Sea (at the same time talking to Poland, which already has an LNG-terminal in Swinoujscie and is going to expand the existing facilities there and in Gdansk).

Czech involvement would not only contribute to the country's energy security, but would also be a signal of cooperation on security of supply in Central Europe on the part of Germany. When it comes to oil imports, Czech efforts to enlarge the capacity of the TAL-pipeline (thus substituting Russian supplies through the Druzhba system) seem to have overcome the difficulties they met with in the past, but the implementation will require time. Therefore the Czech Republic (together with Slovakia and Hungary) was allowed to further import oil via the Druzhba, whereas other member states accepted a ban on Russian oil from the beginning of 2023. Both with regard to oil and gas, political backing is important, hence a reinforced bilateral (or minilateral) dialogue on energy issues within and beyond the Strategic Dialogue and engaging the related line ministries and key companies is highly topical.

Another field of cooperation is the transition to sustainable energy and economies. Here, the geopolitical aspect of renewables and the transition to a climate-friendly energy model, could give impetus to the ongoing processes. Hence, in the Czech Republic the promise of less energy dependence could help reduce aversion towards RES. In this context a series of thematic German-Czech energy fora could be organized and devoted to issues like smart-grids, decentralization of the energy market or energy efficiency in housing and industry as well as the use of hydrogen. They could be embedded in debates about the state of energy security and national diversification strategies in both countries. These fora, but also the dialogue between governments could include mutual communication about objectives and projects planned in the context of the RePowerEU plan, which aims to reduce the energy dependency of the EU on Russia.

In this context, the Czech government of Petr Fiala has publicly pledged to completely cut off all supplies of Russian energy resources within a five-year-term.² Due to a high dependence and infrastructural bottlenecks, Prague has been cautious to follow a course of swift embargos on Russian fossil fuels. This, both in reference to the above mentioned debates about the EU oil ban, but also to the gas sector.³ However, given the current political and energy turbulences, this might be an overly long period of time, which is why the government is also preparing plans for an emergency situation⁴ which would necessitate cooperation with neighbors, among which Germany and Poland stand out as the most important ones. Germany seems to be more ambitious, with the objective of a phase-out of Russian gas by 2024. However, long-term contracts of German companies with Gazprom or delays in

² Česká televize, "Vláda chce Česko do pěti let vyvléci z „ruské energetické smyčky“, 9. 4. 2022, <https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/domaci/3468597-vlada-chce-cesko-do-peti-let-vyvleci-z-ruske-energeticke-smycky>.

³ Czechia keeps mum on Russian gas embargo, Euractiv, 10.6.2022, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/czechia-keeps-mum-on-russian-gas-embargo/>.

⁴ Czech Radio, "Czech Republic bracing for potential disruption of gas supplies from Russia", 4. 4. 2022, <https://english.radio.cz/czech-republic-bracing-potential-disruption-gas-supplies-russia-8746753>.



building new gas infrastructure, especially LNG-terminals with sufficient capacity, might complicate these plans.

A new European perspective for Ukraine

The EU is going to play a central role for Ukraine in the future. It is a key political point of reference, a frame for reforms, an outstanding economic partner and, of course, a key factor for the post-war reconstruction. In short, the EU will be an even stronger anchor of stability for Ukraine in the future than it was before the war.

For the EU to live up to this role, it must act credibly, sustainably and proactively. If, once the fighting calms down, it falls back into old patterns and practises indifference, Ukraine will lack a crucial source of consolidation and modernization. The Czech Republic and Germany both have an eminent interest in ensuring that Ukraine can follow a path of reform and Europeanization. What has so far differed in the two countries at the political level is primarily the issue of future EU membership for Ukraine.

