
Chapter 1

Introduction – the Conceptual Framework, and the International and Internal Political Context of the Czech Foreign Policy in 2015

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When analysing the last year (2014), the authors of this publication concluded that it was the most significant year in terms of foreign policy for the entire monitored period and, to a large extent, for the entire period of existence of the independent Czech Republic in general. The trend towards the weakening of the multilateral and open global order and towards the decrease of trust in this order deepened more in 2015. It is a purely negative phenomenon for a country that has the size and abilities of the Czech Republic. Therefore, the key question for us is still the same: How and why does the Czech Republic react to the challenges coming from the outer regional-international-global environment, and how has it itself tried to influence this environment? Does the Czech Republic contribute with its foreign policy to the cultivation or at least to the sustainment of the multilateral global order or not? In this context, we further ask the following questions: In which areas and why did the Czech Republic implement a proactive, a reactive or “any” policy, and how successful was it? In which areas did the polarization and politicization of the foreign-policy agenda occur, and what was the influence of these factors on the Czech foreign policy?

To answer these questions, the team of authors has been working with the same conceptual framework for the last three years, and thus we are presenting here the conceptual framework from the editions from the previous years:

CATEGORIZATION OF THE WAYS THE CZECH REPUBLIC ACTS IN ITS FOREIGN POLICY

The matrix of possible foreign-policy “actions”:

	Offensive	Neutral	Cooperating
Proactive action	Imposing one's own policy	Mediation	Creation of a common policy
No action	Ignorance	Lack of interest	Fare dodger
Reactive action	Active resistance against external policy	Adaptation to external policy	Complete acceptance of external policy

On the first axis, we differentiate proactive action, “no” action and reactive action in foreign policy. On the second axis, we differentiate offensive, neutral and cooperating foreign policies according to the attitude of the country towards the international environment.

Proactive – No action – Reactive

A *proactive* foreign policy is initiated by the country's own ideas on how foreign policy should look. Here the ideas on the meaning and purpose of foreign policy are based on the national, domestic sources rather than on the external stimuli or external expectations. The risk of a proactive foreign policy is the underestimation and marginalization of external limitations and opportunities.

A proactive policy may marginalize not only the external limitations and opportunities but also the external expectations. The proactive foreign policy can then remain misunderstood, and the actor may thus come into a conflict with the external expectations and with the role it plays within the wider international community.

A *reactive* foreign policy formulates its goals in response to the identifiable strategy or policy of another actor. Here the external stimuli are the very trigger for the formulation of foreign policy; they are not only the background for the formulation of foreign policy. The mere fact that the Czech Republic, in its formulation of its foreign policy, takes into account the external environment (the interests, strategies, and priorities of other actors), is not enough to allow us to classify its foreign policy as a reactive one. Each foreign-policy strategy (active, passive or reactive) somehow reflects the external environment. It is typical for a reactive foreign policy that it relates to a particular and clearly articulated foreign-policy strategy of an external actor.

It is also typical for a reactive foreign policy that the political elites attribute great relevance to the strategies or policies of other actors, against which they negatively delimit themselves, or which they transpose. Also, a reactive foreign policy is usually associated with small countries.

A *reactive* foreign policy may take the form of a negative delimitation against the policy and initiative of an external actor, or it may take the form of a neutral adaptation or complete acceptance of the external policy (positive response). The general theory of foreign policy talks about adaptive behaviour and in European studies, there may be an analogous process of Europeanization (*top-down*).

For a *no-action* policy, it is typical that it does not respond to internal or external stimuli. An absence of internal stimuli may be explained by a lack of consensus or a lack of interest of the political elites and/or the public in foreign policy. An inactive foreign policy may also be a consequence of a conflict between the domestic ideas about the role and meaning of the foreign policy of a particular country, and external expectations.

We believe that “no action” in foreign policy, i.e. the inability to adopt an attitude in response to an external stimulus and the inability to formulate one’s own strategy, should be studied as a peculiar phenomenon. The analysis of what is ignored in foreign policy is often more beneficial than the study of those policies that are articulated by politicians, and of what is being done. Passivity, no action, and ignorance remain a neglected topic in social sciences in general.

Offensive – Neutral – Cooperating

On the second axis, we distinguish offensive, neutral and cooperating foreign policies. An *offensive* policy is characterized by confrontational behaviour towards the external environment. The negative delimitation towards the external environment can be a consequence of the country’s active efforts to impose its own idea of a certain policy on the external world. An offensive policy can also be a consequence of a negative response to external stimuli. In general, a confrontational policy tries to sustain its own policy or even to enforce it toward (or force it on) the external world.

