



Agenda for Czech Foreign Policy²⁰²²

ed.
Pavčina Janebová

Association for
International Affairs



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AGENDA FOR CZECH FOREIGN POLICY 2022

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Typesetting—Jaroslav Kopřiva

Print—Vydavatelství KUFŘ, s.r.o. – tiskárna

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ISBN 978-80-88470-18-2 (print version)

ISBN 978-80-88470-19-9 (PDF version)

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Czech Foreign Policy in 2022: The Imperative of Doing What is Right

Vít Dostál
Pavλίna Janebová

In previous years' Agenda for Czech Foreign Policy, we stated an assumption that 2021 and 2022 are in retrospect likely to be seen as a critical turning point in social, political, economic and international developments. The crucial variable, setting in motion, accelerating and emphasising important processes in these areas was the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences.

This year, we stand behind the claim. However, in parallel with the consequences of the pandemic on economies, supply chains and public health, war in the most literal and abhorrent sense of the word has returned to Europe. Whereas covid has been threatening in its unpredictability, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia on February 24th brought back images and experiences familiar to us, but which we had hoped were long gone in this part of the world and although a lot of people were shocked by the scale of Russian brutality, the decision itself to undertake hostile actions against Ukraine had been foreseen – and warned of – by many.

For months, Russia's aggression in Ukraine has been defining a major part of the foreign policy agenda of the countries of the West, simultaneously exacerbating some of the previously existing issues, like economic recession and rising energy prices, and consuming time and resources needed to tackle them. Currently, as a result of a calculated strategy by Vladimir Putin, it is Russia, not the West, who dictates the program of international politics, demonstrating in practice that the security of the West cannot be taken for granted and that hard power continues to be the ultimate language in talks among adversaries.

However, so far it seems that Putin has miscalculated, expecting the West to fall apart. Since the initial stages of the war, the West has shown a united position in favour of supporting Ukraine and providing it with resources to defend itself. Admittedly, there have been nuances in some of the EU member states' leaders' rhetoric or willingness to visit the Kremlin and try to talk some sense into the Russian president, but overall, the West has passed the test of unity. This is especially important in regard to transatlantic relations which had just been getting back on track after the four years of the Trump presidency, the unfortunate developments regarding the AUKUS deal and the hasty withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan last year. The European Union, yet again, has surprised many, itself included, and not only managed to take decisive action in imposing sanctions on Russian business as well as key figures of the regime, but also recognized that it was time to reconsider the enlargement fatigue and offer candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova and a European perspective to Georgia. Finally, after decades of remaining outside of NATO, Sweden and Finland decided to join.

While these developments presumably do not make Putin happy, the united approach of the West certainly cannot be taken for granted. As the conflict drags on, the sense of urgency declines, populations in the EU and the US get accustomed to horrifying imagery coming from Ukraine and are faced with other serious problems, whilst their frustration with rising inflation rates and energy prices might result in societal polarisation and be harvested by populists and political extremists. In these circum-

stances, Western unity is in danger of dissolution, with an increasing number of states' political representations perhaps getting a bit more conciliatory towards Russia in the naïve hope of restoring stability.

In spite of the acknowledged strength of the transatlantic partnership, the ongoing situation has again demonstrated the extent to which the EU still relies on the US in its defence. Leaving the contentious issue of EU strategic autonomy aside, it is clear that the (fully legitimate) U.S. requirement for the European allies to step up their defence spending will persist, especially if there is a Trump-like Republican in the White House after 2024. Although the US has shown a great commitment to support Ukraine and ensure security on NATO's eastern flank, its pivot to Asia will continue, making it necessary for Europe to rely on itself more.

Furthermore, the reaction of the international community to the Russian aggression in Ukraine has also illustrated that despite the united approach of the West, a significant portion of other key players are not necessarily with us. China's "friendship without limits" with Russia had been known since February at the latest. However, India too has not been taking any sides in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, while the inclinations of some of the African states have been clearly pro-Russian. The West should critically reflect on the shortcomings of its strategy in relations with these countries and what to do differently to be able to compete with the Russian narratives. The West's lingering approach regarding the distribution of covid-19 vaccines to the countries of the global South is just one example.

Last but definitely not least, the climate catastrophe does not pay attention to wars among nations and is still looming over us with all of its drastic and foreseen consequences, likely affecting human existence in all its aspects.



The grave international context has brought about an opportunity for the new Czech government to prove the key foreign policy claim of the coalition's campaign, i.e. that the Czech Republic does indeed belong in the West. And it has to be stated outright that it has largely succeeded. With a refreshingly active approach and a decisive tone, the Fiala government not only expressed its clear support for Ukraine with words but also took crucial practical steps in delivering military, financial and humanitarian assistance and providing shelter to hundreds of thousands of people displaced by the conflict. For once, the Czech Republic has acted as a responsible member of the international community, overcoming the inward looking tendencies of the previous governments and rediscovering the identity of the Czech Republic as a country which stands up for key values.

In full realisation of the great weight of taking bold foreign policy decisions whilst face to face with the aggressive Russian actions, it is also fair to acknowledge that in this war, unlike in the pandemics or other recent crises (e.g. refugee and climate), the decision to stand in support of Ukraine and participate in the assistance was not

a complicated one, at least for the current political representation. In the minds of the Czech society, the narrative of the evil that must be defeated and the victim that must be helped is deeply ingrained, even more so when the evil comes from Russia. In this sense, the steps following the Russian invasion of Ukraine were inevitable. The government's approach was clearly, if somewhat tritely, summarised by the Prime Minister Fiala after his trip to Kyiv in March together with his Polish and Slovenian counterparts: "One must do what one believes in and what is right".¹

This claim certainly cannot be disputed. It is however important to keep in mind that not all the crucial issues that the Czech foreign policy has to deal with in the near future are as clear as the war between Russia and Ukraine. Identifying the right decisions in situations that are more complex and in which the Czech population as well as the political scene might be split will require at least as much courage.

Developments in key bilateral relationships of the Czech Republic were also to a great extent framed by the Russian war in Ukraine. One of the often mentioned foreign policy goals of the Fiala government has been a review of relations towards Russia and China. Following last year's revelations about the involvement of Russia in the Vrbětice ammunition warehouse explosions, relations remained frozen, with the Putin regime's aggression in Ukraine only helping to move other EU countries in the same direction and accelerating the diminishment of Prague-Moscow contacts nearly to a state of non-existence (more on this by Pavel Havlíček in chapter 2). Relations with China have recently not been given the most attention. In recent months however, the Czech Republic seemingly has been moving towards leaving the 16 (or 14, after a goodbye from Latvia and Estonia) + 1 format. Moreover, the Indo-Pacific strategy has been devised to encompass Czech ties to other countries in the region, corresponding with the approach of the EU (see more in chapter 4 by Filip Šebok). There has been a significant improvement in relations with Poland since the dispute over the Turów coal mine has been resolved. Yet, it still leaves an open question of how the deterioration of this key partnership was allowed to happen and what the key steps were in the process. Unless the key foreign policy actors find the answers and learn from them, we can hardly take it for granted that the current reinvigoration of Prague-Warsaw ties will be lasting. Relations with the new German government of the traffic light coalition of social democrats, greens and liberals have also set off relatively well.

A proactive approach regarding EU assistance to Ukraine has been present in many countries in Central Europe and has contributed to a more constructive image of the region which had not always been the case in recent years. At the same time, the war has further boosted the importance of Czech relations in the region, mainly with Poland, Slovakia, Germany and also Austria. With the Visegrád Group as a traditional cornerstone of the Czech policy in the region weakening, there is an opportunity for

¹ Petr Fiala (@P_Fiala), "Člověk má dělat věci, kterým věří a které jsou správné," Twitter, March 16, 2022, https://twitter.com/p_fiala/status/1504087300757766145.

a reformulation of Czech Central European policy and a reevaluation of its goals and means. The most pressing issues in this regard are of course security, defence and energy policy. We analyse the Czech policy in Central Europe in more detail in chapter 3.

Russia using the EU's energy dependence as a weapon aimed at disrupting the unity of the West and the very concrete impact of this tactic on the EU states' citizens and businesses have brought the issue of energy security to the forefront of political discussion. However, as Romana J. Březovská writes in chapter 6, the immediate issue of ensuring energy security is perceived by the Czech policy makers as "more pressing" than energy transition, which is essential in achieving the general effort towards decarbonisation, instead of looking at the wider picture in which both of the issues are closely linked and should be tackled together.

In past years' editions of the Agenda for Czech Foreign Policy we often criticised the preoccupation of political representation with domestic policy, not paying enough attention to international issues or only using foreign policy topics as a proxy to meet their domestic interests. With the current government, the situation is the opposite. That is not ideal either. The point is that just as domestic politics cannot shield itself from the international environment, foreign policy is not sustainable if it does not draw on at least a basic level of agreement within the society. If there is a lack of decisive action on mitigating the effects of the economic recession on citizens and preventing the deepening disenchantment with the political representation in the groups that were hit the hardest, the collapse of domestic political stability might disrupt the commendable track record on the international stage. Among other things, the resolution to fix the long term shortcomings regarding funding for the armed forces – the importance of which has been painfully emphasised by the Russian actions in Ukraine – might yet again be at risk.

Lastly, the Russian war in Ukraine has been overshadowing certain less visible phenomena when it comes to Czech foreign policy formulation and execution. Among them is the fact that after reluctantly appointing Jan Lipavský to be the Minister of Foreign Affairs, President Zeman has been virtually ignoring his existence and discussing foreign policy issues exclusively with Prime Minister Fiala. The MFA under the leadership of the smallest coalition partner has indeed become more autonomous and visible compared to previous years. However, key foreign policy issues are decided by the Prime Minister or the whole Government, which in these turbulent times is not a wrong move per se. As a result, Czech foreign policy making must get ready for a more assertive Prime Minister's say in international issues. At the same time, the activities of President Zeman in this field have declined, with him even taking a very critical stance towards Russia at the outset of the invasion.



Czech foreign policy will need to maintain the vigour of recent months. The world is indeed an increasingly less safe place, and foreign policy is one of the tools through

which we maintain our own security, prosperity and stability. It is essential to constantly explain this logic to citizens and to find ways to convince even those who are not among the electorate of the current coalition. Moreover, the importance of the country's foreign policy challenges does not diminish the weight of the problems that people are facing and will face in their daily lives. The government should emphasise the mutual complementarity of domestic and foreign policy in this respect.

From today's perspective, Czech foreign policy priorities are concentrated in three key areas. Recommendations from the team of authors are detailed in the individual chapters of the book, but some themes permeate the entire publication.

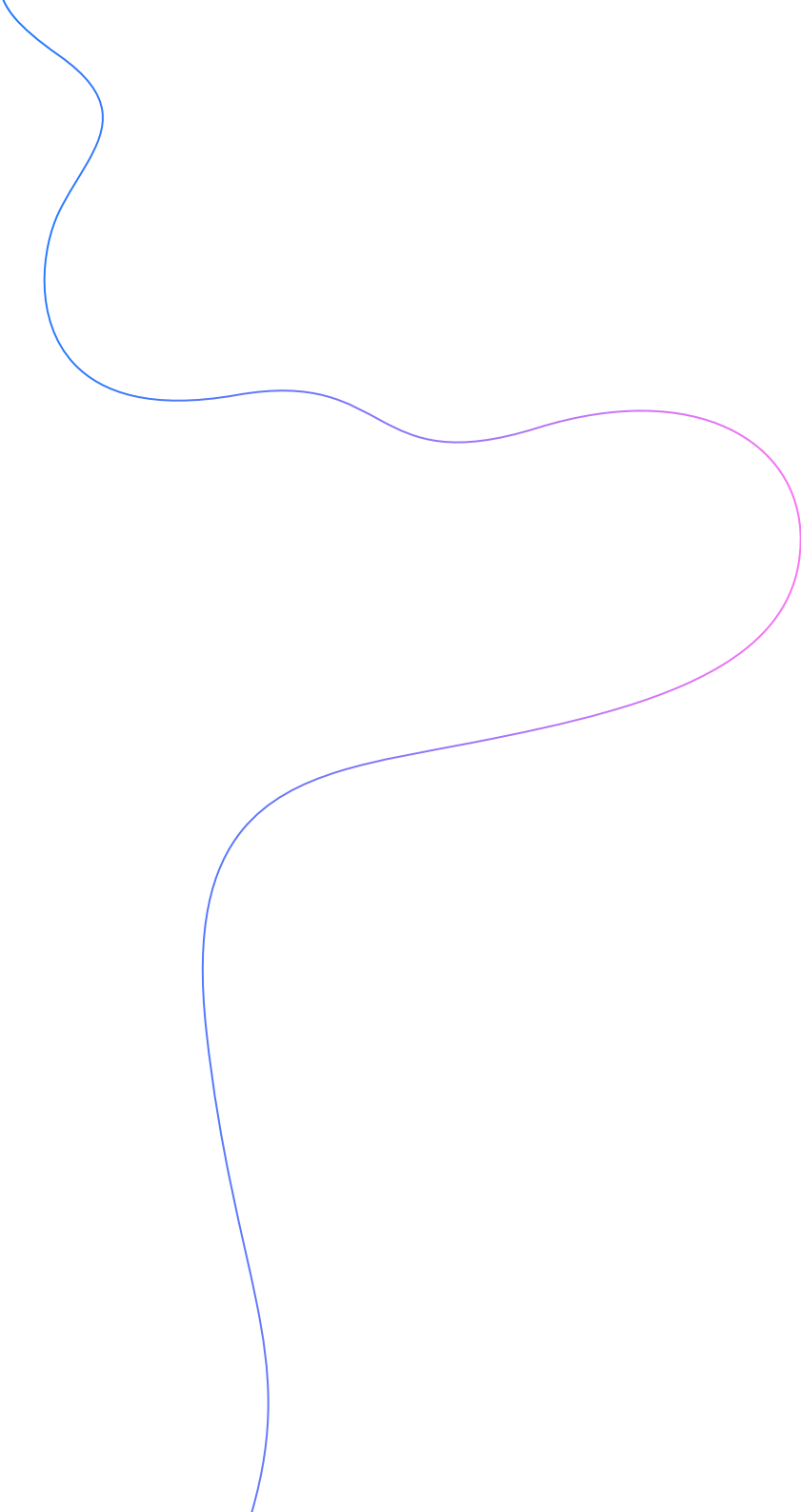
Firstly, the main task for Czech EU policy is the smooth execution of the presidency of the Council of the EU. It seems to be off to a promising start, achieving among other things an agreement among the member states regarding a solidarity mechanism to be used in the event of critical gas shortages. Proving competence and leadership in the EU is a unique chance for the Czech Republic not only to increase its credit in the eyes of European partners but also to showcase its influence in the EU and the benefits of membership to the Czech population. Unfortunately, the government has so far failed to recognise the opportunity of the presidency as a moment that can contribute to strengthening support for Czech membership in the EU, as if this were not a vital state interest. Public support for the EU is not the weakest it has ever been, but it is still fragile. In this light, ignoring a resourceful communication campaign is a missed opportunity and a mistake that may cost dearly in the future. Thus, the communication of European affairs in this regard should be stepped up also beyond the presidency.

