



Czech – Polish Cooperation on the Cusp of New Horizons: Reinvigorated Partnership in Eastern Europe

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Summary

- The most recent parliamentary election in Poland creates a window of opportunity for a new opening in Czech-Polish cooperation concerning their Eastern policies. Their societies too share similar positions on the most important development in today's Europe, which is the Russian war against Ukraine.

- Czechia and Poland are two EU and NATO member states whose interests and policies regarding Eastern Europe, Russia, South Caucasus and Central Asia overlap to a very large degree. Moreover, developments in Eastern Europe have a huge impact on the internal situation in both countries and on their foreign and security policies.

- Today these regions, which have always held a large importance for Czechia and Poland, are undergoing tectonic changes. Prague and Warsaw must adapt their policies to follow and be on the top of these developments.

- Whilst remaining as tightly bound as possible, Czech-Polish cooperation should engage with other partners from the transatlantic community since this cooperation and outreach constitutes one of the key factors which may influence to a considerable degree the new Eastern European policies of the whole of NATO and the EU.



Introduction

Czechia and Poland distinguish themselves from most other EU and NATO member states by social, economic, cultural, historical and political ties with the countries of Eastern Europe, Russia and to a lesser degree South Caucasus and Central Asia. Development of Czech-Polish cooperation in the East will stem from a solid basis of multidimensional bilateral ties.¹

Moreover, both countries possess considerable and rising stakes in certain countries of Eastern Europe and South Caucasus. Still there is a huge untapped potential regarding Czech and Polish engagement with the region, though their influence faces certain limits stemming from their combined mid-size economic capacity. Their relations with Eastern Europe and Russia and to a lesser degree with the South Caucasus and Central Asia have been undergoing a radical transformation in recent years due to fundamental changes taking place in the above-mentioned regions.

On 15 October 2023, the day of the Polish national elections, Czech-Polish relations were given a new stimulus that will shape their future for the years to come and determine the nature of the ties in all bilateral topics. In many, the cooperation has already been outstanding and benefitting from a positive momentum and climate for mutual rapprochement caused by a new sense of urgency created by the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the Western community after February 2022.

However, in other areas, including some new issues and upcoming challenges, the new Polish government will need to take proactive steps to define the country's position and possibly look for new partners and alliances, which suffered during the previous PiS-led government. This should be an opportunity for Czech-Polish relations, which on most important ideas, are coming from a similar background and societal mindset. This should be utilised to strive for a stronger voice within the EU on a number of prominent challenges, also when speaking to bigger neighbours and players in the European context, such as Germany and France.

For the region of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), these challenges stem particularly from the ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine and its confrontational policy towards the West as well as other neighbouring countries, which are suffering not only from the direct threat of military escalation and a potential spillover on their territories, but also indirectly in the socio-economic realm. After nearly two years of the ongoing full-scale Russian invasion, it is clear that the war is likely to continue and negatively impact the EU and NATO for months, likely years.

The change in the Polish government is also being widely observed in the context of the European Parliamentary elections in June 2024, when the whole EU institutional landscape is likely to undergo another major reshuffle. At the same time, other international partners - including the United States and the United Kingdom - will experience elections too, which are going to shape the position of the EU and NATO in the international arena. That is why Prague and Warsaw should attempt to form an inclusive centre within the CEE region and contribute to the wider European debates based on consultations with other relevant actors.

The paper takes a look at the recent changes in Eastern Europe and new developments that have taken place since 24 February 2022, in order to provide the context within which the Polish and Czech foreign and security policies operate, and

¹ Both countries represent to each other mutually important trade partners. Czechia occupies third place in the Polish trade turnover (5%) slightly exceeding even France and Italy's share. Moreover, Czechia has become in recent years a main destination for Polish investment abroad and vice versa. In 2023, a great rise in the number of Czech tourists arriving in Poland was witnessed (almost 100%). Sources: Czech National Bank, <https://www.cnb.cz/en/>. Czech Statistical Office, <https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/home>. National Bank of Poland, <https://nbp.pl/en/>. Statistics Poland, <https://stat.gov.pl/en/>.



go on to suggest concrete areas of cooperation and potential synergies. Among those, the authors identified security, wider Eastern policy, reconstruction of Ukraine as well as enlargement and the future of Europe debate, which is closely interconnected with it. Finally, the conclusions and recommendations show specific issues that deserve attention where Czechia and Poland can find new ideas and potential.

1 Everything new in the East

Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine in 2022 created the most serious threat to Europe's security in decades. In response, the EU and NATO countries (excluding Turkey) imposed unprecedented levels of sanctions on Russia and decoupled to a very large degree from Russia. Moreover, the Russian invasion of 2022 dramatically changed the EU and NATO policies towards the Eastern neighbourhood. The idea of Ukraine's accession to NATO became, for the first time ever, the topic of a serious debate within the transatlantic community. Moreover, Moldova and Ukraine received candidate status from the EU and Georgia was recognized as a potential candidate. The Russian aggression accelerated geopolitical tectonic shifts which started after the dissolution of the Soviet Union: the empowerment of post-Soviet republics, the rise in influence of Turkey and China. In the recent years, Beijing has decisively increased its leverage in Northern Eurasia, particularly in Central Asia² but also to a lesser degree in Eastern Europe³ and South Caucasus. Due to the war in Ukraine, the transformation of Russia into China's junior partner, or even a sort of vassal state, has gained a new dynamic. After China, Turkey - an emerging mid-sized power - is benefiting from Russia's declining influence in the Black Sea and Caspian regions. The Turkish rise⁴ is based on close cooperation with Turkic countries on a bilateral basis (especially with Azerbaijan, but also Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan), in the triangle Baku-Tbilisi-Ankara and within the framework of the Organization of Turkic States. The victory of Azerbaijan in the war over Nagorno Karabakh against Armenia achieved thanks to close Azeri-Turkish military cooperation and an unequivocal diplomatic backing of the Turkic states constitutes the most striking example of this process.

The change in balance of power also concerns the countries which are located in Northern Eurasia. Their accelerating emancipation makes terms such as *Ruski Mir* (Russian World), post-Soviet space and Russia's exclusive sphere of influence obsolete. Russia has not managed to subdue Ukraine and Kyiv has increased its defence capabilities decisively thanks to massive Western military support, turning into one of the strongest military powers in Europe. However, the war has resulted also in a dramatic weakening of Belarus' sovereignty and the cementing of Russia's grip over Belarus' economy, society and security. Indeed, the country has transformed itself into a fully-fledged Russian protectorate, which may even be annexed by the Kremlin based on the Union State process of integration. The Turkic countries are particularly on the rise demographically and economically. Kazakhstan, primarily because of the negative impact of war, surpassed Ukraine as the second biggest economy (GDP PPP) between the EU and China, soon to become the largest

² After the 24th of February 2022, China became the most important trade partner of the Central Asian countries surpassing Russia.