The Czech Republic openly advocates meeting Ukraine's (and in the second tier also Moldova's and Georgia's) accession aspirations, i.e., quickly granting the country candidate status for EU membership, so that accession negotiations can begin promptly. It values the symbolism of such a step and giving Ukraine the perspective into the future, even if it wants to stick to the merits-based process of negotiations after that. This is also going to be one of the priorities of the program for the Czech presidency of the Council of the EU. Germany has been more hesitant, pointing to a lengthy process for which there can be no shortcuts, precisely because Ukraine has a large number of deficits, for example concerning rule of law issues or the fight against corruption. Berlin does not want to give Ukraine a bonus for the war, if only to avoid triggering even more resentment about EU policies in the Western Balkan countries, which have long been in a state of stagnation due to a lack of reforms and deficits in rule-of-law or governance. Moreover, Germany also has doubts about whether the EU can absorb more states, especially large ones, without internal reforms (e.g., of the decision-making system or finances). However, the declaration of Chancellor Scholz in Kiev on June 16, where he expressed German support for giving Ukraine and Moldova candidate status was a clear signal that Berlin's position has changed and has taken into account what a tangible European prospect for neighbors means. At the same time, this does not mean that Germany will enthusiastically push for a swift beginning of accession negotiations. Germany belongs to those member states, which will closely look at the fulfillment of the Copenhagen criteria, including the necessity to ensure the internal functioning of the EU.

In view of this, the Czech Republic and Germany should be on guard to ensure that the debate on the candidate status of Ukraine and other Eastern European countries is well-managed. A possible disagreement on enlargement and accession issues between the Czech Republic and Germany should not overshadow their common efforts to provide support for Ukraine. For even if Ukraine (and other Eastern European countries) were to be granted candidate status, this - despite huge symbolic importance - will not necessarily bring about huge imminent practical changes, as the EU (or rather some member states) might be satisfied with having given the status without doing much to give real momentum to the accession process. The situation in the Western Balkans shows that despite candidate status, and even despite opened accession negotiations, years of stalemate can occur. In their dialogue and in the context of the EU, the Czech Republic and Germany should therefore focus in particular on three major sets of issues in support of Ukraine.

First, they should ensure that the EU's future reconstruction plan (as well as other assistance) is geared toward modernizing Ukraine in a way that is compatible with basic EU objectives and in line with its principles and the proceedings of any future EU accession negotiations. With the EU's envisaged focus also on issues such as climate policy or digitalization, there is considerable potential for this. Against this



backdrop, both countries could coordinate their bilateral aid programs and, after consultation with other European states, set priorities and develop German-Czech projects for future-oriented reconstruction.

Second, the Czech Republic and Germany should work to reform the enlargement process as a whole. Whereas a model of so-called “staged accession”, which offers concrete benefits on the way to full-fledged membership and motivates countries to do more and better during the process, has been debated in recent years, offering rapid internal market integration, tailored support funds and sectoral partnerships, could also be an attractive action plan of smaller steps to achieve some quick wins before full membership. Issues of that kind could be advanced during the Czech presidency of the Council of the EU with the involvement of France (which previously held the presidency) as well as Sweden within the trio of presidencies and other member states.

Third, both countries could consolidate the EU's Eastern Partnership focus of “resilience”, which it has emphasized in recent years, and enrich it with new elements. This would include, in particular, more integration, innovation and security in energy policy - with elements of EU energy solidarity being applied to Ukraine and Moldova. In addition, there would be issues of cybersecurity or security in the information sphere. In this context, Ukraine, with its experience, would certainly also be an interesting “security producer” for the EU.

Together with a human face

The field of humanitarian cooperation represents a specific area closely interconnected with the domestic policy in each of the countries, including receiving the refugees and migrants from Eastern Europe, providing shelter to them or access to education or health care and other public services. It also brings along substantial economic costs and challenges, as particularly visible in the Czech Republic where the issue has started to be quickly politicised and instrumentalised for political and other gains by the populist forces.

It is necessary to acknowledge that both countries have a different starting point for the debate. Germany, has long standing experience in dealing with asylum seekers and the integration of migrants from different parts of the world, notwithstanding the many challenges Germany still faces in this area and of course a more and more critical public opinion after the huge wave of migration in 2015. In the context of the war in Ukraine, Germany was not a country of first arrival but rather of final destination for refugees from Ukraine. Czechia, on the other hand, had a strong tradition of Ukrainian labour migration and to some extent also practical integration due to the smaller language barrier. On the other hand, the domestic debate about migration has been profoundly shaped by the 2014-15 so-called *migration crisis*, which deeply polarised the domestic discourse and seemingly caused a lot of antipathy towards newcomers.

However, after 24 February Czechia administered more than 350,000 temporary protection mechanisms for Ukrainians and offered shelter to those fleeing the war zones.⁵ An immense and unexpected wave of solidarity and support has been evident across the country and demonstrated in civil society, which outdid the state capacities when it came to the immediate response to the crisis. The state took a particularly long time to mobilise its resources and relied for a long time on civic engagement and management of the refugee wave on the local and regional level, which caused frustration and criticism from part of the Czech society and political class.