Secondly, Eastern policy will be a key area. Support for Ukraine, including planning for robust reconstruction assistance, is of course central to this. In this respect, the Czech Republic faces not only the opportunity to continue its responsible policy, but also to make economic gains. Support for the European aspirations of Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and the countries of the Western Balkans must go hand in hand with reconstruction. The Czech Republic should also co-shape a new European policy towards Russia. Recent months have brought further strengthening of the voice of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, so it makes sense to further intensify cooperation with them on these agendas. However, this does not mean that the Czech Republic should slacken in its efforts towards partnerships across Europe. As mentioned above, a successful presidency is the way to enhance the Czech Republic's diplomatic position in the EU.

Thirdly, security and defence policy will be an important aspect. This must reflect the changing environment and the conclusions drawn by NATO and the EU in their strategic documents adopted this spring. In addition to increasing defence spending, this process will have to include a number of other areas – e.g. how to engage in the defence of NATO's eastern flank, rethinking the Czech contribution to European defence cooperation, and the agenda of relations with key partners, including the United States. Vojtěch Bahenský and his co-authors outline the necessary steps in chapter 5.

In the coming months, the strategic documents – the Security Strategy and the Foreign Policy Concept - will be revised. The previous ones are already outdated and, especially after February 2022, do not reflect reality. It is important that the whole process of drafting new basic foreign policy documents is open to diverse perspectives. In addition to the above-mentioned topics, they must also include issues of neighbourhood relations, Central European cooperation, relations with China and the Indo-Pacific, a broad and fundamental Czech reflection on climate policy, migration, relations with the global south, development assistance or the relationship between the socio-economic development of the Czech Republic and its foreign policy.

In addition, next year a new president will take office, who will have to be integrated into the execution of the country's foreign policy. Fundamentally, it will depend on which personality is elected. However, the effort is essential regardless of who the next president will be.





Czech Policy in Eastern Europe: Stepping into a Leading Role

Pavel Havlíček

“ *Putin must not win the war nor be able to take control over the Ukrainian people.* ————— **Jan Lipavský**
May 17, 2022

“ *The Western Balkans and EU enlargement are undoubtedly one of the main priorities of the forthcoming Czech presidency of the Council of the European Union. The Czech presidency will focus on deepening economic, environmental and security cooperation between the EU and countries in the region.*

Jan Lipavský
May 17, 2022

“ *The madman needs to be isolated and we must defend ourselves against him not just with words, but by concrete actions.* ————— **Miloš Zeman**
February 24, 2022

“ *The only thing that countries of an imperial character will understand is a show of strength and determination. It simply isn't the case that if you give them something it will satisfy them.*

Petr Fiala
April 22, 2022

After the change of government at the end of last year, the Czech Republic decided to prioritise the eastern vector in its foreign policy and further bolster some of its elements. Based on the coalition agreement as well as the governmental programme, the cabinet of Petr Fiala pushed for a review of relations with Russia and China and continued a traditional Czech focus on the countries of the Eastern Partnership as well as the Western Balkans. These thematic areas were present in the thinking of the previous government, especially after the Vrbětice affair last year, which escalated tensions in Czech-Russian relations to unprecedented levels. However, the Fiala government added a strong new pillar of democracy and human rights, which should symbolise a return to the legacy of Václav Havel of the 1990s and a strong normative approach to international relations. One sign of this is the plan to adopt a Czech version of the Magnitsky Act by the end of this year, which should punish violators of democracy and human rights or corruption around the globe in the Czech context too.

The political transition of power, with all its usual turbulence, also came at the same time as a great upheaval for Eastern Europe and the world, following the previously unimaginable events of 24 February 2022. Whilst the Czech Republic already had a well shaped perception of Russia as a threat and aggressor, including at the wider societal level, nonetheless many structural dependencies were and still are present in the two countries' bilateral relations, primarily in the area of energy, but to a lesser degree also in economy and mutual trade or military cooperation. Though attempts had been made to phase out these dependencies already before the events of February 2022, when combined with a relatively slow start to the building of relations with foreign partners, budget cuts and a weak capacity of the state, this created a situation of practically constant crisis-management thinking and taking many swift and/or ad hoc measures to complex problems and structural issues. This was, for example, visible in the slow response to the energy crisis, which is still largely missing any comprehensive plan for the worst case scenario of a complete cut off of Russian oil and gas or any complex communication strategy towards the wider public.

One effect of the Russian war against Ukraine has been to speed up many processes in Czech-Russian ties or vis-à-vis Ukraine and the Eastern Partnership. Issues that would under "normal" circumstances have taken many months or years were dealt with within weeks. One concrete example was the Czech withdrawal from the so-called Russian banks stationed in Budapest, which the previous government had blocked due to the uncertain fate of the Czech money deposited in the bank and an unwillingness of part of the political elite to act, partially due to the influence of the Czech President Miloš Zeman. Another example was the Czech push for Ukrainian candidacy status, which it decided to lead on alongside other EU member states too. Many other issues, including the fight against disinformation and Russian propaganda or the establishment of a system of strategic (and crisis) communication of the state were taken on with much more urgency after the change of government and were further fuelled after the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine's territory.

In general, it is possible to characterise the Czech response to the war as highly normative, security-driven and embedded in the broadly defined common European and Western framework. This is particularly with regards to Russia, in which the Czech Republic since day one pushed for a strong and complex sanctions mechanism on multiple levels and a complete isolation of the country, but also vis-à-vis Ukraine. The Czech Republic has found a new leadership capacity to not only deliver much needed arms, including the more sophisticated ones, but also to accept hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing the war in their home country. Being a strongly polarising issue, the context of the Russian war helped to overcome some of the previous mental patterns associated with the so-called migration crisis of 2014/15. The Czech Republic together with Poland and Slovakia also positioned itself at the forefront of the crisis management, clearly outperforming some of the bigger and wealthier EU members. This was symbolised, for example, by the Czech, Polish and Slovenian PMs being the first to visit Kyiv after the outbreak of the war and a number of other political but also very practical gestures of support towards Ukraine. Furthermore, the Czech Republic – for the first time ever – decided to lead the NATO battle group in Slovakia as part of the extended so-called enhanced forward presence together with Germany, the Netherlands and the United States and other international partners.

This political and mental switch moved the Czech Republic closer to the Eastern flank of the EU and NATO in terms of their foreign and security policy thinking. This meant a further cooling off in relations with Budapest, which continued with an ambivalent and unconstructive position vis-à-vis the conflict and Russia itself, but it also brought the Czech position much closer to the Polish or the Baltic one, standing firmly on value and security-driven grounds when coping with the crisis. Despite some level of domestic criticism, the Czech Republic also continued to play a bridging role in relations with Germany and to some extent also France, which due to the slow pace of their reaction to the Russian aggression and mixed signals sent to Moscow have been losing credibility and trust among Central and Eastern European members of the EU. This should be seen positively since the Czech Republic – especially in the run up to its presidency of the Council of the EU – managed to play a leading role in the region, also when speaking to the bigger EU members.

On the other hand, it is clear that within Czech society there are political and societal voices critical of the strongly normative and comprehensive approach of the government, partially associated with the pro-Kremlin camp, even if it has lost a lot of ground and public support – including from the President Miloš Zeman. A dichotomy between economic instability and rising levels of inflation, and the rather strong Czech support towards refugees has found its way into the political life of the country and pushed many to ask for how long it will be possible to sustain the political momentum and strong societal consensus, including within the five-party-government of the ruling block.



This new level of leadership, very well recognised at the international level, also manifested in the review of the upcoming priorities for the Czech EU Council presidency, which were reshaped and moved to address the current crisis situation, which had caught the French presidency not only unprepared, but also in the middle of their presidential and parliamentary election campaigns, which had prioritised a rather domestic-looking perspective for the French policy makers.

The cabinet of Petr Fiala rightly decided to react otherwise and elevate the response to the crisis to the top of the Czech EU priorities. Officially based around the five key areas for the presidency, the government prepared a so-called 5-point-plan for Ukraine to show to international partners its readiness to deliver in several key areas, including rewarding Ukraine with candidacy status, organising a high level Ukraine conference with the leadership of the country and preparing a donor conference, which would raise funds for immediate needs as well as the post-conflict recovery, among other things. In this way, the government put Ukraine and the response to the war as its cross-cutting priority.

Beyond this, the Czech Republic plans to continue with their tough approach towards Russia in terms of sanctions, punishing war crimes by promoting the establishment of the international legal tribunal and isolation of the country in the international arena, even if the government itself faces some key dilemmas in how far to go, for instance, on the question of energy dependency and redirecting to alternative sources of oil and gas. Other dilemmas are connected to the domestic situation and political debate as well as European values, when it comes to - for example - the question of frozen assets of sanctioned companies, oligarchs or other representatives of the Russian regime, which are governed by the rule of law mechanism and protection of private property, unlike in Russia or Belarus. Finally, the government has to decide to what extent it wants to focus on the current political reality in Russia and how much it is ready to support and cooperate with the pro-democracy actors who could bring about some kind of change in the country in the future since they have so far stood back on this. This was, for example, visible during the negotiations on help towards the Russian and Belarusian civil societies and critiques of both regimes, which at least at the beginning were not really in the focus of the governmental approach.

On the question of the EU's eastern policy, the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs has so far sent only mixed messages wishing for – on the one hand – a comprehensive change to the policy, but on the other also the continuation of some of its basic principles of cooperation with the Eastern European states. Czech diplomacy has clearly prioritised Ukraine, given the atrocious Russian aggression that the country has been facing, although the official position is still that all three associated countries deserve to become members of the EU one day, despite the fact that Georgia was not given candidate status by the European Council decision on 23 and 24 June 2022.

One of the crucial parts of the debate is the question of “Wider Europe”, which is back on the EU decision-making table as well as the inter-connected setup of enlarge-

ment policy, which has stalled in the past decade and suffers from deep structural problems as well as a lack of political will within several member states. The Czech Republic is going to need to take a proactive stance and play the role of mediator and honest broker e.g. within the rather emotional and subjective debates between Bulgaria and North Macedonia. Achieving progress in some of the complicated issues tied to the membership perspectives of the Western Balkan countries would help mitigate the grievances of some of these states regarding the possible accession of Ukraine and other Eastern European countries. Both Albania and North Macedonia have clearly taken a condemnatory stance on the Russian war and deserve the EU's help and future perspective.

An important - and yet still unexplored - part of the debate is bringing other EU members to endorse and support practical steps towards Ukraine's and Moldova's integration, resilience and, in the case of Ukraine, post-war reconstruction. Even though the Czech Republic has developed a strong line of argumentation on why it is necessary to bring Ukraine closer to the EU and deliver concrete benefits to its citizens, it has not yet invested enough in establishing a wide political consensus among the EU states, particularly those which are less interested or inclined to follow suit. This aspect touches on a long term underlying problem of capacity and resources, which are not always sufficient to achieve even the most important foreign policy priorities, due to the secondary importance of the foreign policy portfolios in the Czech domestic political debate.

On the other hand, during the Czech EU Council presidency, its leading position within the EU on mediating among the European members on key policy areas, including energy, migration, economic recovery and investment or the future of Europe (among other things) make the Czech Republic an important ally and might help the country to increase its political and international profile, if approached strategically and with the proper tactics of establishing a strong alliance among like-minded EU members as well as discussing potential opportunities with the less interested ones.

For that reason, Czech-German and Czech-French relations are going to be of crucial importance (not only) in the coming months. The Czech-German strategic dialogue, which too often lacks concrete substance, might represent a promising platform for the debate on the future of Eastern Europe as well as relations with Ukraine and Russia. Similarly to that, France has officially been declared a foreign policy partner and an important ally in the governmental programme, and this needs to materialise more in practice, also when it comes to high-level visits and more active exchange and dialogue.

On the Russia front, it is essential to continue with the review of mutual ties and finish the ongoing processes of cutting ties, while trying to minimise the risks. Now, it is practically impossible to keep the ties and continue with the previous international cooperation projects. At the same time, it is critical to continue with the traditional priority areas, such as the support of civil society, independent media and democratisation in the wider sense, in which the Czech Republic has invested over

many years. In order to achieve this, the government needs to take proactive measures to support the priority groups on the Russian side and return to its previous foreign policy tradition of the Masaryk's Russian Aid Operation towards the pro-democratic/anti-bolshevik part of the Russian society on multiple levels. One good example of this effort is the governmental programme "Civil Society", which represents a first step in this direction. Outreach and (strategic) communication to the Russian society as well as the Russian and the Russian-speaking community in the Czech Republic represent another crucial component of the debate.

In addition to the EU's Russia policy, the Czech presidency of the Council of the EU and Czech foreign policy in general need to recalibrate Eastern Partnership policy as a part of the upcoming debate on the Wider Europe concept. It is necessary to establish a new balance between a stronger bilateral track (differentiation), especially with the Associated Trio, and the multilateral dimension (inclusivity) to keep Belarusian or Azerbaijani civil society and pro-EU parts of their societies inside the policy framework. This is also important for Armenia, which is facing turbulent times at home, while being limited by the geopolitical nature of its conflict with Azerbaijan. This must be done in order to preserve a comprehensive EU eastern policy towards the region. It is also crucial for the Czech national priorities, which are traditionally connected with democratisation, civil society support and engagement as well as achieving prosperity and stability in Eastern Europe, for which the EU's concept and understanding of resilience is still the most relevant one.

Last but not least, security is going to play a key role with Eastern European countries. In this area, the Czech government should return to some past ideas in promoting closer cooperation with the security and intelligence agencies of Eastern European states, which has now become an open necessity when facing the war with Russia. The Czech leadership of the NATO battlegroup in Slovakia illustrates that our successes and foreign and security courage might benefit the country from many directions. These concrete initiatives and ideas are going to be particularly important following the NATO Madrid Summit in June 2022, bringing the Alliance into a new security reality.