³ China's share in Ukrainian trade increased radically before the Russian full-scale aggression. In 2021, China accounted for almost 15% of Ukraine's trade turnover and reached first place among Ukrainian external commercial partners. The war of 2022 weakened considerably the Chinese-Ukrainian economic cooperation but according to economic experts probably it will recover in the coming years. Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine, <https://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/>.

⁴ When the Soviet Union was dissolving, Turkey's GDP measured in PPP was around 30% of the Russian one, today it is equal to more than 70% of Russia's. In the next 10 years, the gap will be diminishing further considerably in favour of Turkey. International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database, October 2023, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2023/October>.



one, surpassing Russia concerning national income per capita. Uzbekistan will overcome Kazakhstan regarding population and become the second most populous nation after Russia in the above-mentioned area. In the next decade, it may also surpass Ukraine in terms of GDP PPP, gaining status as the third largest economy. Finally, Azerbaijan will soon have a bigger economy than Belarus, which has been a result of a longer term rise in economic indicators based on the oil and gas industry and also the stagnation of the Belarusian economic model. Cooperation between the members of the Organization of Turkic States has intensified and deepened considerably in recent years as a counterbalancing power primarily to Russia.

The Turkic and Islamic factor will gain even more relevance in the coming years in Northern Eurasia because Turkic and Muslim nations and immigrants of Islamic background constitute the largest non-Russian communities inside of Russia. Their share will increase even further in the mid-term perspective. Meanwhile, the war has highlighted that the national question (internal cleavages between ethnic Russians and the other nations) constitutes one of the key challenges to the future of Russia.⁵ In the longer term perspective, the ethnic tensions may seriously undermine its stability and in the case of a positive scenario (democratisation), non-Russian nations might play an important role in the re-establishment of a genuine federation in Russia. Finally, Russia's trajectory, because of the ethnic, religious and cultural affinity between immigrants and non-Russians and nations of Central Asia and the South Caucasus, will depend to a large degree on the developments in these regions.

All of this leaves Czechia and Poland with a number of dilemmas about how to engage with the newly emerging powers, how to balance the focus on democracy on the one hand and security and short-term stability on the other, with a particularly challenging case of the South Caucasus. Also, these developments should motivate both countries to pay more attention to both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, which have remained on the outskirts of both foreign policies in the past years. Finally, the look inside Russia brings more looming questions which require additional tools and capacity for monitoring and evaluation of domestic developments, which are going to shape the coming years.

1.1 Internal dimensions of Czech and Polish engagements with the East

Czech-Polish cooperation in the East is not happening and developing in a vacuum and the domestic political reality as well as other constraining political, social and economic factors are shaping the Eastern policies of both countries and determining the quality of bilateral collaboration in most relevant fields. The Russian war against Ukraine represents the most visible indicator of the overlap between domestic and external spheres in both Poland and Czechia. Both countries belong among the group of EU member states which accepted the largest numbers of Ukrainian refugees. Poland hosts 960 thousand Ukrainian refugees (the second biggest group after Germany in the world) and Czechia around 360 thousand which places them second, proportionally to the size of population. Combined, they host around 35% of all Ukrainian refugees who have found shelter in the EU.⁶

Moreover, even before the full-scale war, Czechia and especially Poland attracted a huge inflow of Ukrainian seasonal and permanent labour migrants. As a consequence, Poland and Czechia, together with Germany, became the most important second homes for Ukrainians in the world. In addition, Ukrainians based in Germany, Poland and Czechia quite often maintain family and social contacts and cooperate between themselves. This situation also means that for these three

⁵ Robert Coalson, Russia's 2021 Census Results Raise Red Flags Among Experts And Ethnic-Minority Activists, 05. 02. 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-census-ethnic-minorities-undercounted/32256506.html>.

⁶ UNHCR, Ukraine Refugee Situation , <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>.



countries the Ukrainian question took on a very clear internal dimension. Regarding the external dimension, it brought about a decisive rise in Czech and Polish Official Development Aid (ODA).⁷ In this indicator, both countries overtook all countries of the CEE (excluding Estonia) and are on the way to gradually catching up with most Western European countries.

1.2 Czechia

On the Czech side, there are a number of - rather positive - factors that will likely shape bilateral ties and orientation towards Poland as a prominent ally and supporter with a common voice from the CEE. Among these, it is possible to identify especially the following: 1) a five-party-government with diverse ideologies and political stances, 2) the re-emerged role of the president in foreign and security policy as well as 3) the decreasing popularity of the cabinet of Petr Fiala, which is going to look for quick wins and successes in international relations to bring concrete benefits for the domestic - and more complicated - socio-economic reality.

Socio-economic hardship and vulnerabilities, partially also caused by the ongoing Russian aggression and its consequences, has been one of the major topics for the Czech government determining its actions both domestically and abroad, particularly when it comes to financial aid, sanctions exemptions and investments abroad.⁸ This is both the case for the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund, which is still missing the Czech contribution, and for additional investments in Ukraine, apart from the already agreed commitments and military cooperation, which are mostly on a commercial basis. This fact is to some extent undermining the credibility of Czechia, which is not able to deliver on some of its promises and international commitments.

This is also one of the driving factors behind the rising profile of president Petr Pavel who has been trying to establish his reputation in the international arena, actively positioning himself in New York at the UN level as well as in Brussels, both vis-à-vis the EU and NATO. The president has also reinvigorated some of the country's positions on global affairs as well as the EU's agenda and its future as such, when also publicly commenting on the contested notion of qualified majority voting (QMV) in foreign and security policy or other key issues.

The Czech government cannot count on the unequivocal support of the main opposition party ANO regarding Eastern policy, especially concerning Ukraine. Currently ANO enjoys the highest popularity (around one-third of voters).⁹ The party often expresses reservations or even distances itself from the government policy towards Ukraine and plays with populism as far as Ukrainian refugees are concerned.¹⁰ Moreover, several radical right and far left parties (representing in total around 16% of the electorate) strongly reject support for Kyiv and sympathise to varying degrees with Russia's positions. This means that in the case of the

⁷ Between 2021 and 2022, the Polish ODA increased from 0.15% of GNI in 2021 to 0.5%, while Czechia's ODA grew from 0.13% to 0.36%. OECD, ODA Levels in 2022 – preliminary data, 12.04.2023, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/ODA-2022-summary.pdf>.

⁸ Barbara Moens and Wilhelmine Preussen, Czechs push for longer exemption from Russia steel sanctions, Politico, 17. 11. 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/czechs-push-longer-exemption-russia-steel-sanctions-nlmc-putin/#:~:text=The%20Czech%20Republic%20is%20asking,three%20EU%20diplomats%20told%20POLITICO>.