In Germany, on the other hand, the state capacity - including on the regional level - has been traditionally much stronger and the wave of newcomers was much

⁵ Ministerstvo vnitra, Uprchlíci prchájící před válkou, 25. 5. 2022, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/vnitro/status/1529356596777611266>.



less intense than it was in the Czech Republic, whose resources and absorption capacity remain much weaker. The debate in Germany has also been more inclusive towards Russian and Belarusian passport holders asking for shelter. In the Czech Republic, after some hesitation, the restrictive stance was reversed at least for the civil society, independent media representatives or political refugees.⁶ The same as in its neighboring country, German public opinion has mobilised enormously in support of the just defense of Ukraine and those fleeing the war, especially since mostly women and children have arrived to both countries.

The field of humanitarian support provides an enormous opportunity for closer cooperation on a cross-border level, exchange of best practice and know-how not only when it comes to the immediate needs, but also the later process of societal integration. This, especially since the Czech state is still only fine-tuning its response to the longer-term integration of the Ukrainian community and it often lacks the practical knowledge and information about how to organise the process, given also that many historical integration attempts have been rather weak and organic on the societal level, often driven by local and regional administrations.

Last but not least, both partners should also strive for sound management of the overall situation and integration of the refugees since it could otherwise lead to the rise of populism, societal polarisation and/or the spread of anti-Ukrainian sentiment, especially based on socio-economic factors and financial problems, which both (but particularly Czechia) are experiencing in regard to the high levels of inflation, increasing levels of poverty or the slowing economic growth and potential in the future.⁷ This is also why Czechia was the only EU country so far to ask for help from the EU's Asylum Agency (EUAA) with the challenge and management of the refugee crisis.⁸ However, there should be much more help from the EU institutions and other less affected EU members to share the burden, which leads on to the issue of reforming the EU's migration and asylum policies, which is currently ongoing and which both countries should proactively shape.

Future of post-war Ukraine

There are at least two major issues that are relevant for post-war developments in Ukraine and Russia. First is the post-conflict reconstruction of Ukraine and the financial investment in the restoration of its prosperity; second is the establishment of an effective justice mechanism which can hold the perpetrators of war crimes and other violations against Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity to account.⁹

In both areas, Czechia and Germany might relatively easily find common ground and help each other to empower common European efforts in these fields. The European Commission has already presented its financial programme

⁶ Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí ČR, "Vlada na návrh MZV schválila program pro ohrožené občany Ruska a Beloruska", 18. 5. 2022, https://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/udalosti_a_media/tiskove_zpravy/vlada_na_navrh_mzv_schvalila_program_pro.html.

⁷ ČTK, "Vlada navrhuje zprávit pravidla pro dočasnou ochranu uprchlíků z Ukrajiny", 18. 5. 2022, https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/vlada-navrhuje-zpravit-pravidla-pro-docasnou-ochranu-uprchliku-z-ukrajiny/2207904?utm_campaign=abtest198_novy_panel_sluzeb_varAA&utm_medium=z-boxiku&utm_source=www.seznam.cz.

⁸ Aneta Zachová, "Czechia only country to ask EU asylum agency for help with Ukrainian refugees", Euractiv, 24. 5. 2022, https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/czechia-only-country-to-ask-eu-asylum-agency-for-help-with-ukrainian-refugees/?utm_source=piano&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=21349&pnespid=reY9DDtbbbNE3aWf_GSuSoKJohvxT5hsLbHinOBy8R1moSL8yyfurYCVGjKu8oWMnrQJ5JMRw

⁹ EUObserver, "First Russian sentenced for war crimes in Ukraine", 23. 5. 2022, https://euobserver.com/tickers/155028?utm_source=euobs&utm_medium=email.



#RebuildUkraine,¹⁰ which should be co-managed by the Ukrainian and EU authorities. The planned resources should reach between 500 and 600 billion EUR,¹¹ even if it is still unclear that these resources will suffice, taking into consideration that the war is still ongoing and causing additional damage. Also, it is too difficult to estimate the real costs since many of the areas are still under Russian occupation and conflict is likely to return there once again during the Ukrainian liberation efforts.