The Czech Republic, with its strong and credible transatlantic bond, might also offer the right diplomatic channel to facilitate closer coordination with the US, including when it comes to the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine, military cooperation or energy. It is essential to keep Western unity and a common approach both towards Russia as well as Ukraine. One concrete example is the donor conference on the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine that the Czech Republic is planning to host together with the United States, which might help to bridge the gap inside the EU27 on that issue.

While it is key to manage the presidency of the Council of the EU well, and the foreign policy portfolio in a wider sense, it is also essential to keep things stable on the domestic front and facilitate a strong domestic consensus for the crisis response, which would also have broad public support. The government needs to make sure

that its eastern policy does not fall victim to populist and pro-Russian cliques within the Parliament, which would benefit from chaos and divisions inside of the society and the ruling elite. For that, it is – first of all – essential to further invest in strategic communication and work with the Czech and wider European public as well as to reach a wider transatlantic solidarity, and sustain strong mutual bonds and a common approach to the crisis as the only way out of the current escalation with Russia.

To conclude, the Czech Republic has a good and solid starting position to move from an average - or even underperforming in some respects - member of the Western alliance into a leader and credible partner on the international stage. However, it needs to have the right mindset, invest additional resources in boosting its capacity to act and facilitate the domestic discussion and keep the instability at bay. If it succeeds, it is going to dramatically increase its profile and potential for future coalition building and new ways of cooperation, which it should use for its own benefit.

Context

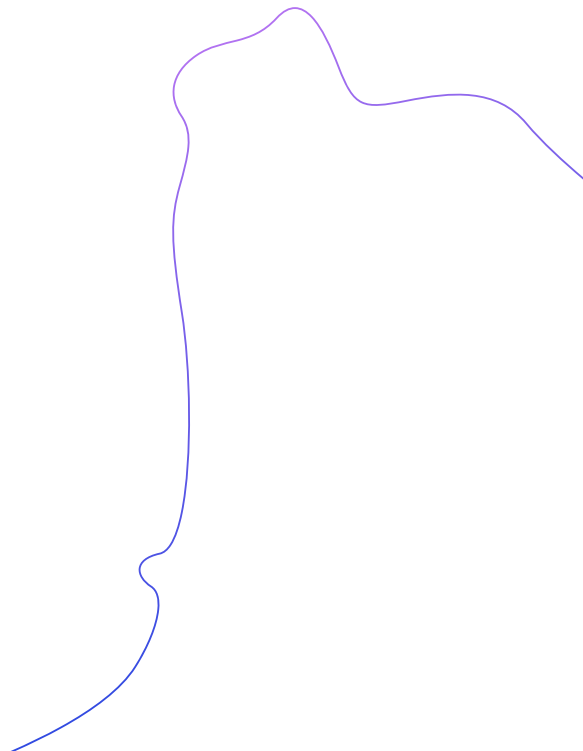
- Ongoing Russian war against Ukraine has profoundly shaped international relations and European security architecture by exposing the vulnerabilities of the EU towards the Russian threat.
- The consolidation of the stance of the Western community towards Russia is approaching its limits based around the national interests of individual EU countries, including in relations with Ukraine.
- Czech EU Council presidency has been strongly promoting relations with Eastern European countries and prioritising the trio of associated countries, particularly Ukraine and Moldova, on their way towards the EU.

Present

- The government pursues a full-scale crisis management of the Russian war crisis on multiple levels, including energy, help to refugees as well as support to Ukraine, while trying to mediate the socio-economic impacts of the war.
- Frozen bilateral relations with Russia are unlikely to change in the foreseeable future, while the Czech Republic tries to move its international partners in the same direction.
- Ukraine stands in the centre of the Czech upcoming EU presidency as well as the centre of gravity of policy-making in the country.
- The Czech government is still in a brainstorming phase on what to do next with Eastern Partnership policy, particularly in relation to the three candidacy status applications from Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova.

Recommendations

- The Czech government should prioritise active and professional management of the Czech presidency of the Council of the EU with a clear set of priorities, including primarily those related to the Russian war against Ukraine and efficient management of its consequences for the EU itself.
- The government should focus on establishing new partnerships and consensus-building as a must to achieve common goals and keep the EU strong and united, particularly on complicated issues such as the accession process of Ukraine and Moldova, energy or restoration of the enlargement policy.
- When it comes to authoritarian regimes such as Russia, Belarus or Azerbaijan, the Czech Republic should continue supporting opposition and civil society actors and promote democratisation across Eastern Europe.





Czech Policy in Central Europe: Searching for a Fresh Outlook

Vít Dostál
Pavína Janebová

“ Cooperation in the Visegrád Group will be part of our relations at all levels. ————— **Policy Statement of the Government**
January 7, 2022

“ Let’s not have exaggerated expectations, but at the same time let’s not curse Visegrád. It is a well-established communication platform that we should not give up.
Mikuláš Bek —————
June 15, 2022

“ What will be the use of gas in Germany if the Czech factories stand still and can not deliver to German factories? On the other hand, every state must ensure energy security, and our government is working intensively on this. ————— **Jan Lipavský**
July 29, 2022

“ I think it’s a great success, we managed to cast off the mill-stone that burdened Czech-Polish relations in recent years.
Petr Fiala —————
about the agreement on Turów, April 22, 2022

In recent years, coherent Czech policy in the region of Central Europe has largely been replaced by the politically prioritised participation in the Visegrád Group. Overlooking its true substance, the V₄ became the subject of polarised discussion among its avid supporters and equally vociferous opponents in which both of the camps were largely missing the point. Due to their prevalence, these two perspectives largely overshadowed attempts at a realistic evaluation of both the benefits of the cooperation at the working and societal level, and also the limits of the V₄ when it comes to pursuing regional foreign policy goals. Instead of a functional tool of Czech foreign and regional policy, the V₄ became a placeholder for competing ideological wings inside Czech domestic politics. As a result, only limited time and capacities were spent on talking about other regional partners or the goals of the Czech Republic in Central Europe as such.

Since the end of last year however, Czech policy in Central Europe received at least two substantial impulses leading if not to a profound change of perspective, then at least to an attempt at a reevaluation of Czech engagement and partnerships. These two impulses of course were the election of the new government and, crucially, the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The Civic Democrats-led government initially declared an unchanged commitment to the Visegrád Group, listing it among the key alliances for the Czech Republic in its Policy Statement.¹ In spite of some expectations and certain political or ideological ties to the Law and Justice party in Poland or (to some extent) Fidesz in Hungary, shared by the ODS and the Christian Democrats, the government did not put the Visegrád Group at the forefront of their foreign and European policy, even before 24 February. Indeed, the remaining coalition partners – TOP09, Mayors and Independents and the Pirate Party had in the past voiced criticism regarding developments in Poland and Hungary leading to a deterioration of rule of law standards and, by extension, Czech participation in the V₄ as such. While the governmental parties share broad agreement on the affiliation of the Czech Republic with “the West,” (albeit vague and in fact rather void of any meaning,) and a pro-EU course, too much affinity expressed towards the V₄ in some parts of ODS and KDU-ČSL were not worth causing bad blood in the coalition. Certain reservations towards the group originated also in the heavily publicised relationship between Andrej Babiš and Viktor Orbán, with the Hungarian leader even coming to the Czech Republic during the election campaign to support ANO. Too many photo-ops with Orbán would not play well with the government’s efforts to distance themselves from Babiš as much as possible. Instead, the government declared the intention of developing Central European relations beyond the V₄.

That was also manifested in the hastening of the conclusion of an agreement between the Czech Republic and Poland on the expansion of mining in the Turów lignite mine located near the Czech border. The fact that bilateral relations have been

¹ “Policy Statement of the Government - Government of the Czech Republic,” <https://www.vlada.cz/en/jednani-vlady/policy-statement/policy-statement-of-the-government-193762/>.

unblocked is undeniably of key importance, especially in the context of the later developments in Ukraine. However, although Warsaw, Prague and the Liberec region are satisfied, in the view of some local communities and environmental organisations the Czech government should have striven for a better deal.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has brought a completely new reality to Central European relations, especially in the areas of political cooperation, security and people-to-people relations. Firstly, most Central and Eastern European countries actively engaged in political support for Ukraine. The Czech Republic was no exception to this. The regional dimension and cooperation on this matter was demonstrated by the joint trip of the prime ministers of the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovenia to Kyiv while it was still under partial siege. The Czech Republic cooperated with Poland and Slovakia on the logistics of arms transfers to Ukraine. It also has also been playing a more prominent role in the defence of NATO's eastern flank, with the establishment of a Multinational Battle Group in Slovakia under Czech command. The large number of Ukrainian refugees coming to the Czech Republic following the invasion has also necessitated an intensive exchange of information and cooperation.

In all these issues, however, Hungary stood on the sidelines due to the position of the Fidesz government which has been fundamentally different from its V₄ partners. Hungary's refusal to let the military equipment provided to Ukraine by other European states be transported through its territory, objecting against EU sanctions imposed on Russia and the rhetoric of Hungarian representatives has further strengthened the image of Hungary as a complicated partner for the Czech Republic which goes against the interests of other countries in the region and the entire EU.

One of the consequences of this has been the weakening of Visegrád cooperation at the highest political level. With the exception of the V₄ + UK prime ministerial meeting, there has been no major summit at the prime ministerial level and the traditional coordination meetings before the European Council have not taken place. In addition, Hungary's actions have also brought about a continuation of the discussion about a possible Czech withdrawal from the V₄, which took place even among the parliamentarians of the ruling coalition parties. The V₄'s fall from grace has given a certain boost to the visibility of the Slavkov platform.

In light of the rapidly worsening relations between the EU and Russia, the region has started to focus intensively on cooperation in the field of energy security. The Czech Republic has been working with neighbouring countries to secure oil and gas supplies and has sought to acquire stakes in liquefied natural gas terminals in neighbouring countries. However, so far it was unsuccessful in Poland and Germany and secured a stake in the Netherlands.

The coincidence of new governments taking office in both the Czech Republic and Germany at approximately the same time brought an opportunity to start a new chapter in mutual relations which had been going smoothly but politically had lagged behind their potential. Russia's actions in Ukraine have of course to a great extent defined both of the countries' foreign policy agenda, limiting the time and capacities that

could have been devoted to the development of mutual relations. On the other hand, there are areas brought forward by the war where cooperation between the Czech Republic and Germany makes sense and should be strengthened – i.e. energy, security policy or humanitarian issues.



Cooperation in Central Europe will continue to be affected by Russia's aggression against Ukraine. This changed political and security reality will frame the issues relevant to Central European cooperation. The EU response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine marked an opportunity for the region, including the Czech Republic, to change the usual dynamic between the “old” and the “new” EU members and assume a leading role for once. Given the EU Council presidency, the Czech Republic has a unique chance to build upon this experience and define itself as a constructive voice in the EU, able to provide leadership in the areas of its expertise and traditional priorities.

First, assistance to Ukraine will be a central theme. Whether it is military, humanitarian, financial or political aid or active participation in the reconstruction of the country, Central European states should cooperate on these issues and Czech foreign policy should seek regional dialogue between like-minded countries on these issues. In addition, the Central European countries can share their experience in dealing with the refugee wave and work together to raise additional European funds to help them integrate well.

Secondly, solidarity within the region will be essential in the event of difficulties in ensuring the availability of energy supplies. As a landlocked country, the Czech Republic is in a comparatively worse position to secure supplies. It must therefore engage in dialogue with its neighbours - in particular Poland and Germany, regarding the usage of their LNG facilities.

Thirdly, it will be necessary to reinforce the security of the region with an additional military presence on NATO's eastern flank. The Czech Republic should take up the responsibility to play its appropriate part in this. Given that the change in the security environment will be long-term, the gradual further involvement of the Czech Republic in the defence of NATO's eastern flank should become part of new conceptual documents such as the new Security Strategy of the Czech Republic. This should also include emphasising the importance of EU foreign policy paying sufficient attention to the area.

Further, given its EU Council presidency, the Czech Republic should be the voice of the region in putting emphasis on the importance of maintaining the unity of the West regarding keeping up the tough stance towards Russia, including sanctions, when the willingness of some EU member states might be diminishing. A prerequisite for this, of course, is the ability to maintain the united position at home.

Slovakia's V₄ presidency programme is rather modest compared to the plans of its Hungarian predecessor, which is quite understandably welcomed by the Czech Repub-

lic. At the moment, the V₄ makes sense as a communication platform at the sectoral working level. The meaningfulness of the V₄+ formats in foreign policy needs to be reviewed, especially when it comes to non-European countries. The Czech Republic should then continue to strive for further development of the International Visegrád Fund, as people-to-people contacts are always needed in Central Europe, and even more so at a time when there is a lack of consensus at the highest political level. With these theses in mind, the Czech Republic should enter preparations for its V₄ presidency, which it will hold from July 2023. It is important for the Czech Republic to realistically assess the potential of the platform in fulfilling Czech interests. On the other hand, hollow calls to abandon this platform altogether will not bring any benefits.

The diminishing importance of the V₄ in Czech Central European politics should go hand in hand with efforts to develop other formats and bilateral relations where possible. These should be as mutually complementary as possible, so as to contribute to creating a coherent bigger picture of policy in the region and contribute to promoting Czech political, security and economic interests.

It is advisable to continue cooperation within the Slavkov Triangle with Slovakia and Austria, as well as within the C-5. The Slavkov format can continue to be used for joint initiatives towards candidate countries, especially given its track record in cooperation on the issues of international law and development policy. Both these formats include Austria and thus provide an opportunity to develop bilateral relations which, although strengthened during past years and working well, still have some unused potential. Beyond these formats, attention should be paid to the Bucharest Nine and cooperation with the Baltic states, given the importance of the security dimension of the regional policy. The Czech approach to the Three Seas Initiative still needs new impetus. Internally, a Czech governmental coordinator needs to be appointed, who should preferably be one of the deputy foreign ministers. The Czech Republic should - finally - make its contribution to the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund and identify new priority projects instead of the inappropriate redundant Danube-Oder-Elbe waterway project. Last but not least, the Czech Republic should explore the idea of holding another Three Seas Initiative summit in 2024, which could be an opportunity to present the next president's Central European policy priorities.