⁹ Median: Sněmovní volby by v září vyhrálo ANO se 34 procenty. Druhá ODS má 13 procent, iRozhlas, 01. 11. 2023, https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/pruzkum-median-volby-ano-ods_2311010735_ako.

¹⁰ Around half of Czechs are against prolonging the stay of Ukrainians in Czechia and in general the society is becoming more polarised and radicalised on the issue: Česká společnost je rozpolcená na tématu podpory ukrajinských uprchlíků. Vnímání Ruska jako hlavního viníka války neklesá. Stem, 10. 10. 2023, <https://www.stem.cz/ceska-spolecnost-je-rozpolcena-na-tematu-podpory-ukrajinskych-uprchliku-vnimani-ruska-jako-hlavniho-vinika-valky-neklesa/>.



establishment of a new government under ANO's leadership after the parliamentary election of 2025 a considerable correction of Czechia's present course towards Ukraine cannot be excluded.

Czechia has been eyeing the wider picture of Eurasia with economic opportunities in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, which it has engaged with more over the past year based on international trade which has been promoted by high-level government representatives. At the same time, the reputation of some of the Central Asian countries has been affected by their engagement in bypassing the EU's sanctions mechanisms, particularly Kyrgyzstan, but to some degree also Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, which have engaged in the process too. How to balance both dimensions has emerged as a new challenge and task for the government.

1.3 Poland

The overall victory of the opposition in parliamentary elections in Poland on 15 October 2023 opened up a window of opportunity for a rapprochement between Poland and the EU institutions and Germany, which is the most influential EU member state in the east of the bloc. An improvement of cooperation between Warsaw and Berlin might substantially facilitate a multilateral collaboration (coalition of the willing) between Poland and other states, which are especially engaged in the Eastern regions, including Czechia. On the other hand, the ability of the new Polish government to shape the Eastern policy of the EU and NATO will to a considerable degree depend on internal developments. The government, on the one hand and the president and opposition on the other, might be preoccupied with domestic in-fighting, especially given that before late spring 2025 three elections (local, European and presidential ones) will be held in Poland. Due to the polarisation of political life in Poland, the political rivalry may have a negative spillover on Polish foreign policy. Certain strategic issues, including relations with Ukraine, may become bones of contention between the president and the opposition versus the government.

The Russian full-scale invasion contributed to a substantial improvement in the attitude of Poles towards Ukrainians, but still only slightly more than a half of Poles feel sympathy towards Ukrainians. Moreover, the most recent Polish-Ukrainian interstate tensions may partly reverse this positive trend. Rising fatigue within Polish society concerning Ukrainian refugees represents another worrying development, which may be misused by nationalists and the opposition and may have a negative impact on Polish-Ukrainian relations within the country and between the states.¹¹

The immigration of people of Muslim background and their efforts to obtain asylum in Poland constitutes an even more divisive topic in Polish domestic politics. Indeed, the number of seasonal labour migrants from Azerbaijan and Central Asia has increased manyfold in recent years. Despite the fact that they still represent a small group among foreign labour migrants in Poland, their presence turned into one of the most contested topics of the electoral campaign in autumn 2023. Their Muslim background was often presented by the liberal Civic Coalition, the main political force as a potentially serious threat to national security. On the other hand, the then PiS-led government blamed the Civic Coalition and their allies for an alleged undermining of Poland's security by a lenient approach to foreigners, including citizens of Russia of Muslim background and people originating from Central Asia,

¹¹ According to Globsec Trends 2023 (surveys carried out in March 2023), more than half of Poles believe that "Ukrainian refugees receive support at the expense of our citizens from weaker and socially vulnerable parts of the population that need it more". By comparison, in Czechia less than 40% endorsed this opinion. In another national poll conducted in October 2023, almost 60 % of Poles wanted the state to stop providing Ukrainians with financial aid.

Globsec, Globsec Trends 2023, United we (still) stand,

<https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/GLOBSEC%20Trends%202023.pdf>.



trying to cross the Polish-Belarusian border. PiS accused the opposition of being “puppets” of Putin and Lukashenka.¹² The dominance of the immigration issue in the Polish electoral campaign stemmed from the social mood. According to opinion polls (for instance, Pew Research Centre), Poland and also Czechia stand out within the EU for their high levels of islamophobia extending also to a considerable degree to political elites.¹³ Taking into consideration the increasing influence of Turkic states and the growing importance of the Muslim question inside Russia, the popularity of islamophobia in Poland and Czechia may turn out to be a key liability for Polish and Czech engagement with Central Asia, South Caucasus and Muslim Russia in the long term.

The war in Ukraine and the mass crimes committed by the Russian armed forces caused a radical rise of antipathy within Polish society towards Russians. After the invasion, the notion of Russia’s “eternal” authoritarian and expansionist character gained popularity in the Polish and to some degree also the Czech public discourse. Moreover, the war in Ukraine strengthened decisively among Poles’ the conviction that in contrast to Western Europe, they had always been right concerning Russia’s neo-imperial and Oriental/Asian “nature” (Russians as Mongols/Tatars). These perceptions of Russia are more popular in Poland than in Czechia and make support for the Russian democratic opposition rather unpopular. It is often perceived by many Polish politicians and intellectuals as useless. Finally, the self-image of Poland as a great expert on Russia and its neighbouring regions resonates well among Polish society and elites. However, the level of expertise and knowledge about Turkic and North Caucasian nations in Poland is limited and shaded by stereotypes and generalisations. The situation may considerably hamper Polish attempts to adapt its Eastern policy to a new order emerging in Northern Eurasia. This challenge also concerns Czechia, which also suffers from multiple stereotypes, particularly the older generation, which still remembers the horrors of the 1968 Soviet invasion against the Prague Spring.

2 Concrete areas of cooperation

From mid-December 2023 (onwards), when the actual new Polish government is expected to come into force, there will be a number of challenges but also stemming from them, opportunities, for the Polish-Czech tandem at the EU as well as regional (Visegrad and beyond) levels. Among these, there will be a serious need to rethink the approach to Eastern Europe, including both the Eastern Partnership and relations with Russia and Central Asia, which are undergoing a fundamental shift, also in connection with the enlargement perspective for Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia one day. This will also require a comprehensive discussion on reform for the EU, as proposed by Germany and France most recently. Ukraine, and the European approach to it, closely interconnected with the debate on post-war reconstruction will be a crucial component of the geopolitical response to the ongoing Russian aggression and building deterrence against it.