Closely interconnected with that lies the question of where the money should come from. Several EU members, including Slovakia and the Baltic states, have proposed that the frozen assets of the Russian Federation - namely from the foreign reserves of the National Bank of around 300 billion in EUR and USD - should be employed.¹² However, there is still going to be a rather lengthy discussion, on which the EU-27 will need to find a united voice. This is essential since the EU and the Commission will need to prepare a financial and legal framework,¹³ which is going to be necessary to protect the new scheme from criticism and legal battles. The Czech Republic and Germany should be closely involved in the process.

Czechia is already strongly engaged in cooperation with Ukrainian authorities, including in the defense sector since it is getting contracts for the repair of tanks and other military vehicles, often provided by the Czechs. Germany, on its own, has been a long-term economic partner and significant investor in Ukraine in several fields of the economy, including energy, agriculture or industry and services. In addition, it is essential to see the mutual interconnection of the Czech and German economies, which constitute strong grounds to believe that for the post-war reconstruction the Czech-German tandem might be well-prepared to be engaged. This is true in terms of the political alignment as well as the economic power and readiness to work on this issue with sufficient Western investment, which should be coming from the EU and the United States. It is in both Czech and German interests that there is a strong and united Western response and not a transatlantic fragmentation when it comes to the reconstruction plan. The Czech presidency of the Council of the EU, which is planning to host a donor conference together with the United States for the reconstruction of Ukraine could provide solid ground for ensuring this.

Secondly, the judicial mechanism for punishing perpetrators and war criminals is another major field where Czechia and Germany might strive toward closer cooperation, especially when it comes to sharing know-how and promoting a common European response to what many call a “genocide”.¹⁴ Germany has a long and tragic history of post-totalitarian transformation of society and investigating war criminals. Czechia, itself has been one of the active members involved in the universal jurisdiction in the case of Belarus as well as Russian crimes in Ukraine. Therefore, it already has some experience with holding the perpetrators of crimes

¹⁰ János Ammann, “EU Commission proposes Ukraine reconstruction platform”, Euractiv, 19. 5. 2022, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/news/eu-commission-proposes-ukraine-reconstruction-platform/>.

¹¹ The Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy mentioned at least 500 billion USD that will be necessary for the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine. We are Ukraine, “Frozen Russian assets should pay for Ukraine’s \$500 billion reconstruction — Volodymyr Zelenskyy, President of Ukraine”, 24. 5. 2022, https://www.weareukraine.info/frozen-russian-assets-should-pay-for-ukraines-500-billion-reconstruction-volodymyr-zelenskyy-president-of-ukraine/?utm_source=piano-esp&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=20819&pnespid=tbt3DzQfOb8Eh_Gbti_uF4iWuQ.wXplrILmxmflx8B9mmgwjRMxJQAIZsUSMEfum84.mLJfORA.

¹² Andrew Rettman, “Russia’s \$300bn on table in EU talks on war repairs”, EUObserver, 23. 5. 2022, https://euobserver.com/world/155034?utm_source=euobs&utm_medium=email

¹³ Wester van Gaal, “EU aims to seize Russian assets amid legal unclarity”, EUObserver, 24. 5. 2022, https://euobserver.com/ukraine/155040?utm_source=euobs&utm_medium=email.

¹⁴ New Lines Institute and Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, “An Independent Legal Analysis of the Russian Federation’s Breaches of the Genocide Convention in Ukraine and the Duty to Prevent”, May 2022, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/russia/an-independent-legal-analysis-of-the-russian-federations-breaches-of-the-genocide-convention-in-ukraine-and-the-duty-to-prevent/?fbclid=IwARoYLdPqhOA6SUfzrcEUjtDkMJS5Rnxld8joR8-vRjcsDLhQuHxkagGqoBg>.



against democracy and human rights to account. Even if it is going to be difficult to investigate each criminal case of which there might be thousands (if not more),¹⁵ it is still worth formulating and implementing a common Western response to the criminal activities operational. For that, it is crucial to avoid fragmentation and to focus on pooling resources for a more efficient system.

The last several years of prosecution of the crimes against democracy and human rights in Belarus might serve as an example, in which both Czech, German as well as Polish and Lithuanian authorities were involved over time. A crucial component of the efforts is the documentation of criminal activity and providing solid evidence, which requires not only capacity and financial resources, but also a common framework and strong presence on the ground. The French authorities were one of the first to send a team to Ukraine to help to coordinate these efforts, however, it should be in the common interest of both Czechia and Germany to be involved and to push for a common European and Western engagement in this area and the restoration of justice in Europe after the war.