Czech-Polish relations need to build on the good momentum created by the closure of the Turów case and the cooperation since the beginning of the Russian war against Ukraine. The relationship needs consolidation of the physical and interpersonal infrastructure. The revived consultative formats such as joint meetings of governments or deputy foreign and defence ministers must continue. In particular, cooperation can develop in particular in security, defence and transport or infrastructure policy. At the same time, old unresolved cases that have a toxic effect on relations, such as the border debt to Poland or the so-called Warsaw diplomatic properties case, need to be resolved. Last but not least, attention must continue to be paid to environmental issues in the border area and to seeking greater friendliness from the Polish side, without which - as the Turów case has shown - relations can be very fragile.

Despite the expected further positive intensification of Central European cooperation, the region continues to bear the burden of the decline of the rule of law in some of its countries – notably Poland and Hungary. The European Commission is now trying to separate the two cases – standing firm against the worsening situation in Hungary and trying to negotiate improvements in Poland through dialogue and mutual concessions. The Czech Republic should accept and informally support this strategy. Poland's importance to Prague is significant and growing in political, security and economic terms, and excessive ostracisation of Warsaw would go against its own interests. However, this does not mean that the Czech Republic should ignore the current state of the rule of law in Poland which should be raised during closed-door meetings between political leaders on the bilateral level.

At the same time, the openly declared and increasingly antagonistic positions of the Hungarian government not only with regard to Ukraine and Russia but also towards the European Union are in direct conflict with the foreign policy interests of the Czech Republic and scaling relations down will not bring any significant costs to the Czech Republic. Czech politicians in the executive and parliament have to repeat in private conversations that the poor state of rule of law in Poland and Hungary tarnishes the political and foreign investment reputation of the whole of Central Europe, is not conducive to efforts for further EU enlargement, has a direct negative impact on the unity of the EU and makes it increasingly difficult to sustain and develop cooperation with Hungary and Poland due to increasing criticism of such coming from the Czech society.

Political, economic and people-to-people relations with Germany will remain crucial for the Czech Republic. Germany is preoccupied with itself because of the war and the divisions it has revealed in the still relatively new government coalition. The Czech Republic must be present and active in its relation towards Germany and cannot just wait to see what kind of Germany emerges from this process but must attempt to influence Germany's positions especially when it comes to the war in Ukraine and its follow-up. Alongside working meetings of the executive, both parliamentary diplomacy and the presence of German-speaking Czech ministers in the German public debate could be an instrument in this endeavour. At the moment, good Czech-German cooperation at European level during the Czech presidency of the EU Council is essential, but there is also room for parliamentary diplomacy and further political activity after the presidency. Indeed, both countries share a number of challenges - such as industrial transformation or securing energy supplies. Also, Germany's engagement in the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine will be crucial and the Czech Republic should be part of the discussion about it at the EU level.

Slovakia continues to be an indispensable partner for the Czech Republic in the region. That bilateral relations will remain exceptionally good, should however not be taken for granted. The Czech Republic should carefully follow the developments of the Slovak domestic political scene and prepare for a potential substantial change in Slovak foreign policy orientation, should the political subjects currently leading according to the election polls replace the current government.

In an international environment in which, due to the Russian aggression, the stakes are higher than ever, the government, which is still fairly new, should recognize the need for a fresh approach to its immediate neighbourhood which must take into account the political, economic and security realities of the region as a necessary starting point for its foreign and European policy. Instead of reducing the regional policy to the value conflict between the adherents and opponents of a close cooperation with Budapest and Warsaw, Czech Central European policy should take a pragmatic outlook and use the potential of both bilateral and multilateral relations in the region to promote its interests. In this, issues of energy and security will be crucial in the coming months and years. The long-term debt regarding the physical infrastructure in the region, not only in the area of energy but also transport is more salient than ever.

An overarching key task for Czech policy in Central Europe is to build upon the current momentum and sustain the newly strengthened self-confidence of the region vis-à-vis the older EU member states, also in regard to the accession process of Ukraine and Moldova, as well as the states of the Western Balkans. Keeping up intense communication and strong relations with Germany and Austria is a prerequisite for that.

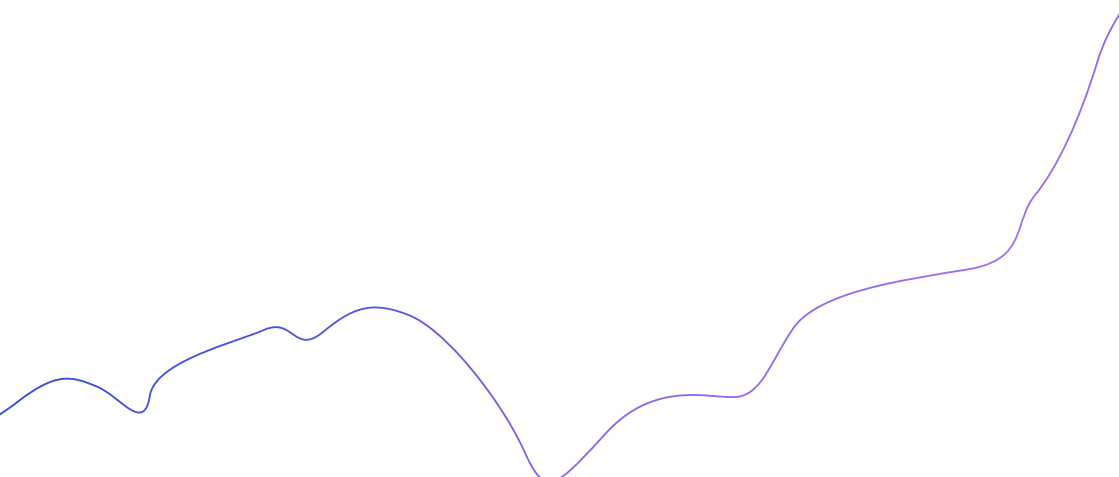
Context

- Region of Central Europe has been significantly affected by Russia's aggression against Ukraine, including political cooperation, (energy) security and people-to-people relations, but also the overall sense of leadership regarding the EU response.
- Visegrád cooperation has been weakened at the highest level, mostly due to Hungary's lukewarm approach to the support of Ukraine and the EU measures.
- The problems of the rule of law in Poland and Hungary persist. While in the case of Poland, negotiations between the European Commission and Warsaw or elections may bring about a change, in the case of Hungary a reversal of the deteriorating trend is unlikely.

Present

- In past years, any coherent Czech Central European policy was replaced by a politically exaggerated preference towards the Visegrád Group, which became the subject of a polarised debate between its supporters and opponents.
 - Relations with Poland, Slovakia, Germany and to some extent also Austria gained new substance in multiple areas – predominantly in security and energy policy. Relations with Hungary deteriorated due to its stance towards Russian aggression against Ukraine.
 - Assistance to Ukraine, mutual solidarity, especially in the field of energy, coping with the refugee wave from Ukraine and strengthening the defence capabilities of NATO's eastern flank are among the key issues for the region and Czech Central European policy.
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Recommendations

- V₄ makes sense as a communication platform at the sectoral working level. The meaningfulness of the V₄+ formats with non-European countries in foreign policy needs to be reviewed. The Czech Republic should strive for further development of the International Visegrád Fund. With these theses in mind, the Czech Republic should enter preparations for its V₄ presidency.
 - The diminishing importance of the V₄ should go hand in hand with efforts to develop other formats and bilateral relations where possible. The Slavkov format can be used for joint initiatives towards EU candidate countries. A new Czech governmental coordinator for the Three Seas Initiative needs to be appointed and the Czech Republic should - finally - make its contribution to the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund and identify new priority projects.
 - Czech-Polish relations need to build on the good momentum and consolidate physical and interpersonal infrastructure. The Czech Republic must be present and active in its relations towards Germany and cannot just wait to see what kind of Germany emerges from this process but must attempt to influence Germany's positions especially when it comes to the war in Ukraine and its follow-up.
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Czech Policy towards China and the Indo-Pacific: Exploring New Potential

Filip Šebok

“ Dialogue and a coordinated approach by the EU, US, and other like-minded countries is absolutely key for promoting and safeguarding the values of the democratic community. The interests of the Czech Republic in the Indo-Pacific are thus much broader and absolutely crucial. ——— Jan Lipavský
February 18, 2022

“ I resolutely condemn the moves of the Chinese Communist Party, which decided to bully Lithuania. It is a test not only for Lithuania but especially for us: they are testing our readiness to stand behind our ally within the EU and NATO. ——— Pavel Fischer
December 15, 2021

“ [The] platform of cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European countries, known as 16+1, has not brought any significant benefit to the member (sic!) countries in our region in ten years of its existence and has functioned mostly as a tool for pursuing unilateral interests of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). ——— Foreign Affairs Committee
of the Chamber of Deputies
May 19, 2022

Over the past year, the Czech Republic has been developing its own position towards the Indo-Pacific region, in line with the strategy of the EU and of key allies, including the US. The framing of the foreign policy in the region as part of a broader approach, both in terms of geographic scope and sectoral focus, has provided a new conceptual framework for Czech engagement in the region and for bilateral ties with key partners. This is true also for ties with China, whose geopolitical rise with its consequences on politics, economy, and security, is the often-unstated, but nevertheless key factor in the birth of the Indo-Pacific concept a few years ago.

For the Czech Republic, developing a comprehensive approach towards the Indo-Pacific as the most dynamic global region that provides economic opportunities but is also home to potential security flashpoints is no less important than for major powers. The development of the Czech approach towards the Indo-Pacific started already under the government led by Prime Minister Andrej Babiš. In September 2021, Czech Foreign Minister Jakub Kulhánek appointed an experienced diplomat, Libor Sečka, previous Ambassador to Beijing and London, to the post of special envoy for the Indo-Pacific. The Czech Republic also started to devise its own Indo-Pacific strategy, following the national strategies of France, Germany, and the Netherlands and the EU joint strategy. The Czech Republic also made the decision to put the development of the EU's engagement in the Indo-Pacific as one of the key focus areas of its presidency of the Council of the EU. The road to the presidency has been accompanied by close coordination with the presidency of France which is the leading actor in the EU's policy towards the region.

The increased focus on the Indo-Pacific has mirrored the political priorities of the new government. The government programme committed to deepen cooperation with key partners in the Indo-Pacific, explicitly mentioning India, South Korea, and Taiwan. Moreover, the programme set out the goal of revising ties with China (as well as Russia), which remains Czech Republic's strategic partner.

For the first months of the new government's tenure, due to other more pressing international developments, China policy has remained on the margin of the government's interests. Bilateral ties have remained in the state of hibernation which has characterised them since at least 2019. In general, there was a certain cautiousness on the part of the Czech diplomacy towards China, while the process of the revision of ties with China, envisioned by the government programme, was initiated.

The Russian war against Ukraine has understandably occupied the attention of Czech policymakers, especially as the Czech Republic has been at the forefront of the EU's assistance to Ukraine and has pushed for a harsher reaction to Russia's aggression. In this context, "opening another front" with China would put the Czech Republic in a difficult position. Moreover, the government has maintained an uneasy co-habitation with President Zeman, who has remained the most outspoken pro-China voice on the Czech political scene. On several issues, the new government seems to have tried to avoid a direct conflict with Zeman. This might have led the government to shelve any key change in China policy until after Zeman finishes his second term in 2023 and a

new president takes office. One manifestation of this divergence was the issue of the Beijing Olympic Games Boycott, where the new government failed to coordinate a joint stance with the President.

However, Czech diplomacy gradually started to make more ambitious steps on China policy, also in the context of the unease with China's position on the war in Ukraine. Minister Lipavský met with Penpa Tsering, the leader of the Tibetan government-in-exile, during his visit to the United States in April. Soon after, Lipavský also publicly met with the Taiwanese representative in Prague, Liang-Ruey Ke, in order to express gratitude for Taiwan's assistance to the Czech Republic to cope with the inflow of Ukrainian refugees. While seemingly trivial, this meeting created an important precedent for official meetings with Taiwanese officials. The new confident stance of the administration on ties with Taiwan was confirmed by the visit of the President of the Taiwanese Legislative Yuan You Si-kun to Prague in July 2021 and his meetings with Senate and Parliamentary leaders as well as the Deputy Foreign Minister. Commenting on the visit, Prime Minister Fiala reiterated Czech adherence to One-China Policy while noting the right of Czech politicians to meet with Taiwanese representatives owing to the "friendly relations" with Taiwan.

The broader framework of the Czech approach towards China, embedded within the EU approach, also continued to present new challenges. After the tumultuous developments of the past few years, marked by growing political tensions and a salvo of reciprocal sanctions in 2021, EU-China relations took another hit after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. While officially trying to appear neutral, China has supported Russia's justification for the war as the result of concerted NATO and US pressure on Russia's strategic space and ignoring of its "legitimate security interests". Moreover, China has supported Russia's goal of reconstructing the European security architecture in line with its long-term strategic objective of weakening EU-US ties.

China's repeated attacks on NATO and the support for Russia's aim to redraw European security order have been seen particularly sensitively in some of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including the Czech Republic. In April, Chinese Special Envoy for China-CEE cooperation (also a former ambassador to the Czech Republic) Huo Yuzhen visited Prague as part of an eight-country tour of CEE. The purpose of the mission was to explore the interest of the CEE countries in the future development of 16+1 cooperation as well as to explain China's position on Ukraine. During the meeting with Huo, the Czech Foreign Ministry communicated Czech concerns over China's relationship with Russia which were previously relayed also to Chinese *chargé d'affaires*.

On May 19, 2022, the Chamber of Deputies Foreign Affairs Committee passed a resolution concerning 16+1. The resolution stated that the cooperation has not brought any tangible benefits during its 10-year history and has served mostly as a tool for China to pursue its unilateral interests. This assessment was also shared by the Czech Foreign Ministry, which noted virtually no benefits from the cooperation for the Czech Republic in any of the key focus areas. The non-binding committee

resolution called for decreasing Czech involvement in 16+1 activities and leaving the platform altogether.



The presidency of the Council of the EU is a key test of the Czech ability to positively shape the EU's engagement in the Indo-Pacific region in numerous areas as defined by the EU, but also in those of the upcoming Czech Indo-Pacific strategy. There is a need to present the EU as an actor that is committed to long-term substantial engagement with regional partners despite the increased need to pay attention to security in the immediate neighbourhood following the Russian aggression against Ukraine. The EU is seen as a promising partner by the countries in the region, who appreciate the positive role that the EU can play in bridging the growing dichotomization of the region's geopolitical architecture within the framework of US-China rivalry. This is especially the case in terms of the EU's support for the ASEAN centrality in the multilateral structure of the region, which has recently been eroded due to the growing role of minilaterals.