Concurrently, there is a bigger debate looming over the EU about how to position itself on security and the future of the European security architecture, especially if there is a change in the White House next year and yet another Donald Trump presidency, which would put the EU and European members of NATO at the

¹² After 24 February 2022, PiS continued to violate human rights and Polish and EU laws by using push backs on the Polish-Belarusian border against foreigners, mostly Muslims, including people from Russia and Central Asia who wanted to receive refugee status in Poland. According to multiple verdicts of Polish and European courts, Poland keeps asylum seekers in detention centres in unacceptable conditions. Moreover, the PiS-led government extradited some of the asylum seekers from the North Caucasus to Russia in violation of judiciary procedures and despite the fact they faced the prospect of being tortured, or even killed in some cases.

¹³ Pew Research Center, Publications, <https://www.pewresearch.org/publications/>.



forefront of the response to the Russian aggression also in the military domain. This would represent an enormous challenge for the Union.

How to do more together and emancipate the EU approach, while maintaining a strong transatlantic bond represents one of the ultimate conundrums of our time for the EU. However, the list of challenges does not end here if we consider the issue of energy and becoming less dependent on critical resources, materials as well as fuels from authoritarian countries, including Russia or China.

2.1 Security

It is the topic of security that has been dominating European discussions for almost two years since the start of the full-scale invasion of Russia into Ukraine. This has been so of conventional forces as well as in the domain of hybrid threats and disinformation, which have been high on the EU agenda. But other areas, including energy, interconnectedness and dependency on authoritarian powers or pursuing a more autonomous course of action vis-à-vis the United States have been added to the picture too. Especially so when taking into consideration the upcoming US presidential elections in autumn next year or the highly unpredictable course of events in the Indo-Pacific region and the Middle East, which might occupy the attention of the United States for the next period of time.

Russia, for most of its history, has posed a fundamental threat to Polish national security and to a lesser degree to Czechia too. The Czech perception of Russia started to overlap with the Polish one in recent years, especially after the announcement of Russia's responsibility for the ammunition depot explosions in Vrbětice (April 2021) and fully matched it after the Russian full-scale aggression against Ukraine in 2022. Since the Russian invasion, Poland and Czechia have been among the EU frontrunners on sanctions against the Kremlin and Minsk, while calling for their isolation in the international arena. Moreover, they managed successfully to create a wide coalition on these issues and shape the mainstream within the Union.

The Russian full-scale aggression against Ukraine intensified cooperation between Warsaw and Prague, on the one hand and Kyiv, on the other in the security sphere. Czechia and Poland recognized the defence of Ukraine's independence and its territorial integrity as a strategic goal of vital importance for their own national interests. Therefore, until today, Poland and Czechia used bilateral and multilateral formats to support Ukraine's military effort and economic survival. Both countries committed to particularly extensive aid in the military sphere. Around 4.5% of all military commitments allocated to Ukraine came from Poland and Czechia placing Poland 7th and Czechia 12th on the list of donors, respectively. As far as total commitments (military, economic and humanitarian aid) are concerned, Poland assigned almost 8 billion USD and Czechia around 2.7 billion USD to Ukraine which accounts for almost 4.5% of the entire commitments obtained by Kyiv.¹⁴ However, while Poles, according to Eurobarometer (fieldwork date: May-June 2023), express a very strong approval of financing the purchase and supply of military equipment to Ukraine, which surpasses 85%, in the case of Czechs only slightly less than half of them endorsed it.¹⁵

The military cooperation between Poland and Czechia, on the one hand and Ukraine on the other, may intensify considerably in the future due to the increasing military potential of the three countries. The Russian full-scale aggression against Ukraine provoked a radical rise of military expenditures in Czechia and in Poland. However, the spending was much bigger in the case of Poland and paradoxically the gap between both countries' defence budgets deepened considerably. In 2022, Poland

¹⁴ IFW Kiel Institute for the World Economy, Ukraine Support Tracker Data, <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/publications/ukraine-support-tracker-data-20758/>.

¹⁵ Standard Eurobarometer 99 - Spring 2023, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3052>.



spent almost 2.5% of its GDP on defence, while Czechia only 1.4%. In April 2023 Czechia approved a rise in its defence budget to at least 2% in 2024, but Poland has already radically increased its military expenditure for 2023, which reached almost 4% of its GDP.¹⁶ Moreover, before the election of 2023, the Polish government presented a budget forecast that foresees a further increase of its military expenditure that is supposed to expand beyond 4% of GDP in 2024. The new Polish government will probably decrease its military spending expenditures due to economic constraints, though, the Polish defence budget will remain one of the biggest in NATO and the EU. In the case of Czechia, there are also a number of future dilemmas over the sustainability of such a rise in military spending and also around the scaling up of military production and the defence industry's ability to keep pace with the war and the readiness shown by the Russian Federation.

For Czechia and Poland, running alongside these security concerns the number one priority has also been to deal with its traditional energy dependency on Russian oil and gas but also nuclear fuel in the case of Czechia and coal in regard to Poland. Prague and Warsaw have succeeded in finding alternatives but have struggled to cut off imports of Russian fuels completely. Thus, the Czech and Polish governments are currently planning to invest in new ways of importing energy resources, including bilateral cooperation and transfers of gas from LNG terminals in the Baltic sea, which represents a shared challenge but also a common opportunity for investments and future development.

On the strategic level, Poland and Czechia have become staunch advocates of rebuilding the European security architecture without Russia. Czechia and Poland have called for stronger cooperation with the US and the Bucharest Nine (or rather Eight)¹⁷ on the regional level. Meanwhile, cooperation within the V4 format was impeded by the anti-Ukrainian course of Orban's Hungary and after the Slovak parliamentary election in September 2023 won by Robert Fico, Orban's ally, it became even less sustainable. Czechia and Poland have been among the EU and NATO members calling for better readiness to withstand shocks coming from the international arena, also in terms of trade and economic blackmail, as previously exercised by China, with whom Czechia has much troubled relations over support to the Russian war as well as due to the stark human rights record and pressure on Taiwan, a key Czech ally in the Indo-Pacific. Poland, with regard to China, has tried to pursue a more pragmatic course by maintaining communications on the presidential level with Beijing. The Polish president justified this policy by presenting the contacts as attempts to convince the Chinese leadership of the Ukrainian position, but these efforts failed.

2.2 Future of EU's Eastern policy

Poland as well as Czechia have traditionally been among the keen supporters and open advocates of the Eastern Partnership policy of the EU towards the six countries in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus. The policy was altered when the full-scale invasion of Russia broke out and Ukraine together with Moldova were given candidacy status in June 2022. Around that time, Czech diplomats called the Eastern Partnership “dead” and attention quickly switched to alternative initiatives, including the enlargement track or the European Policy Community, which was launched in autumn during the Czech EU Presidency. This was the reason why the political pendulum swung elsewhere leaving the EaP in a state of limbo, especially after the recent Armenian-Azeri war over the Nagorno Karabakh.