Instead of conclusions: How to deal with Russia in the future

The debate on individual policy areas illustrates the complexity of the situation with which Czech-German relations have to cope given the Russian war against Ukraine and its consequences. Many of the issues reach far beyond their combined potential and affect the EU as well as the wider West as such. The outcome of the war in Ukraine, the way in which the EU and NATO have responded and will react to Russia's aggression, and the future relations of the European and transatlantic organizations are key factors for the future of the Western community. Hence, discussing the above mentioned questions, the Czech Republic and Germany should be aware of the strategic dimensions of their interaction.

Within the West, and certainly also in Czech-German debates, the shape of future relations with Russia might become a serious point of contention. In other words: Whereas the war has acted as a catalyst of Western unity, the post-war situation might bring a return of the question of how to appropriately deal with Russia. Some countries including Poland or the Baltic states will call for a complete political and economic disconnect from Russia, accompanied by upgraded deterrence and defense and an enhanced policy of containment.¹⁶ Others will ask for a critical dialogue or conagement-style relations, with residual elements of cooperation or inclusion of Russia in a future "European security order". In this context, Germany and the Czech Republic could follow different paths, when looking at their current positions vis-à-vis the conflict, which it is desirable to prevent.

According to the dominant attitude in the Czech Republic, Putin's regime is no longer a credible partner and it is not possible to have any business-as-usual after the war. The mainstream in the country is of the opinion that it is not only necessary to return all occupied territories after 24 February 2022, but also the Donbas and Crimea and to possibly go beyond that. The 9/11 effect of the war on Czech society and the political class is often translated into a strong hand against Putin's regime and the cutting of all ties with the country, including in sensitive sectors such as energy. For many in CEE, this is an opportunity to get rid of a weakened Kremlin and push for deeper change in Russia.

¹⁵ Interfax Ukraine, "Prosecutor General of Ukraine announces 13,000 cases related to Russian war crimes", 24. 5. 2022, <https://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/834413.html>.

¹⁶ Anne Applebaum, "The War Won't End Until Putin Loses", *The Atlantic*, 23. 5. 2022, https://www.weareukraine.info/the-war-wont-end-until-putin-loses-ann-applebaum-for-the-atlantic/?utm_source=piano-esp&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=20819&pnespid=qbc4BjkZJKcTgOLJvmyvEZ7cpxKoDcFocennmrI3oxRmjD.sCNRPs10qJ8hVVP15872Ga9gZtw.



Germany, on the other hand, might lean towards a more pragmatic stance. Even though there will be no return to the level of ambition of the old German-Russian partnership, there might still be a line of argument that starts from the assumption that Russia, even though it is a destructive rival of the West, cannot be ignored - due to its sheer potential, its global role and its place on the European map. An early indication of this might be talks about finding “face-saving” exit strategies for Moscow: Whereas they are dominant in France, Austria or elsewhere in the Western part of the EU, such ideas are also present in the political class in Berlin and in German society. Taking into consideration that many German companies put their businesses and investments in Russia only on hold, and are generally waiting for what comes next in relations between the West and Russia, the prospect of a possibly far-reaching detachment also in economic relations is highly unlikely. In the political realm, particularly the strong German tradition of *détente* and the preference for non-escalation and dialogue, might favor an attitude, which despite or indeed because of Russia’s behaviour will opt for resuming a dialogue with Russia about peace, stability and the future security order in Europe.

Bearing this all in mind, the Czech-German dialogue should also focus on the prospects of EU and NATO relations with Russia and the East. Will and should there be a common EU Eastern policy? What place (if at all) will and should Russia have in Europe’s future “architecture”? How can European partners ensure a strong US presence on the continent, and how can the US contribute to stability and resilience in Europe beyond defense and military issues? Maybe both countries will be able to work out a kind of mini-strategic-compass, i.e. a set of common initiatives and shared assessments, which might help advance EU and NATO policies, but which could also contribute to overcoming regional differences among the Western and Eastern part of the EU.

To achieve this, the Czech-German dialogue should also be understood as part of a broader Central European and EU debate on security and the prospects of relations with Russia and Eastern Europe. Therefore, both countries should also invite other partners from the region to their debates and use existing minilateral formats or create new formats, in which these issues can be debated.



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