While security is only one of the pillars of the EU's Indo-Pacific approach, it has undoubtedly been put to the forefront of Czech and other Western nations' foreign policy considerations since the Russian invasion. Due to the need to significantly increase defence expenditures and refocus on the security situation in the immediate neighbourhood, the EU nations' ability to step up their hard security role in the Indo-Pacific now seems even more uncertain than before. Nevertheless, the Czech Republic will be trying to contribute to security cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners, especially in the niche areas of cyber security and hybrid threats. Czech Republic has already built a significant reputation in these fields, not least due to the leading role on the issue of 5G security evidenced by the Prague Proposals that were pivotal in highlighting the non-technical aspects of 5G security. Japan and South Korea are set to become even more important partners in the region for both the EU as a whole and the Czech Republic, with an increasingly crucial pillar being the strategic and security dimension of the relationship, exemplified also by the closer cooperation with NATO of both actors.

The trade and connectivity agenda in the Indo-Pacific is going to feature high on the agenda of the Czech presidency. The Czech Republic can play a positive role in boosting trade liberalisation negotiations with key partners in the region. Apart from the FTA with New Zealand concluded just before the start of the Czech presidency, after the Australian elections in May 2022, there is hope of a reset of ties with the EU (mostly in terms of bilateral ties with France) and reviving the FTA negotiations between the two sides. In the connectivity agenda, the key challenge will be to come up with specific deliverables within the framework of the new Global Gateway strategy, which is quite transparently devised as an answer to China's Belt and Road Initiative. The goal of the Czech presidency of the Council of the EU in this field should thus be

to highlight the EU's role as an eager economic partner that wants to make a constructive contribution to the Indo-Pacific region's development by delivering on specific high-visibility issues. Giving the EU's involvement a recognizable brand could boost the EU's image in the region and contribute to its standing. So far, the EU has been lacking in its response to China's involvement in infrastructure development and it needs to realise that apart from criticising China's way of doing business and patronising the receiving countries, it also needs to present a positive alternative that can be embraced by regional partners.

The Czech Republic can also take advantage of the increased willingness on the EU level to boost ties with Taiwan, motivated to a large extent by the awareness of the strategic importance of Taiwan in global supply chains and efforts to attract Taiwanese investment in the European semiconductor sector. Czech Republic could lobby for pushing forward the Bilateral Investment Agreement with Taiwan, although the Commission remains cold on the proposal due to the significant political capital needed to push for the deal as well as the view that its benefit will be limited. In any case, the role of Taiwan will be pivotal in the context of the EU's efforts to upgrade its own semiconductor industry.

The Czech Republic can also utilise its EU Council presidency and its seat in the Human Rights Council to continue with its tradition of human rights promotion also in the Indo-Pacific. The focus on China, with the continued mass oppression of the Uyghurs and other minorities, is warranted, and the current government has shown significantly more willingness to call out China also on the political level. Based on the proposal by foreign minister Lipavský, the Czech government passed a version of the Magnitsky Act, which might also be applicable to Chinese officials. At the same time, it is also necessary not to ignore human rights abuses elsewhere in the Indo-Pacific region, even in countries that might sometimes be classified as "like-minded", for example India.

Last but not least, the Czech Republic can use the opportunity of its presidency to diversify its network of bilateral partnerships across the Indo-Pacific, including strengthening ties with South Korea, Japan, India, Taiwan and the ASEAN countries and creating synergies with key partners within the EU as well, such as France, who is the leading EU power in the region. This can have a lasting positive effect on Czech Republic's presence in the Indo-Pacific region, which can outlive the presidency.

China policy as such is unlikely to figure high in terms of the Czech presidency's agenda. EU-China cooperation is growing increasingly distant in terms of the political dialogue, despite the rising bilateral trade numbers. The war in Ukraine and China's stance is going to remain a chief factor influencing the relationship, despite China's efforts to avoid the issue and compartmentalise ties with the EU. China is highly unlikely to distance itself from its ties with Russia just to appease the European capitals. China has so far been unable to grasp the impact of the war in Ukraine on Europe, only viewing it through the prism of US interests. The Chinese argument that sees the EU as an actor without its own agency and as subordinated to US geopolitical inter-

ests is most likely not just a tool of external propaganda but a genuine reflection of the views of the Chinese leadership and is unlikely to change. China is still expecting that under the heavy economic costs of sanctions, political unity in the EU will crumble, and the European public will become discontented, leading to an urgent need for the EU to reconsider and improve ties with China.

While China can ultimately profit from damaged European unity, especially as the Russian war against Ukraine turns into a protracted conflict, the prospects for revived EU-China cooperation are limited. The controversial CAI (Comprehensive Agreement on Investments) will probably remain frozen during the Czech presidency as any progress has been conditioned on China's lifting of sanctions on EU politicians and official bodies. While China has already ratified relevant ILO conventions, as put forward in the CAI, and indicated a willingness to lift sanctions if the EU proceeds first, such a move is highly unlikely. On the political level, EU-China ties are likely to stall, and the nature of the relationship will mostly be shaped by the further development of the EU's internal autonomous defence mechanisms, including the International Procurement Instrument and especially the Anti-Coercion Instrument.

The trend of increasingly close EU-US cooperation on addressing China is going to continue. The divisions over the AUKUS deal that created a significant rift in France-US relations have already been mostly smoothed out, in significant part due to the bolstered transatlantic unity spurred by the Russian aggression. The EU and US have also further developed their dialogue and coordination of China policy, including via the high-level EU-US Dialogue on China as well as the Trade and Technology Council. The need to foster a common approach on various issues from the unification of export controls and better protection of emerging technologies to the resilience of value chains is going to become even more important going forward. In this regard, coming on the heels of the French presidency, which continued to put a premium on the opaque concept of EU strategic autonomy, the Czech Republic can leverage its close relationship with the US to bolster cooperation between Brussels and Washington, including in the Indo-Pacific.

The most important challenge for the EU and the US will be to derive lessons from Russia's aggression and the resulting rapid salvo of sanctions - leading to de facto economic decoupling - for a similar escalation with Beijing. With China, the challenges of the EU's strategic dependencies are several magnitudes more complicated than in the case of Russia. This is even more the case as the EU sets upon a clean energy transition, which might lead to the creation of even more dependencies on China in critical sectors, due to China's dominance in rare earths and other areas. China's use of economic coercion against Lithuania has shown that it is more than willing to weaponize global supply chains to achieve political goals.

The most significant move that can be expected in terms of the Czech bilateral approach towards China during the presidency is an exit from the 16+1 format. In August 2022, Estonia and Latvia followed Lithuania's decision the year before to cease participation in the format, underscoring the continuing decay of the cooperation

platform. Regarding the future of the grouping, as indicated by the mission of the Chinese special envoy Huo Yuzhen, China is exploring the possibility of holding a ministerial meeting of 16+1 countries in autumn 2022 instead of a prime minister/head of state level meeting as has been the case before. The move is an apparent reaction to the decreased interest on the part of the CEE countries in the platform, and a preemptive effort to weaken damage to China's prestige and interests. In similar China-led bi-multilateral groupings such as FOCAC (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation) and CCF (China-CELAC Forum), ministerial meetings are held only every three years, sometimes replaced by high-level summits involving top leaders. A similar scenario involving decreasing the profile and frequency of meetings of 16+1 is likely. Based on a clear assessment that 16+1 has not brought any benefits to the Czech Republic, Prague is likely to stop participation in the platform altogether, although it remains to be seen in what ways the decision will be arrived at and officially communicated. As the 16+1 is not an international organisation and there is no treaty-based relationship to the platform, the decision is a political one. It will thus depend on the agreement of the government, with a potential role to be played by President Zeman. While the format can hardly be seen as a benefit for the Czech Republic, the potential exit from the format should be accompanied by a specific proposal on how to include all the member states, including CEE countries, in the formulation of the EU's China policy. This is especially the case as simultaneously with the decreasing relevance of the 16+1 platform, the France-Germany-China summits have continued. Moreover, ideally, the Czech exit from the format would be coordinated with other participating CEE countries to signal unity and shield against China's reaction – in this regard, the exit of Baltic countries was already a missed chance.

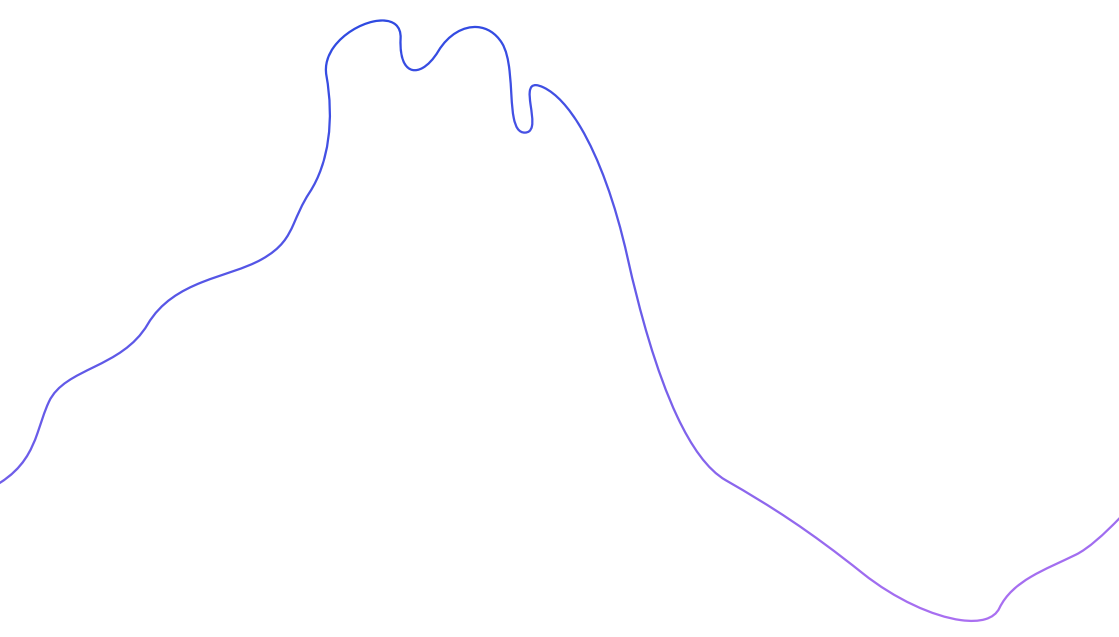
Context

- China's support for Russia has had a negative impact on its ties with the EU and especially the CEE states, including the Czech Republic.
- EU-US cooperation on China has been growing, further spurred by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- There is an urgent need to address strategic dependencies on China that are likely to become more salient with the clean energy transition in the EU.

Present

- The Indo-Pacific strategy has been developed as a new framework for Czech ties with the region and Indo-Pacific is one of the CZ PRES priorities, with Czech contributions in security, trade, and connectivity agendas.
 - The Czech Republic and the EU have been diversifying ties with like-minded partners in the Indo-Pacific.
 - After a hesitant beginning, there have been the first signs of the revision of ties with China and moves towards the Czech exit of 16+1.
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Recommendations

- The Czech Republic should leverage its EU Council presidency role to bolster bilateral ties with key partners in the Indo-Pacific region and create new partnerships that will outlast the presidency.
 - The Czech Republic should push for concrete deliverables in the trade and connectivity agenda to highlight the engaged and constructive role of the EU in the Indo-Pacific despite the war in Ukraine.
 - The Czech Republic should take advantage of its close relationship with the US to improve EU-US coordination on China Policy and in the engagement of the two actors in the Indo-Pacific.
 - Coupled with the exit from 16+1, the Czech Republic should push for a new model of common EU policy which avoids any type of incomplete N+1 formats and includes all member states.
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Security and Defence: The Return of War to Europe

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Petr Boháček
Michal Bokša

“ *The world is not going to be a safe place.* — **Aleš Opata**
Chief of the General Staff
February 22, 2022

“ *...we have a sacred obligation under Article 5 to defend each and every inch of NATO territory with the full force of our collective power.* — **Joe Biden**
March 26, 2022

“ *We are not including [in 2 % on defence] some expenditures that we could – for example, some expenditure on infrastructure, some items in budgets of ministries of interior, transportation, finance or research projects.* — **Jana Černochová**
January 24, 2022

Security and defence issues have never quite been at the forefront of the Czech public discourse, however this abruptly changed in February of 2022 with the Russian invasion of Ukraine thrusting them into the spotlight. Sharp discontinuities make for an engaging subject to describe but also make any predictions challenging as the spectrum of possible plausible futures opens up. This opening of possibilities also presents an opportunity to make important and overdue decisions. Providing expert input for those decisions is all the more important the less exposed the decision-makers were to the issues in the past.

Looking first at (conventional) defence policy, 2021 was in some ways a new low for the stability of defence funding. A political deal from the minority government led by ANO with the Communist party to secure the passing of the national budget through parliament led to a decrease of the defence budget by 10 billion crowns (400 million euros), which was then returned piecemeal during the spring. In the summer, the forecasted defence budget for the following years was decreased with the Ministry of Finance arguing the need for austerity measures after spending linked with the pandemic. The acquisition of new infantry fighting vehicles remained unfinished.

Unsurprisingly, there were both major hopes and concerns following the election of the new centre-right coalition government led by the Civic Democrats. On one hand, the government promised to reach 2% of GDP on defence spending by 2025, to revamp the financing of defence through the establishment of a defence fund and to legislate for minimum defence spending. At the same time though, promises of a small state, fewer civil servants and austerity measures were sources of concern about the credibility of those plans.

The European-wide shift in favour of a greater emphasis on defence spending and military readiness sparked by the Russian invasion of Ukraine also reverberated in the Czech Republic. The government found itself under considerable pressure to match its diplomatic and rhetorical support of Ukraine with material military and nonmilitary assistance, which it was able to do, matching the support Ukraine received from the eastern NATO member countries, minor hiccups notwithstanding.