¹⁶ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Military Expenditure Database, <https://milex.sipri.org/sipri>.

¹⁷ Originally, the regional format of cooperation was known as the Bucharest Nine - B9, but became the B8 when Hungary stopped participating in the initiative due to a different policy stance on Russia and its war against Ukraine.



Concurrently, the EU has not been able to agree on a new comprehensive strategy on how to pursue relations with Russia, beyond leaving the country and its society isolated and promoting resilience both at home and towards Ukraine and other EaP countries under the Kremlin's pressure. Different camps have emerged among the EU members, one promoting the status quo of keeping relations frozen, while the other wants to forge a new consensus based on the current high level of agreement stemming from the aggressive nature of the Russian regime. The first group of member states is prevailing for the time being, while risking the momentum fading away as countries could gradually re-establish their own bilateral ties and break the consensus on no-ties with Russia.

Ukraine, because of its demographic and economic potential, its geographical location and cultural-historical ties, particularly with Poland, has always occupied a high position in the agenda of policies of both countries. Moreover, for Czechia and Poland, Ukraine policy has been the driving force behind most of their foreign policy actions since February 2022. The Russia policy of Poland and Czechia has de facto become a Ukraine one. Indeed, trade ties between Poland and Ukraine flourished during the war. Poland gained the status of the largest trade partner of Ukraine (12% of Ukrainian trade volume in 2022, while it was 7% in 2021). Meanwhile, Czechia maintained its position as one of the significant trade partners (3% of Ukrainian turnover).¹⁸ On the other hand, serious problems concerning trade between Poland and Ukraine (see below) may contribute to a moderate decrease in the Polish-Ukrainian turnover in 2023.

Poland and Czechia occupy the status of relatively important EU partners of Moldova concerning political relations and economic activities (FDI, external trade, ODA, migration, and remittances), but their significance is decisively weaker in comparison to Romania, Germany and Italy.¹⁹ On the other hand, in 2022 Poland, in order to strengthen Moldova's resilience in the face of Russia's rising pressure, increased by around 10 times its development aid assigned to Moldova (almost 30 million EUR) taking the position of one of the main donors.²⁰ It is worth remembering that a Polish general heads the EUBAM mission on the border between Moldova and Ukraine too.

Czech aid to Moldova has traditionally been among the highest in the EU when compared to the per capita ratio. The overall value of Czech projects in support of Moldova in 2022 reached 5.9 million EUR and in 2023 further increased to 10.7 million EUR.²¹

The engagement of Poland and Czechia in the South Caucasus is decisively smaller than in Eastern Europe, which is correlated with the relatively weak position of the EU and the US in the region. Regarding relations with South Caucasian countries, Prague and Warsaw developed the most intensive contacts with Georgia and the least, with Azerbaijan. However, the previous Polish government had close ties with the Georgian opposition which became a liability in the deeply polarised Georgian society.

¹⁸ Sławomir Matusiak, A year of war in Ukraine's foreign trade, 08.02.2023, OSW Commentary, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2023-02-08/a-year-war-ukraines-foreign-trade>.

¹⁹ Poland's share in Moldovan trade turnover approaches 3.5% and the Czech share, 2.5%. Source: National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, External Trade, https://statistica.gov.md/en/statistic_indicator_details/19.

²⁰ Grupa Granica, Polska Współpraca Rozwojowa 2023, <https://zagranica.org.pl/zasoby/#publikacje>.

²¹ The figure for 2023 also comprises data concerning planned projects that might not necessarily be finalised by the end of this year, data provided by the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs (not published).



Czechia performs considerably better than Poland regarding economic relations with Caucasian states.²² Both Czechia and even more Poland provided EU missions in the region (Georgia and Armenia) with substantial personnel.

Before the 24th of February 2022, despite bad political relations, cooperation between Poland and Czechia on the one hand, and Russia, on the other, had been developing in certain sectors (trade, education, tourism).²³ However, the ongoing full-scale Russian aggression has brought about a dramatic decrease of any Polish-Czech relations with Russia. Poland and Czechia advocated for a full revision of the visa policy of the EU towards Russia and suspension of the visa facilitation agreement, which has succeeded at the EU level, but otherwise Czechia has been largely marginalised in its cutting off all ties with Russia and its society even in the eyes of its closest allies on the issues among the Baltic states or Poland.

On the EaP, Czech and Polish diplomacy gradually toned down their fierce criticism but stayed rather lukewarm toward the policy focusing on concrete benefits (e.g. security, energy and interconnectedness of people-to-people ties) and advocating in favour of Ukraine, Moldova and also Georgia, while keeping doors open to Armenia and pursuing a bilateral course with regard to Azerbaijan. Belarus has occupied a special place as a country-aggressor next to Russia, in which the society was isolated by the West to a large extent too, with the exception of the democratic and anti-war forces.

Poland and Czechia's relations with Belarus underwent a dramatic deterioration after Lukashenka's crackdown against the democratic demonstrations in 2020 and his support for Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine. But Poland still remains the biggest donor of ODA to Belarus among the EU member states (allocating more funds than Germany, France, Spain and Italy combined). The Polish ODA is allocated to the Belarusian democratic opposition, independent media and civil society. Poland also hosts the largest Belarusian community (political refugees, students and labour immigrants, national minorities) in the EU. As a response, the Belarussian authoritarian regime provokes serious tensions with Poland because it discriminates against and sometimes even persecutes Belarusian citizens of Polish background and Roman Catholics. Moreover, Minsk put Poland under pressure by creating a still ongoing migrant and refugee crisis on the Polish-Belarussian border.

Poland and Czech relations with Central Asia have been traditionally very limited and their potential remains mostly untapped. Thus, Poland and Czechia have only two embassies in the region (Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan). Official visits on the Polish side remain rather rare. For instance, the most recent visit of the president of Poland to Kazakhstan took place in 2017 and in the case of the prime minister in 2003. The interest of Czechia in the region also has traditionally been even weaker. The economic engagement of both countries with the region remains rather limited, particularly in the case of Czechia.²⁴ However, the intensity of bilateral contacts and

²² Since the Rose Revolution of 2003, regular inflows of Czech direct investments to Georgia have approached one billion USD making Czechia one of the key foreign investors in the country. Poland and Czechia account for almost 15% of the EU's trade with Georgia. Czechia has also become an important destination for Azeri exports recently. In consequence, the Czech share in Azeri turnover approached 2% in 2022 making Czechia one of the key EU trade partners of Baku. Meanwhile, Polish-Azeri exchange is negligible. Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia, Foreign Direct Investments, <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/191/foreign-direct-investments>. The State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Trade <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/trade/?lang=en>.

²³ Before the invasion, Poland was one of the important trade partners of Russia (3% of the Russian trade, 4th place in the EU) surpassing even France. Meanwhile, Czechia was the second most popular destination in the world for Russian students enrolled at foreign universities. Source: Federal State Statistics Service, Russian Statistical Yearbook 2022, https://eng.rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/Yearbook_2022.pdf. Unesco Institute for Statistics, Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students, <https://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow>.



trade exchange with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan has been increasing from the Czech side in recent months with a number of bilateral visits by several ministries and at the level of the PM too, with the prospect of increased trade cooperation.²⁵

2.3 Ukraine's Post-war Reconstruction

Ukraine's reconstruction has been on the agenda since at least mid-2022 when the Lugano international donor conference in Switzerland took place, which highlighted the first ideas and strategies about what might happen after the war ends. This included big plans from the Ukrainian government of regional components of the reconstruction and co-ownership of the international community as well as overall principles of building back better to get the country ready for EU membership one day.

From the initial optimistic picture, the debate largely returned to the idea of fast recovery and providing humanitarian needs for a country still at war, which needed to get ready for the winter season of 2022, especially under heavy pressure from the Russian aggressor against energy and other civilian infrastructure. Since then, a more realistic position, acknowledging and getting ready for a long war has taken over together with the realisation that practical things need to be put in place already now, in order to improve the quality of daily lives of Ukrainians still living in the country today.

Czechia has been among the most active nations when it comes to the reconstruction of Ukraine since the very beginning of the process in 2022. At the Lugano international donor conference, Czechia volunteered to take the responsibility for the Dnipropetrovsk region, in which it has prior interests when investing at the regional level of cooperation, unlike most international partners of Ukraine. Apart from that, the country was among the first to appoint a special envoy for Ukraine's reconstruction, several months ahead of Poland, whose role is to begin streamlining the work and looking for concrete opportunities of business and financial engagement in the process. In autumn 2022, the cabinet of Petr Fiala also adopted its own bilateral program and financial instrument for Ukraine's reconstruction for 2023-25, which was based along the lines of blending humanitarian, stabilisation and development aid of 20 million EUR per year.²⁶ Last but not least, the Ministry of Industry and Trade organised the so-called Business Club Ukraine, which now brings together around 200 Czech companies, which began planning for and/or directly investing in Ukraine's reconstruction. However, the system has been struggling with at least two issues: insurance of the investment in order to attract more substantial private capital, and a rather low economic basis for such a paramount task, which led the government to look for opportunities at the EU and international level, and from IFIs.

²⁴ Poland's share in the trade of Kazakhstan does not exceed 1% and is almost 2.5 times smaller than the Romanian-Kazakh turnover. Nevertheless, both countries may increase their exports in the future, which shows a very huge rise in Czechia's exports to Uzbekistan in 2020, accounting for 2.5% of the entire Uzbek imports. However Prague did not manage to sustain this in subsequent years. Source: Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Statistics of foreign, mutual trade and commodity markets, <https://stat.gov.kz/en/industries/economy/foreign-market/>.
Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Foreign economic activity, <https://stat.uz/en/official-statistics/merchandise-trade>.

²⁵ Radio Prague International, Czech PM Fiala arrives in Kazakhstan as part of Asian tour, 23.04.23, <https://english.radio.cz/czech-pm-fiala-arrives-kazakhstan-part-asian-tour-8781115>

²⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, «Humanitarian, stabilization, reconstruction and economic assistance programme for Ukraine 2023-2025», https://www.mzv.cz/public/c/37/f5/5134325_3073110_Program_Ukrajina_EN.pdf.



Poland treats the reconstruction of Ukraine as a huge opportunity and important instrument for strengthening Ukrainian stability versus Russia's imperialism. On the other hand, the ongoing war is perceived as much more significant than the issue of reconstruction. In Lugano, Poland decided that it will take care of the reconstruction of the Kharkiv region and in spring-summer 2023 Polish companies launched this process. Nevertheless, there are some challenges attached to the Polish engagement in the reconstruction, which are similar to the Czech situation. However, when compared with Czechia, Poland benefits from a deeper relationship and insight into the Ukrainian economy, beneficial legal standing as well as a more advanced insurance scheme run by the government, which is still largely missing in the Czech case.

Poland's expectations on financial benefits regarding the post-war rebuilding of Ukraine are running very high and they may result in a substantial disappointment because Polish companies, especially in the construction sector, may face a serious challenge concerning their competitiveness on the Ukrainian market against firms from other countries. Their underperformance provoking disappointment in Poland may be misused by Polish nationalistic circles - accusations of alleged Ukrainian ingratitude - aimed at undermining Polish-Ukrainian cooperation.

2.4 Future of Enlargement

The debate on the future of enlargement has preoccupied many decision-makers and think tankers in the past months. However, little to nothing has changed so far in a largely inefficient and technocratic approach to the EU's policy, which has been stuck for many years. Suffering from a low level of credibility, bureaucratic overburden and lack of willingness or insufficient determination to perform by the partners from the Western Balkans themselves, the enlargement policy nowadays hangs in limbo, which is made still worse by political blackmail by certain EU members, which is expected to remain in the future too.

This goes directly contrary to the new levels of ambition within the EU as well as of the associated and candidate countries, including most notably from Ukraine and Moldova, which believe in a fast and efficient (but merit-based) process on behalf of the EU. At the same time, the debate on the fast-track enlargement or bypassing of the existing rules and procedures has proved to be a dead-end as perceived from a number of EU members, especially from Western Europe.

For Czechia, a traditionally pro-enlargement country, this lack of tangible progress has been an obstacle to bringing Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia closer to the EU, which is advocated as a geopolitical response to the ongoing Russian aggression. Czech diplomacy has taken a proactive line on gradual and practical integration, sometimes referred to as fusing-in. Concurrently, the country's leadership has engaged very little in the debate on the future of the EU, including in terms of its decision-making, and preparing the EU fit for 35, or even 38 countries in the future. This has been the case both for the change of treaties advocated by Germany or France as well as adopting the institutions or internal procedures, most likely beyond the passerelle clauses change. Only to a limited degree, some new approach has come from the country's president and the minister for EU affairs circulating the idea of evaluating the risks and benefits of such changes, in order to start the debate at home. However, beyond the rhetorical level of a pro-enlargement mindset, there has been very little analysis and understanding of what future wave(s) of enlargement will actually mean for the country, and this process is only being started right now in the commissioning of studies and promoting a deeper understanding of the process.