However, this support also laid bare the limits of national stockpiles, and the spectre of a proxy war between NATO and Russia becoming a direct confrontation gave new urgency to the readiness of the armed forces to fight a conventional war. Different estimates put the internal debt of armed forces accumulated through years of neglect at around 100 billion crowns (4 billion euros).¹ While the military can-do attitude can compensate for some resultant shortfalls, the scope of required modernisation and acquisition projects is daunting even if there is no rise in ambitions regarding the size or capability of the force. The government must make crucial decisions about the future shape of its armed forces in light of the heightened threat and lessons learned from Ukraine and utilise the immediate public willingness to adequately fund defence in

¹ Jan Zilvar, "10 nebo 5 miliard pro AČR je politické, nikoliv odborné rozhodnutí." Czdefence.cz, February 5, 2021, <https://www.czdefence.cz/clanek/10-nebo-5-miliard-je-politicke-ne-odborne-rozhodnuti/>.

the short term while finding a way to stabilise its finances in the long run. The first developments in this area are promising as the procurement of infantry fighting vehicles moved ahead with plans to acquire Swedish CV90s through government-to-government contracts, and plans to modernise the supersonic air force through acquisition of F-35s through the same process were announced.

Compared to the long term neglect of conventional defence, defence in the cyber domain and against hybrid threats has received more attention, although substantial problems persist. In the past year, the Czech Republic took steps to strengthen its defensive posture in cyberspace and signalled ambitions to assume a principal international role on cyber issues. Domestic legal reforms granted Czech Military Intelligence a stronger mandate in cyberspace, which now notably includes the authority to take active cyber countermeasures. The government also commenced the drafting of a law that should ensure secure and transparent implementation of 5G technologies. On a working level, Czech cyber experts continued to actively and successfully participate in international exercises, last year also having hosted the 2021 European Cyber Security Challenge (ECSC). On a policy level, the country will host the first Prague Cyber Security Conference in November 2022, reflecting the country's increasing leadership appetite in cyber. Despite the political signalling, however, the Czech government continues to struggle with ensuring the security of its own networks, and potentially other critical systems, mainly due to a chronic lack of funding in cyber security and failure to attract talent.

The Czech Republic is also paying increasing attention to hybrid issues. In 2021, the government issued the first National Strategy for Countering Hybrid Interference, as well as the corresponding Action Plan, which together provide a strategic outline of the threats and a set of practical steps on countering them to be taken by 2023. While the Action Plan was criticised by some as insufficient and too minimalistic, it is often described as realistic and has a good chance of being implemented.

Reflecting the emerging focus, the Czech Republic delineated resiliency against both hybrid and cyber threats as amongst its main priorities for its presidency of the Council of the EU. In the hybrid area, Czech presidency of the Council of the EU aims to lead discussions on weaknesses and opportunities in countering hybrid threats across different international platforms. As for cyber, Czech Republic wants to focus on ensuring the stability and implementation of norms and rule of law in cyberspace. However, the Czech presidency agenda may shift to accommodate the urgent issues following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The Russian war in Ukraine has further increased hybrid threats to Western societies, which have been targeted with pro-Russian information campaigns designed to undermine the ongoing support for Ukraine and subvert societal cohesion vis-à-vis the shifting security paradigm. Even prior to the invasion itself, the different types of hybrid threats coming from Russia to Europe had intensified, including political coercion through energy supply, and even some new threats, such as weaponized migration, were introduced. These malicious activities, but also the remarkable success of Ukraine's "white propaganda", laid bare the impact of hybrid efforts on national security, especially in times of crisis.

The Russian invasion has also been accompanied by a large amount of cyber network operations, some of which have directly targeted or collaterally impacted targets beyond Ukraine's borders, including the Czech Republic.² While Western networks have not yet suffered serious impacts in the context of the conflict, the amount and frequency of destructive cyber attacks currently observed in Ukraine indicates that the threat of potentially damaging cyber operations remains high, should the conflict escalate horizontally.

The brief foray into conventional and cyber defence issues above already hinted at the importance of the international dimension in securing the defence of the Czech Republic. Arguably the most important of such international guarantees of security for the Czech Republic comes from its membership of NATO. Over the past year, the Alliance has experienced two turbulent events that have had profound ramifications for its internal cohesion, strategy, and future planning.

First, following an agreement signed between the Taliban and the United States, the remaining NATO forces withdrew from Afghanistan in August 2021. A decision that ultimately proved detrimental for the Western-backed Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA). As the GIROA's troops quickly disintegrated, the Taliban in reality seized the country and its capital even before the final completion of the withdrawal. This has led NATO to suspend all support to Afghanistan and to initiate a review process regarding the organisation's engagement in the conflict.

Second, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has created a "new security reality" in Eastern Europe leading to a further reinvigoration of the Alliance's deterrence and defence posture on its eastern flank. NATO has in response established four new multinational battlegroups in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia (in addition to already existing ones in Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) and has increased the total number of troops in the eastern part of the Alliance under its command to over 40,000. Regarding the Czech position toward NATO, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has reinvigorated and notably increased general support for the Alliance to 78%³ - its highest level since 1994. Such a shift also partly led to renewed discussions regarding the possible establishment of a US military base on Czech territory – however, these debates so far remain only theoretical.

The crisis situation in Eastern Europe is by far the most urgent and precarious in terms of the aforementioned challenges. The Alliance will have to continue to ensure the defence and security of its eastern flank while reassuring local member states. Building on the previously adopted measures, NATO's Madrid Summit in June proved

² Notably, the German energy infrastructure was impacted by a cyber attack on a satellite communications provider in March 2022. Multiple Allies, including the Czech Republic, have attracted the attention of pro-Russian patriotic hackers following a provision of military support to Ukraine.

³ "Podpora NATO je nejvyšší od roku 1994, uprchlíky schvalují dvě třetiny Čechů," iDnes.cz, April 19, 2022, https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/cesko-stem-clenstvi-v-nato-ukrajina.A220419_152358_domaci_mgn/.

vital in this respect. The North Atlantic Council not only approved a new strategic concept, explicitly stating that “the Russian Federation is the most significant and direct threat to Allies’ security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area” but also adopted various measures in order to improve the deterrence.⁴ Specifically, Allied leaders agreed, among other things, to significantly increase the number of high readiness forces from the current 40,000 to 300,000 (a transition that is planned for completion in 2023), to bolster NATO’s battle group formations on the eastern front up to brigade level, and to pre-assign forces to defend specific Allies, thereby allowing for much faster reinforcement in the case of a crisis. However, these decisions are highly likely to only affect and strengthen the Alliance’s internal cohesion with no significant ramifications for developments beyond NATO territory. As a result, given the ongoing failures of the Russian campaign in Ukraine to meet its primary objectives, it is likely that Moscow’s confrontational anti-Western and anti-NATO rhetoric will continue to progressively increase – making effective de-escalatory measures ever more difficult.

NATO will likewise have to present a reformed and more proactive approach to tackling potentially resurgent terrorist networks in the Alliance’s neighbourhood. These networks are likely to particularly exploit the newly emerged vacuums left in areas such as Afghanistan or Mali. In addition to these, NATO will also have to progressively address the changing geopolitics on the strategic level. Specifically, the Alliance will have to further capitalise on, and further develop, its cooperative security mechanisms in addressing the rise of China and the nexus between Euro-Atlantic security and the Indo-Pacific.

Let’s turn finally to the European Union as the second crucial international institution guaranteeing the security of the Czech Republic. In 2022, EU defence cooperation and integration were expected to continue to slowly advance in terms of the number of initiatives emerging as a reaction to the overall worsening of the European security environment after 2014 (first Russian invasion of Ukraine, ISIS expansions, Donald Trump presidency). The launch of the 8 billion euro European Defence Fund, the fourth and last wave of new PESCO projects, and the second round of the CARD were to be complemented by a new overarching security concept, the Strategic Compass. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has put the practicality and effectiveness of these procedural and step-by-step processes under the spotlight. No longer can the discrepancy between political ambitions and the reality of EU defence integration be simply hidden under the guise of its gradual, inclusive and merely symbolic nature.

In the face of the great return of large scale military conflict to Europe, the Strategic Compass re-articulated EU political ambitions but together with deliverables low and vague enough to avoid possible embarrassment should they fail to be delivered within the set timeframe of 5-10 years. The Ukrainian war has clearly demonstrated the gaps in the existing European security architecture. The lack of resolute EU mil-

⁴ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>.

itary and political will as well as a slow and initially reserved response from the US represent a point of concern for Eastern Europe in the face of Russia. None of the three defence policy paradigms within the EU, the Paris-led focus on European autonomy, Polish American-centred nor the NATO-oriented German approach have been proven as the ultimate response to a conflict on the EU borders. Central and Eastern European member states will have to find strategies to maintain US involvement in Europe as well as utilising EU defence initiatives to enhance the ability to answer similar crises. Bilateral cooperation between other regional countries, like Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia or the Baltics, has been effective. Meanwhile, the EU defence funding continues to be consumed mainly by Western member states,⁵ making EU defence integration questionable for strengthening deterrence against Moscow in the East.

With the weight still resting on the shoulders of the member states to take action in defence, the EU has so far not drawn on this, its biggest security crisis, to emerge as a more integrated, cooperating and resolute actor in defence and security. With the war providing the ultimate test, the question arises, if it ever will. However, the political will across CEE new member states presents an opportunity for them to take the lead in building capabilities, cooperation and procedures for coordinating a response to such crises. This can be utilised to generate joint political pressure within the EU against Russia, to launch joint EDF and PESCO projects and to push for more cooperation with NATO, the US and the UK.



Given the extraordinary circumstances, it is vital not only to look to the past events and current challenges discussed above, but also to focus on the future of Czech security and defence policy. Looking first at the national defence policy and force posture, it has to be said that decisions in the Czech Republic have often been viewed as purely expert exercises. Given the degree to which the setup of the military forces is governed by the NATO Defence Planning Process, this proposition might be defensible. However, the war in Ukraine and subsequent militarily illiterate suggestions in the public debate show the limits of this approach. While the future is uncertain, it seems unlikely that military power will be as peripheral as in the post-cold war “end of history” period and both the public and decision-makers will have to grow more familiar with the uses and limits of military power. While this increase of military literacy is also a task for academia and the non-state sector, the government and the Ministry of Defence in particular, should focus on improving knowledge on military affairs among elites, for example through Finland-inspired national defence courses included in the Action Plan on countering hybrid threats.

⁵ Up to 55% of EU defence funding is consumed by France, Italy, Spain and Germany, only. Dylan Macchiarini Crosson. Balancing Member States, money and management. CEPS, 2021. https://www.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/PB2021-02_EU-defence-projects.pdf.

Political parties and governments will need to balance several aims of defence policy which are often at odds: building a deployable, competent and competitive military force, securing a domestic defence industrial base, and driving innovations in the economy through R&D expenditures. The first of those aims in past years has suffered as it was less understood and politically far less attractive than the latter ones. In the world reshaped by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the government will need to pay much greater attention to the first one, as it will increasingly become an indispensable element of the credibility of broader foreign policy aims both for allies and adversaries.

Conscious prioritisation of building and equipping forces is especially important as the need to politically defend increases of armed forces funding will tempt the government to prioritise spending the defence budget domestically. While building a domestic defence industry is a legitimate goal in light of maintaining security of supply for the military, it should not be politically privileged over the building and maintenance of a capable and ready military force, especially in the current international situation. Establishing a defence fund should be a priority for the Ministry of Defence, as it would allow for more flexibility in the procurement process. This should also be accompanied by employing some level of legislative commitment to defence spending, which would ensure a degree of budget stability necessary for long term planning. While the oft-repeated 2% of GDP still remains the ambition, given the accumulated internal debt, this not going to be sufficient, should the current level of ambition for the armed forces be maintained. Extraordinary additional money for defence as well as the creation of the fund has been agreed upon in principle by the government, but the form still can and likely will be contested by the Ministry of Finance. Additionally, the social woes sparked by continuing inflation might also stop the nascent efforts to rehabilitate defence expenditure in their tracks.

While increasing readiness, modernisation and creating or replenishing stockpiles must be a priority, with a special focus on rearming the long-neglected 7th mechanised brigade, there should also be a broader discussion on what armed forces the country needs in light of great power competition and the foreign policy interests and goals that the government sets out for the Czech Republic.

Turning to the area of cyber security and hybrid threats, the war in Ukraine, as the first-ever large-scale military conflict between two cyber capable and highly digitalized nations, has challenged the existing theories about the use of cyber and information capabilities in modern conflict and exposed gaps in relevant policies, established practices, and doctrinal approaches. Both states and international organisations need to address these gaps swiftly, as the threat of horizontal escalation continues to loom over Western countries. In this sense, and especially in the context of its presidency of the Council of the EU, the Czech Republic has a unique opportunity to take the lead in these necessary discussions and cement its emerging cyber and hybrid leading role.

In relation to countering hybrid threats, the chief concern should be the implementation of the Action plan accompanying the Strategy on Countering Hybrid Interference.

While there should be a relative abundance of political will compared to the previous administration, it must be recognized that some crucial changes will still likely prove challenging. Improving interagency coordination and cooperation is desperately needed, but may run counter to entrenched institutional interests as well as a desire to maintain independent ministerial authority. Improving coordination and capacity for countering hybrid influencing will also require adequate financing and the attracting of new talent for state service, which may prove difficult, as the austerity oriented government has taken a hard line on state service, which at the same time does not have the same prestige as the military. In short, it will be crucial to avoid implementing planned changes in a formalistic manner without solving difficult questions and allocating the requisite resources.

The utmost priority in cyberspace for the Czech Republic and other Allies alike should be given to improving the security of national systems and implementing functional cyber defence mechanisms. Domestic stakeholders should try to leverage the conflict-induced pressure and the oncoming increase in defence spending to finally close the many gaps in national cyber security, which in effect also threaten the security of the Alliance. The Allies should also promote effective information sharing, both nationally and internationally, as timely threat intelligence has the capacity to prevent potentially serious cyber attacks. The government should also establish a platform for cooperation with private industry, which is an existentially important partner in ensuring national defence in cyberspace, as has been demonstrated in the Ukrainian war. Last but not least, the government should assume an active role in the emerging discussions on the new strategic approach to cyber defence, which is shifting from reactive to proactive, and will potentially change the entire deterrence posture of NATO.

The Czech Republic should also seize the conflict-induced momentum for better international coordination on hybrid threats, which it has outlined in the 2022 priorities for the presidency of the Council of the EU. But while the government has always primarily focused on disinformation issues, where Europe's stance has been lately rather unified,⁶ it is the energy supply coercion that will represent the most prominent hybrid interference to European politics in the upcoming months. Moreover, the forthcoming energy scarcity and rising prices will likely collide with the economic fallout from disrupted global supply chains and war-induced food shortages. The resulting economic crisis, which will likely be further enhanced by malign information campaigns, will threaten to undermine the ongoing international support to Ukraine and European unity. Czech presidency will play a crucial role in leading discussions and coordinating the efforts to counter these threats.