However, the support of the Czech political mainstream for enlargement is not deeply rooted in the society. In fact, the lack of strong social endorsement of the accession of new countries may present, in the coming years, a considerable challenge to Czechia's pro-enlargement stance. Generally, today's Czechs' approach to further



EU enlargement is rather lukewarm (50% for and above 35% against) and the approval rate is below the EU's average. Moreover, Eurobarometer (fieldwork: May-June 2023) shows that Czechs are particularly deeply divided regarding Ukraine's membership in the EU (more than 45% against and almost 45% for).²⁷ In the future, the decrease of EU funds transferred to Czechia due to its rising national income, may further weaken the support of Czech society for enlargement and for the EU in general.

Poland is one of the most pro-enlargement countries in the EU and Poles distinguish themselves within the Union by a very high level of support for the future enlargement of the EU (67% yes, 25% no). Poland pays particular attention to the integration of Ukraine with the EU. According to Eurobarometer (fieldwork May-June 2023), approval of Ukraine's membership in the EU exceeds 80% in Poland and is one of the highest in the Union.²⁸ On the other hand, Polish support for Ukraine faces serious challenges concerning the clash of interpretations of historical conflicts and crimes, divergences of economic interests (e.g. agriculture) and refugee fatigue. The leaders of PiS declared many times that Polish support for Ukraine's accession to the EU and NATO depends on Kyiv's acceptance of Poland's interpretation of history, including an apology for the Volyn massacre, its recognition as a genocide and condemnation of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). The far right in Poland (Confederation) expresses even stronger anti-Ukrainian positions. Although some politicians from the new ruling coalition subscribe to PiS's position on the preconditions for Ukraine's accession, most probably, the new government will not precondition Ukraine with the same strictness as the previous government. If so, it will find itself under pressure from PiS and Confederation which will "patriotically" blackmail the ruling elite and accuse it of being too weak towards Ukraine.²⁹ Moreover, in September 2023, Poland together with Hungary and Slovakia did not lift derogations concerning the access of Ukrainian agriculture products to the Single Market. This decision violating EU law was endorsed by all political forces and gained strong social support.³⁰ Moreover, Polish (and later also Slovak) lorry drivers have been illegally blocking their border crossings with Ukraine since the beginning of November 2023 in protest against the rising role of Ukrainian transport companies in the EU. The blockade met with a passive response from the Polish authorities and in consequence it provoked tensions between Poland and Ukraine. Generally, Poland would like to play the role of Ukraine's advocate in the EU and NATO, which alludes to the relationship (senior vs. junior partner) deeply rooted in Polish-Ukrainian history. Meanwhile the war has strengthened the decisive feeling of self-reliance and self-esteem in Ukraine, therefore, Warsaw needs to adapt to this new situation, which will not be an easy and smooth process.

2.5 Internal developments in the EU

In the context of enlargement, the internal transformation of the EU has been a closely interconnected process, as advocated by numerous member states of the EU as well as the EU institutions and their representatives too. The European Council President Charles Michel outlined his plans for internal reform of the EU that should make the Union ready for future waves of newcomers beyond 2030. The representatives of France and Germany, and a group of academics commissioned by them, also advocated in favour of internal changes, including when the German

²⁷ Standard Eurobarometer 99 - Spring 2023, op. cit.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ It is worth recalling that in the October election of 2023 PiS won 35%, Confederation 7% and two small parties - radical right and pro-PiS formation of local government activists gained above 3%.

³⁰ In the opinion poll conducted in September 2023, almost 60% of Poles declared that they support a unilateral prolongation of derogations on Ukrainian wheat even if this decision is against the EU. Only 20% of them did not subscribe to that opinion. Sondaż: Czy Polacy popierają embargo na zboże z Ukrainy?, Rzeczpospolita, 23.09.2023, <https://www.rp.pl/spoleczenstwo/art39155921-sondaz-czy-polacy-popieraja-embargo-na-zboze-z-ukrainy>.



foreign minister Annalena Baerbock called for a radical EU overhaul, and mentioned that Germany would not be insisting on having a commissioner for a certain time period in the pursuit of bold and brave changes to the future EU.³¹

These proposals, indeed, include a number of transformative steps in the domain of decision-making, representativeness and inclusivity in the EU's institutions as well as some profound budgetary implications, which would allow the EU to be fit for future waves of enlargement. The question remains of how much will require treaty changes and how much could actually be done without, possibly only based on changes of passerelle clauses within the customary laws and traditions of the EU functioning.

From the Czech point of view, this has been a rather sensitive topic, especially when it comes to the opening of the treaties, which the political leadership rejected on a number of occasions, including when - together with Sweden - they openly stated that it was not a good time to deal with this in 2022.³² Nevertheless, the fluidity of the debate and the need for discussion on the strategic priorities, particularly for Ukraine and Moldova, but also the Western Balkans is pushing the country's leadership into having a more open mind on the debate, including when it comes to changes within the QMV in some policy fields (rather CFSP than taxation, for example). In any case, the country is really only at the beginning of the debate trying to better understand what future enlargement, most prominently of Ukraine, would mean in practice and what kind of implications (including financial ones) this would actually have, on which there is no data and analysis now. Nevertheless, how the situation is often portrayed is that there needs to be some kind of compromise and trade-off made to actually succeed in reforming enlargement policy and delivering for our closest partners and allies in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans, to which at least one part of the coalition government seems to be open and willing to listen.

The issue of internal institutional reforms of the EU correlated with enlargement has already become in Poland one of the most divisive topics concerning European affairs. The opposition parties, PiS and Confederation, are vehemently against any change of voting system in the EU. In fact, PiS prefers to reverse the current level of internal political integration by returning certain competencies, including widening of veto powers, to member states. The increase of majority voting is presented by PiS as strengthening Germany's domination over the EU and for Poland only as a loss of independence. Meanwhile, PiS defines Germany as the main enemy of Poland, representing as serious a threat to Polish independence as Russia does. The current opposition is accused by PiS of being the 5th column of Germany. However, the Civic Coalition and Third Way, the two biggest political forces in the new government, express their scepticism towards treaty changes too.

The correlation between internal reforms of the EU and further enlargement may have a negative spillover on the positive attitude of Poles towards the accession of new states to the Union. In the context of this intertwining, it is worth mentioning that during the electoral campaign PiS and Confederation criticised Ukraine for its close cooperation with Germany. PiS even blamed Kyiv for alleged attempts to change the government in Poland undertaken in collaboration with Berlin. In fact, certain politicians of PiS presented Ukraine as a German vassal state putting into question the benefits for Poland of a possible accession of Ukraine to the EU.³³

³¹ Suzanne Lynch, Germany's Baerbock pitches radical EU reform as bloc eyes expansion, Politico Europe, 2. 11. 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-annalena-baerbock-radical-eu-reform-eu-commission/>.

³² FIIA, «EU reform is back on the agenda», May 2023, https://www.fiia.fi/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/bp363_eu-reform-is-back-on-the-agenda.pdf.



Conclusions

The paper shows that there is a rather broad and deep understanding of the shared challenges and opportunities between Czechia and Poland, which should clearly illustrate the potential of cooperation between both in the future. This is the case under the condition that both partners also share the political will to engage and jointly promote the voice of Central and Eastern European countries whose positions overlap to a large extent, especially vis-à-vis bigger NATO member states such as Germany, France, the US and the UK. This kind of exchange and its practical results can be seen, for example, at the policy planning level of MFAs, in which Czechia, Poland, Germany and France engage for more than a year.

At the same time, the policy paper tried to outline five concrete areas of cooperation as well as challenges and dilemmas in each one of them, which require further attention and dialogue between both parties. The existing format of the governmental strategic dialogue and the 2+2 format of foreign and defence ministries discussions' should be employed to find practical ways to formulate common visions and proposals for Brussels and the level of EU27.

Finally, even if it is obvious that both countries approach Eastern Europe and the interconnected issues from a very similar standpoint, it is evident that without a more proactive approach, especially to the ongoing topic of the Future of Europe, which has been marginalised in both countries and their societies, it is practically impossible for Poland and Czechia to play a more significant role and become anything else than a policy recipient, instead of shapers and policy-makers, which is going to be of crucial importance for the whole region.

This is particularly the case for enlargement, for which there is a historical chance of making progress, as long as there is a strong coalition of countries who would advocate for change at the level of EU27, bring the agenda and concrete proposals, such as for the gradual integration process within the EU, which would bring concrete benefits for the enlarging countries (and stimulate change and public demand for more). Without a substantial support base, there is practically no chance of succeeding either inside the EU when making the Union fit for future changes, or of stimulating the reform process in the partner countries with sufficient funds, technical support as well as know-how and expertise too.

³³ See, for instance:

Prawdziwy cel Kijowa? Waszczykowski nie ma złudzeń: Ukraina w ostatnich wystąpieniach gra na zmianę rządu w Polsce, Wpolityce, 9.8.2023, <https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/657888-waszczykowski-ukraina-gra-na-zmiane-rzadu-w-polsce>.; Prof. Żurawski vel Grajewski, Postawa Ukrainy to linia polityczna, Do Rzeczy, 3.8.2023, <https://dorzeczy.pl/opinie/466830/zurawski-vel-grajewski-postawa-ukrainy-to-przyjeta-linia-polityczna.html>.



Thus, Czechia and Poland should together be engaged in the following:

Recommendations

- Prepare together a long-term holistic strategy and corresponding action plans for their Eastern policies, which will take into account internal developments (including challenges such as Trump's return to the White House, Le Pen's victory in France) within the EU, NATO and in Eastern Europe, South Caucasus, Central Asia and Russia and a new order emerging in Northern Eurasia, including the rise of China and Turkey and the decline of Russia.

- Promote closer common understanding of future key challenges and work out comprehensive and detailed measures (road maps, scenarios, etc.) that would address them coming from a tandem of both countries, which should be supported by other countries from the CEE on an *ad hoc* (and thematic) basis, including by investing in regional consultations and participation at the government's level, holding regular coordinations and investing in meetings of regional experts.

- The tandem model should serve as a template for Polish-Czech engagement with key partners in NATO and the EU (especially with the US, Germany, France, Canada, the UK, the Netherlands and Scandinavia) in various multilateral formats. These multi-angles should be organised around as concrete and practical as possible agendas (tool boxes) addressing the key issues in the Eastern regions.

- Czechia and Poland should especially engage in the development of policy and trust building in the approach towards Eastern Europe, particularly in a Tetragon format with Berlin, Paris and Kyiv. Their cooperation should focus particularly on such topics as Ukraine's reconstruction, military provisions, support in energy and other means of interconnectedness and the people-to-people touch relevant for Ukraine's refugees, which might be useful and synergetic for all parties involved

- Build alliances, bridges, regional coalitions, among the CEE countries (for example Bucharest Eight - B8, especially with Romania and Baltic states), which would contribute to stronger ties and create better advocating positions at the EU level and vis-à-vis the EU institutions, primarily the European Commission.

- Present a new vision for the Eastern Partnership adapting it to the new reality in Eastern Europe. The EaP should be utilised as a platform of regional cooperation and a role model for other regions, including most prominently Central Asia, and as a waiting room to candidate status. As part of the new Eastern Strategy, the future of the European approach towards Russia, which has been stuck for many months at the EU members' level, should be also added to the picture. This should be centred around a new boost for the Euro-Atlantic orientation for Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia and prioritising their access to the EU, and where relevant also NATO.



- Push for a more strategic approach, financial commitment and long-term commitment to Ukraine's support, which would be based on an understanding of investing not only in our own security and resilience, but also in one of NATO's and EU's future member states, which needs to withstand Russian aggression at all costs.

- Invest in building up the EU's military capacity to respond to the ongoing Russian aggression and build up the defence and deterrence measures on the eastern flank of the EU, while also promoting closer ties and security cooperation with the United States and NATO. This should work with the new EU Defence Industrial Strategy and significantly boost military production, of which both Czechia and Poland are significant parts. From the point of view of the bilateral tandem, the EU can also add value in prioritising the civilian part of the security and resilience-building, and - for example - investing in infrastructure to enable military mobility between various regions of Europe.

- Energy dependency and decoupling (as well as de-risking) in relations with Russia should finally take place not only in Czechia and Poland, but across the whole of the EU. Prague and Warsaw should boost their investment in interconnectedness and building up new connections in energy infrastructure, transport as well as digital and other domains, which would become part of the north-south axis placing their bilateral cooperation in a wider continental context.

- Boost the regional diplomatic and political presence in the wider North Eurasian context, especially in Central Asia, which due to its intertwining with China, Russia, Turkey, Iran and the Black Sea region requires our much greater attention and a more systematic approach to the cultivation of ties.


- Relaunch the group of Friends of Enlargement, which would be balancing the approach to Eastern Europe and Western Balkans and serve as a pan-European network wishing to promote and speed up the enlargement process. This also means that both Poland and particularly Czechia need to invest in domestic consensus building, especially among the wider public, and an analysis of the practical impact of enlargement (audit) on their societies. At the EU level, both countries need to bring the right arguments, beyond the financial implications that can be potentially hijacked by anti-European forces.

- Invest resources in building a stronger expert and knowledge-based Czech-Polish powerhouse on Eastern Europe and the wider Northern Eurasia region involving partners from around the world, which would be based on regular think-tank and civil society as well as state officials exchange and create a sustainable flow of ideas and information between both countries, which would help them to become a real know-how hub. It also requires a self-critical audit of our own assumptions, perceptions, prejudices and stereotypes concerning the above-mentioned regions.




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