With respect to NATO, the ongoing conflict in Eastern Europe represents a significant deterioration of international and human security in the region but it also constitutes an opportunity to strengthen the Alliance's internal cohesion and response mechanisms, and to set in motion necessary (and sometimes long overdue) policy changes. In specific, the Czech Republic and the Alliance as a whole should view the Russian

6 As demonstrated by the EU-wide ban on Russian state media in February 2022.

invasion of Ukraine as a harbinger of the urgent need to notably increase European defence spending. With regards to the conflict in Ukraine, the Czech Republic should promote NATO's policies which incrementally increase the costs of war for the Russian Federation, thereby disincentivizing the conflict's further prolongation. While it is highly desirable that Ukraine continues to be provided with essential materiel (weapons, ammunition, military hardware) from individual NATO governments, the Alliance as such should remain focused on deliveries of humanitarian and non-lethal aid in order to avoid further escalation. It is also of the essence that the Czech Republic continues to support NATO's long-standing "open door" policy – an approach which has become even more relevant with the recent Finnish and Swedish decisions to join the Alliance.

While not an urgent threat in the short term, it is highly likely that the risks associated with terrorist networks operating in European neighbouring regions will increase in the mid-to-long term. Terrorist activities and potential expansion need to be monitored particularly in areas such as Mali and Afghanistan. The Czech Republic and NATO as such need to focus on maintaining and/or developing further operational-level capabilities to undermine the expansion and proliferation of these networks. In doing so, developing strong ties with local partners, having effective over-the-horizon air strike capabilities, intelligence sharing, and targeting of financial streams these networks have access to epitomise the key instruments and objectives western governments and the Alliance should strive for.

On a global level, particularly with regards to the Indo-Pacific and the rise of China, NATO should focus on playing an active role in promoting partnership building, helping to protect sea lines of communication, and ensuring the preservation of freedom of navigation. The Czech Republic, as well as the Alliance, will undeniably remain only a very limited actor in the region; nevertheless, in the upcoming decade, the Czech government should actively support the aim to further deepen NATO's ties with local like-minded countries – ideally building a specific partnership scheme focused on the Indo-Pacific (presently NATO's local partners fall under the category of "Partners Across the Globe").

In the area of European defence integration and cooperation, defence integration across CEE is needed to offer leadership for the rest of the EU. Russia is not only Europe's problem but mainly Central and Eastern Europe's problem. Building upon the Czech Republic as the lead nation of the NATO Enhanced Vigilance Activity, Eastern European countries should invest in fulfilling the Strategic Compass goal of building a 5,000-strong Rapid Deployment Force. CEE member states should utilise shared EDF and PESCO projects tailored towards strengthening the NATO deterrence posture vis-à-vis Russia.

Finally, political pressure should be used by the member states on the eastern flank of the EU to push for a more resolute EU foreign policy addressing its main security threats. This includes tougher FAC resolutions and actions on Russia as well as strengthening cooperation with the UK and US, especially in terms of joint EU defence initiatives. Holding the presidency of the Council of the EU, the Czech Republic is in a unique position to be a leader of these initiatives.

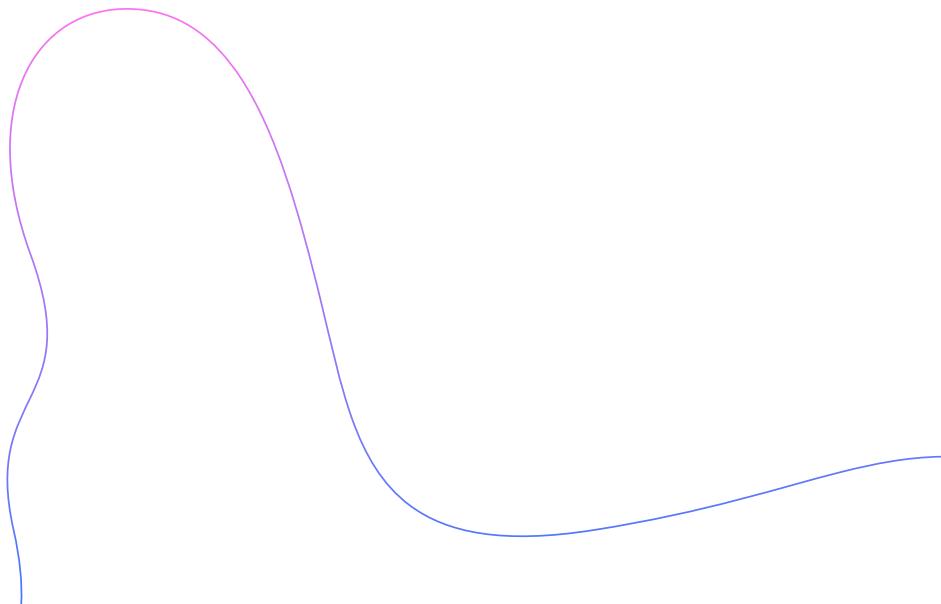
Context

- NATO's internal cohesion has been strengthened following the Russian aggression towards Ukraine.
- While the EU defence initiatives continued in their gradual development, the Russian invasion highlighted the discrepancies between the ambitions and limited and largely symbolic results.
- New heights in hostility between Russia and the West increase the risks of cyber-attacks and hybrid interference.
- Besides the need to reinforce the defence and deterrence on its eastern flank, the threat of resurging terrorist networks as well as of rising China in the Indo-Pacific pose a threat to the Alliance.

Present

- National defence policy reinvigoration is being hastened both by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the newly elected government.
- The Czech population's support for its NATO membership has been notably renewed as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- Addressing instability and insufficiency of funding as a major hurdle to the revitalisation of armed forces may prove challenging given the bleak economic outlook.
- Cyber security and defence against hybrid threats retain priority status, but despite ongoing efforts, gaps and shortfalls still persist.

Recommendations

- Increasing and stabilising defence expenditure, including through the establishment of a national defence fund, must be a governmental priority, accompanied by increasing public and elite understanding of defence and military affairs.
 - The Czech Republic has to prioritise improving the cyber-security of national systems and implementing functional cyber defence mechanisms while following through with implementing planned measures against hybrid threats in a substantial and fully funded manner.
 - To support the required increase in defence spending of European NATO members, the Czech Republic should lead by example while also encouraging NATO to increase engagement with partners along the Southern Flank and in the Indo-Pacific.
 - The Czech Republic, in concert with other states occupying the eastern flank of the EU, should increase efforts to utilise defence cooperation within the EU to serve their security interests and bolster their capability to deter Russia.
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Czech Climate and Energy Policy: Low Hanging Fruit Still beyond Reach

Romana Jungwirth Březovská

“ *An Indigenous American proverb says ‘if you find yourself riding a dead horse, dismount it’. I hope they have now understood this even in Brussels. The Green Deal is dead.* ————— **Richard Brabec**
February 25, 2022

“ *If there is a gas cut this winter, we will burn anything we can to keep our people warm and to make electricity.* ————— **Václav Bartuška**
June 21, 2022

“ *Just 5 years ago we secured about a quarter of our gas from Norway, a safe western country. And the previous government did nothing to maintain these supplies and thus ensure the Czech Republic’s energy security. On the contrary, it allowed us to become virtually 100% dependent on Putin’s Russia for our gas supplies (...).* ————— **Petr Fiala**
June 22, 2022

The Czech Republic found itself leading the EU Council amidst dramatic shifts in geopolitics, manifested not only in the Russian aggression towards Ukraine and the breaching of international law, but also by the fragility of existing supply chains and energy dependencies. As in 2009, when the first Czech presidency of the Council of the EU had to deal with the Russia-Ukraine gas dispute and its ramifications for the EU as a whole, in 2022 fossil fuels are once again a pivotal factor but with even deeper societal and security implications. This time some light has been shed on EU member states' strategic laziness in not being able to guarantee energy security and at the same time uniformly walk the talk of the Paris Agreement. The unique global constellation, which enabled more than 190 countries to come together in 2015 and then paved the way to an agreement on reaching net zero carbon emissions by around midcentury at COP26 in 2021,¹ is melting away due to changing geopolitical and energy landscapes. The world may once again miss the opportunity to use recovery packages to speed up decarbonisation in a fair and just manner. On the scientific front, the latest UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's and World Meteorological Organisation's reports stress the need for systemic transformational action on both mitigation and adaptation should dramatic climate-related systemic risks be averted. Meanwhile, physics being deaf to political promises, 2022 heat waves continue to shatter records.

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, claims about the European Green Deal being dead, by 2014-2021 Minister of the Environment Richard Brabec, for instance, were rejected by the Ministry of the Environment, which stressed that the EGD is part of the solution to "how to get the rid of the addiction to expensive fossil fuels".² From the longer term perspective, Czech climate and energy policy has been underwhelming. By not legislating a national climate neutrality target, and by not, for instance, re-contributing to the Green Climate Fund, a flagship fund epitomising climate finance channelled toward developing nations, the Czech Republic's contribution to the EU's overall climate ambition is poor. In terms of energy, in 2019 renewable sources accounted for only 15% of the national energy mix. Feeling the vulnerabilities of a land-locked and fossil fuel-dependent entity, one of the main priorities of the Czech EU Council presidency is, unsurprisingly, energy security. This entails implementing the REPower EU package and further building on the EU Council's general approach on key parts of the Fit for 55 package to open trilogues with the European Commission and the European Parliament. A rigid adherence to the role of honest broker, i.e. a neutral position, may be key to EGD implementation, as the Czech government has previously taken actions that, in the view of many, hampered it, for instance, by the

1 Report of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement on its third session, held in Glasgow from 31 October to 13 November 2021. 2021. Advanced version. Glasgow: UNFCCC. https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cmaz2021_10_add1_adv.pdf.

2 "MŽP reaguje na tvrzení 'Kvůli ruské invazi na Ukrajinu je Zelená dohoda pro Evropu mrtvá': News - Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic," Ministry of Environment of the Czech Republic, February 26, 2022, https://www.mzp.cz/cz/news_20220226-MZP-reaguje-na-tvrzeni-Kvuli-ruske-invazi-na-Ukrajinu-je-Zelena-dohoda-pro-Evropu-mrtva.

successful effort to label fossil gas and nuclear power as "green" in the EU Taxonomy for Sustainable Activities, or by seeking exemptions from the Russian oil ban. This is unsurprising as the Czech Republic seemed blind – until the invasion – to the risks stemming from being dependent on Russian oil and gas, and underperforming in RSE deployment.

As the presidency drew nearer, a relatively constructive approach was visible as the Czech Republic supported the agreement on the ICE sales ban by 2035, with implementation to be reviewed in 2026. This, on the other hand, might have come as a surprise since the Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala continuously communicated via public media that the potential ban was badly timed and not well thought through, appeasing Czech conservative stakeholders. This somewhat traditional approach of using anti-climate change narratives to buttress voters' support is nothing new in the Czech Republic.³ Symptomatically, after reaching Council Conclusions, the Minister of the Environment, Anna Hubáčková, was applauded on Twitter by her own political party for securing sales of ICE vehicles after 2035 and also for negotiating 30% more emission allowances for Czech heating plants.⁴ The presidency provides an opportunity to spearhead EU climate and energy security policies and at the same time strengthen the Czech Republic's ownership of these policies if communicated well. However, the restrained political will for climate action and the continuous scapegoating of climate matters by Czech officials may yet prove an obstacle.



For the duration of the EU Council presidency, the Czech EU and foreign policy is expected to reflect five priorities - Managing the refugee crisis and Ukraine's post-war recovery, Energy security, Strengthening Europe's defence capabilities and cyberspace security, Strategic resilience of the European economy, and Resilience of democratic institutions. Although, at a glance, the topic of energy security has a direct and obvious linkage to the matter at hand, in light of the multifaceted nature of the climate emergency and its solutions, all five priorities, can, may, and should play a role in hastening the energy transition and climate resilience which will be necessary for entering a world warmed by 1.5–2°C and dealing with its impacts.

Perhaps due to its most topical and tangible nature, energy security is the priority described in most detail, with the Czech Republic proposing concrete steps on how the energy crisis may be tackled. Czech EU Council presidency declares that "the EU cannot be vitally dependent on countries that directly threaten its security and must

³ Romana Březovská, Michal Bokša, "Goulash of Climate (In)Action," Visegrad Insight, August 3, 2020, <https://visegradinsight.eu/goulash-of-climate-inaction-v4/>.

⁴ Pavel Bělobrádek (@PavelBelobradek), "Dobrych zpráv není nikdy fost," Twitter, July 2, 2022, https://twitter.com/pavelbelobradek/status/1543142885205442560?s=21&t=FIRvoqpbJWw-KycpsOuECsA&fbclid=IwARoWYmzc-OuH6R_-cUViXugbnDtqLUeGD41VNGpGnFND-KEmgnPooYoggWhA.

therefore break its dependence on Russian gas, oil and coal". Hinting that such decoupling may not be in line with decarbonisation goals, the Czech presidency wants to "put emphasis on the EU's energy security issues, which are currently more pressing than the energy transition", labelling the removal of dependency on Russian fossil fuels the "main short-term objective". Hence, the Czech government effectively admits to being locked into a thought process that sees energy security and climate protection as mutually exclusive, rather than as two sides of the same coin. Further, focus will be put on "the accelerated implementation of REPowerEU", covering also energy savings and support to low-emission and renewable energy sources. It is highlighted that the Czech EU Council presidency will further work "on the implementation of the regulation of gas reserves, i.e. filling storages in the run up to winter, and the promotion of voluntary joint purchases", replicating a lesson learned by the EU in negotiating for medical needs as one on the global market in the midst of the Covid pandemic. Further, for the decarbonisation of the EU industry it is necessary to move from natural gas to hydrogen and to come to an agreement between EU institutions on the Fit for 55 package, proposals aiming to reduce EU greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030 (from 1990 levels). Specific agendas where the Czech presidency envisions progress include the energy efficiency directive and the enhanced deployment of RES – two fields in which, paradoxically, the Czech Republic has been, in comparison to other EU Member States, vastly underperforming. Other topics highlighted cover the development of energy infrastructure, decarbonisation of transport, and the role of nuclear energy in relation to the EU's energy security and its climate goals. The Czech presidency also mentions the necessity to use a mix of instruments to reduce social and economic impacts, via energy savings in households, for instance, as rising energy prices accompanied by rampant inflation cause widespread public dissatisfaction.

The prospect of inadequate gas supplies for and during the next winter accompanied by social unrest further pushed the Czech Prime Minister to announce several measures to secure energy in the upcoming months with the overall aim of the Czech Republic becoming "an energy sovereign state". Two proposed actions, in line with EU goals as well as the ambitions of the Czech Republic, are directly linked to foreign policy – i.e., securing alternative gas supplies for winter 2022/23, and cutting fossil ties with Russia. A significant step in this direction has been the lease of a capacity share in a floating LNG terminal (FSRU) in the Netherlands, which should reduce Czech dependency on Russian gas by a third.⁵ The necessity to obtain crude oil as well as gas, with Russia's oil imports accounting for 50 % in 2017–2021⁶, creates space for re-opening somewhat "forgotten" projects, especially

5 "Following the acquisition of the share in the LNG terminal, the Czech Republic also secured the necessary transport capacity," Press Releases - Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic, July 19, 2022,

6 "Statistics of crude oil imports to the Czech Republic," Statistics - Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic, April 6, 2022, <https://www.mpo.cz/en/energy/statistics/oil-and->

in light of the Czech Republic being a land-locked country. These include the potential extension of the crude oil pipelines Litvínov-Spergau (via Germany) and the pipeline TAL (via Italy), as well as the gas pipelines BACI (via Austria) and Stork II (via Poland). These projects, recognised by the European Commission already in 2013 as Projects of Common Interest and therefore able to benefit from accelerated permitting procedures and funding,⁷ have, nonetheless, never been operationalised, and by 2021 were erased from the PCI List. Should any of these projects be revived, it will be necessary to take into account various factors, such as the dependence on other states agreeing with the extension, costs, the pipelines' capacities, as well as the risk of carbon lock-in. Based on AMO's analysis, the TAL pipeline extension and the new gas interconnection to Poland (STORK II) are the most implementable projects.⁸ In climate terms, temporary FSRUs on short-term contracts, the acceleration of RES deployment or prolonging nuclear power generation are seen as more suitable solutions.

With energy policies rising to the top of political priorities, various energy-related proposals are being put forward that demand immediate attention. One such is the European Commission proposal for a new Council Regulation on Coordinated Demand Reduction Measures for Gas which gives the Commission the possibility to declare, together with Member States, "a Union Alert on security of supply, imposing a mandatory gas demand reduction on all Member States".⁹ Such relatively ad hoc proposals may require the Czech presidency to broker an agreement on topics that may touch sensitive national circumstances.

Despite the current hunt for energy security, climate policies are still crucial and demand global coordinated action. Coming back to the priorities of the Czech presidency, in the context of Resilience of democratic institutions and Strengthening Europe's defence capabilities, for instance, it is necessary to implement the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, "to make Europe a security provider".¹⁰ Climate change is identified as "a threat multiplier" and the EU as well as its member states should, for instance, mainstream climate change considerations throughout civilian and military missions and operations by the end of 2023. It will also be necessary to amend EU external energy engagement and take steps to accelerate the global green and just energy transition to secure sustainable energy for the EU as well as for other countries, or to "build long-lasting international partnerships and promote the EU

[-oil-products/statistics-of-crude-oil-imports-to-the-czech-republic--260434/](#).

7 "Key cross border infrastructure projects: Projects of Common Interest - European Commission", https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/infrastructure/projects-common-interest/key-cross-border-infrastructure-projects_en.

8 "Diverzifikace českých produktovodů: Factsheet - Association for International Affairs," https://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Factsheet_produktovedy_final-1.pdf.

9 "Save gas for a safe winter," Press Release - European Commission, July 20, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_4608.

10 EEAS, A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/strategic_compass_en3_web.pdf.

clean energy industries across the globe”, as proposed by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.¹¹

In light of the upcoming global climate change conference (UNFCCC COP27) November 2022 in Sharm-El Sheik in Egypt and the (un)intended weaponization of food and energy via global markets, it will be the role of the Czech presidency to lead EU Member States and make sure that the spirit of the Paris Agreement is kept alive. This must be done by reaching a global consensus on sensitive issues such as the development of a “new collective quantified” post-2025 climate finance goal or the operationalisation of the Santiago network, critical for developing nations’ quests to tackle loss and damage caused by the ever-increasing unavoidable impacts of climate change.¹² Distortions on global energy markets are also expected to hamper countries’ ambitions to update nationally determined contributions and to stop feeding “our fossil fuel addiction”.¹³ On a somewhat positive note, as COPs are based on the principle of rotation among regional groups, and as COP 29 (November 2024) should take place in the Eastern European States, the Czech Republic can start identifying its capabilities and partners to apply to (co-)host the event or a pre-COP.

The European Union was set up as a peace project. For it to remain one in light of the current energy, climate and geopolitical disruptions, and not lose its role as a geopolitically significant actor, it has to factor into its very functioning the cascading impacts of climate change and the implications of the energy transition and (delayed) decarbonisation. It is also vital that this is understood by the Czech Republic, a carbon-locked country contributing to the EU’s imprint on the world as well as safeguarding its national interests. In order to encompass the world’s complexity and systemic rivalry, it is therefore essential to design and implement a multi-dimensional strategy that accommodates existing threats and future-proofs current and planned initiatives. An example of a short-sighted policy with fatal consequences would be to become locked-in to fossil fuel infrastructure and thwarting the goal of reaching (global) climate neutrality in a timely and necessary manner.

The Czech government should therefore see to it that short-term actions are not undermining long-term goals and that climate-mainstreaming is taking place. This coherency must be reflected in diverse sectoral policies, such as export policies, development cooperation or security policies. However, what is critical is the ability to understand current power dynamics, dangerous carbon lock-in risks, the EU’s dependency on raw materials needed for decarbonisation, and the necessity to move away from disruptive, dependency-oriented strategies that further destabilise fragile, often

11 European Commission, EU External Energy Engagement in a Changing World, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52022\[C0023](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52022[C0023).

12 “COP26: Key outcomes agreed at the UN climate talks in Glasgow,” Carbon Brief, November 15, 2021, <https://www.carbonbrief.org/cop26-key-outcomes-agreed-at-the-un-climate-talks-in-glasgow/>.

13 “Petersberg Climate Dialogue: Starting Signal for UN climate negotiations,” United Nations in Western Europe - UNRIC, July 18, 2022, <https://unric.org/en/petersberg-climate-dialogue-starting-signal-for-un-climate-negotiations/>.

resource-rich, undemocratic states. One of the first steps in the right direction is therefore to invest in economic and political analyses to fully understand the pathways and the nature of supply chains that will lead towards a global just and fair energy transition. This also includes understanding the harm of silo-thinking, and the benefit of domestic policies fitting into strategies for delivering sustainable projects that accommodate the needs of partner countries and local communities, such as those in sync with the EU's Global Gateway.¹⁴ A necessary precondition for this is a political leadership willing to listen to experts and give consideration to understanding the green transition including its implications, whilst not letting the Czech Republic drag its feet and waste its potential. A practical step would be to set up a systemic foresight process to reflect global megatrends with well-designed future-proofed policies and engagements, in relation to climate change, digital hyperconnectivity or shifts in the global order.

In regards to the energy transition and the speed with which action is required, the Ministry of Industry and Trade should aim to fast-track permitting for RES to generate clean energy. It should also learn from the neighbours of the Czech Republic, e.g. from Austria on how to organise renewable energy communities, which generate energy from renewable resources partly or wholly owned by the community,¹⁵ while at the same time it should incentivize lower energy consumption and higher energy efficiency. These domestic measures have direct foreign policy implications as they help create the manoeuvring space for safeguarding energy security. Regardless of the current crises, the Ministry of Industry and Trade should also re-evaluate its export policies so as to be in line with the Paris Agreement, particularly by including climate and environmental aspects as integral in designing or implementing projects and in their impact assessment. This is essential as the Czech Republic is a highly open export-oriented economy and is always seeking to gain access to new markets. The Czech Republic needs to find a greater consistency in its approach as, for instance, Bankwatch analyses reveal that state funds are used by the Czech export credit agencies to fund coal and natural gas production.¹⁶

The Ministry of the Environment should communicate publicly its successes in fostering a consensus on the EU or global level. It should promote climate and energy policy advancements, including those linked to the global biodiversity conference (CBD COP15) in December 2022, as the EU delegation will be led by the Czech team. Scapegoating climate matters in return for potential domestic support can hardly lead to public support for green transformation. The Ministry should also build partner-

¹⁴ European Commission, Global Gateway: Strategy, https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway_en.

¹⁵ Renewable Energy Communities: A Policy Brief from the Policy Learning Platform on Low-Carbon Economy. Brussels: Interreg Europe. 2018. <https://www.interregeurope.eu/sites/default/files/2021-12/Policy%20brief%20on%20renewable%20energy%20communities.pdf>.

¹⁶ "Exportní garanční a pojišťovací společnost a Exportní banka: Country briefing," Bankwatch, <https://bankwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/ECAs-country-briefings-CZ.pdf>.

ships with other departments or other actors that may share lessons learned from climate action. For example, the city of Liberec is the sole Czech municipality to participate in the EU-wide Mission for climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030.¹⁷ To appear as a credible partner, the Ministry should also announce a climate neutrality target and contribute to climate funds, for instance, the Green Climate Fund or the Adaptation Fund.

Last but not least, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should grasp CZ PRES as an opportunity to strengthen capacity in the field of climate diplomacy and further continue engaging constructively in several successful initiatives. For instance, the Ministry should continue participating in Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs)¹⁸ through which international partnerships with countries are created to build sustainable societies, as part of the EU Global Gateway strategy. In this regard, the Czech Republic should continue pushing forward the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in a changing climate, and attempt to add a fragility dimension to TEIs' projects assessment, evaluation and monitoring.¹⁹ This rather complex view of combining the spirit of Sustainable Development Goals and the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction also creates the conditions for organising green and climate diplomacy-relevant and climate security events. These events may help underscore the climate risk and energy framework of the current and future geopolitical configurations which will revolve more and more around critical raw material extraction and their use. By creating a holistic approach and understanding climate change and energy as a horizontal issue, silo-thinking can be diminished. What is needed is to foster a stronger and wider consensus on the need to align the Ministry's policies and its economic, cultural and (climate) security diplomacy, in collaboration with other departments as mentioned above, with the Paris Agreement and the just and fair energy transition. Transformation, not just change, is key. Only tweaking the system no longer guarantees the inter-resilience needed to overcome transition risks and avoid possible new unsustainable dependencies stemming from the current energy and climate crises, decarbonisation and its ramifications.

¹⁷ European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation. EU missions: 100 climate-neutral and smart cities, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/191876/>.

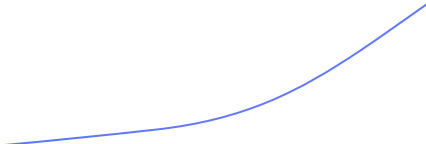
¹⁸ "Team Europe Initiative and Joint Programming Tracker: Capacity4dev - European Union," <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/tei-jp-tracker/>.

¹⁹ Hana Volná (Head of International Development Unit, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic), in discussion with the author, June 21, 2022

Context

- In light of rising greenhouse gas emissions and geopolitical tensions, states are challenged by weather extremes and energy insecurity stemming from fossil fuel dependencies.
- Regardless of the Russian aggression, at global climate events, such as COP27, both the Czech Republic and the EU are expected to show leadership in the Paris Agreement implementation.
- The compounding EU energy, security and inflation crises pressure governments to address societal implications of rising energy prices, decarbonisation, and possible lack of fuel for the upcoming winter(s).

Present

- Energy security is among the CZ PRES priorities with main focus on the REPowerEU implementation, advancing trilogues on key files of the Fit for 55 package, and other aspects addressing EU's dependency on Russian gas, oil and coal.
 - In the long term, the attitude of the Czech Republic towards the green transition is underwhelming on all levels of governance.
 - In the Czech debate, the dominant paradigm of energy security overshadows climate ramifications, framing these priorities as opposites rather than complementary agendas.
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Recommendations

- All five CZ PRES priorities have a climate angle that should be viewed as instrumental in strengthening decarbonisation, energy security or climate resilience, i.e. in the framework of EU defence, strong democratic institutions, economy and Ukraine's recovery.
 - The traversal of geopolitical challenges linked to global decarbonisation must be built on transformative strategies that are based on inter-resilient partnerships and holistic understanding of cascading impacts of climate change and relevant risks and opportunities.
 - The carbon-locked Czech Republic has to find a transition pathway out of fossil fuel dependencies and towards a net-zero future, both domestically and via its foreign policy, including climate diplomacy.
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AMO— Association for International Affairs
CAI— Comprehensive Agreement on Investment
CARD— Coordinated Annual Review on Defence
CBD— Convention on Biodiversity
CCF— China-CELAC Forum
CEE— Central and Eastern Europe
COP— Conference of the Parties
CZ PRES— Czech presidency of the Council of the EU
ECSC— European Cyber Security Challenge
EDF— European Defence Fund
EGD— European Green Deal
EU— European Union
FAC— Foreign Affairs Council
FTA— Free trade agreement
FOCAC— Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
FSRU— Floating Storage and Regasification Unit
GDP— Gross Domestic Product
GIRoA— Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
ICE— Internal Combustion Engine
ISIS— Islamic State
KDU-ČSL— Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party
LNG— Liquefied natural gas
MFA— Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NATO— North Atlantic Treaty Organization
ODS— Civic Democratic Party
PESCO— Permanent Structured Cooperation
PCI— Projects of Common Interest
PRC— People's Republic of China
R&D— Research and development
RSE— Renewable sources of energy
TEI— Team Europe Initiative
UK— United Kingdom
UNFCCC— UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
USA— United States of America
V4— Visegrád Group

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About AMO

Association for International Affairs (AMO) is a non-governmental non-profit organisation founded in 1997. It is not bound to any political party or ideology. The mission of AMO has been to contribute to a deeper understanding of international affairs through a broad range of educational and research activities. We offer space for the expression and realisation of ideas, thoughts and projects for the development of education, understanding and tolerance among people.

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

With its activities, it supports an active approach to foreign policy, provides an independent analysis of current political issues and encourages expert and public debate on related topics. Among our goals is a systematic observation, analysis and commentary on international affairs with a special focus on Czech foreign policy.

AMO:

- » formulates and publishes briefing, research and policy papers;
- » arranges international conferences, expert seminars, roundtables, public debates;
- » organises educational projects;
- » presents critical assessments and comments on current events for local and international press;
- » creates vital conditions for growth of a new expert generation;
- » promotes interest in international relations in the wider public domain;
- » cooperates with like-minded local and international institutions.

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