A *neutral* policy stands somewhere between an offensive and a cooperating policy. We should not confuse neutrality with passivity. Neutrality may be manifested in its active form when a country is actively involved in forming its own policy, e.g. through mediation. Neutrality may also have a passive form when a country does not have an articulated position toward a certain policy and, at the same time, it is not interested in it. Neutrality may also have a reactive form when a country responds to external stimuli using neutral adaptation – the partial acceptance of the external stimuli (by a politician).

A *cooperating* policy can come in three forms: active, passive, and reactive. An active cooperating policy means that a country acts as a leader: it actively proposes a common policy. The impulses for an active cooperating policy include state stimuli (rather than responses to the external environment), but in this case, the country does not promote its idea offensively (by forcing it on others), but it rather looks for and builds coalitions and a wider support for its proposals. A passive cooperating policy corresponds with the position of a fare dodger. The fare dodger is passive and not active, does not respond to external stimuli and does not develop his or her own activity. The policy of a fare dodger, however, is cooperating at the same time – even if the actor remains passive, they realize the benefits of the common policy. Otherwise, they could not travel. Finally, a reactive cooperating policy has the form of a complete acceptance of the external policy.

In terms of the process of foreign policy formation, it can be normatively stated that the best policy is the *active-cooperating* policy, followed by mediation, and the

worst is the *ignorant* one and that of the *fare dodger*; in accordance with the circumstances and the specific agenda, there are other modes of behaviour between these two poles.

POLITICIZATION

Another major issue is the factors that have contributed to the adopting of one of these positions in individual cases. Except for the generally understandable dimension of capacities for the performance of the given policy, which is a natural part of each analysis, we also wonder if any of the above-mentioned types of behaviour are influenced by the politicization of the given area and by polarization.

Therefore, the unifying questions are 1) whether entire areas of the analysis or its parts are politicized, not politicized or depoliticized; and 2) whether we can experience a polarization of political views in the given area. Below we describe the conceptualization of the key terms (politicization and polarization).

Politicization

The term politicization is, despite its frequent use in political sciences, defined quite vaguely; the team of authors inclines to the following definition:

“Politicization means the extent to which a particular foreign-policy topic is a part of a public and political debate and a part of the decision-making in open political processes.”

For our purposes, the political processes *include the presence of the topic in the public life and media but also the presence of the topic in the election debates and programmes of political parties, in the debates of both Chambers of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, particularly in connection with the legislative process, in the governmental statements, in public opinion polls, etc.*; this means the presence of the topic in all channels of the democratic decision-making processes that we have interventionally monitored in this publication, from the electorate through the political parties and legislative power to the executive power (and eventually also the judicial power when, in rare cases, the foreign-policy acts or standards get there), but at the same time also *the non-governmental sector if it influences the political processes (e.g. advocacy activities, protests)*. This extent can be logically operationalized only relatively in relation to other domestic and/or foreign issues, but it is *absolutely* possible to indicate the presence of the topic among the given actors.

Polarization

The third concept is polarization, which will be monitored in the first part of the book (the political and conceptual background of the Czech foreign policy) as well as in the part that deals with the actors, where we will ask if the polarization is institutional (it is typically institutional in cases of the Parliament versus the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Industry and Trade versus the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence versus the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Government Office

of the Czech Republic versus the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, etc., or at the level of trade unions if one gets access to such an opinion or information).

The reasons for polarization include the non-institutional (content, political), institutional (the way the parties and the Parliament are organized and are functioning) and cultural ones (e.g. the level of political culture in the communication and in the relationships among the Deputies from different parties). The polarization of elites dramatically changes the way how the opinions of the public are formed. It stimulates the party reasoning/logic of attitudes, which subsequently leads to the fact that the political attitudes are controlled more by the party affiliation; it strengthens the confidence in the attitudes, and it does not take into account the factual arguments. The attitudes of the politicians form the political/ideological framing of issues, and thus they influence the decision-making of the still indecisive public: if the political elites talk about the topics and combine it with their own ideas, the public then focuses on these ideas when the given issue is being judged. In principle, for the purpose of the analysis, we consider the topic to be polarized

- when the determining political actors (especially the political parties and their leaders) and the institutional actors (the president, the prime minister, ministers, the ministries, etc.) have a consistent position in regard to which the particular actors unite and identify themselves with each other, and the principle of internal discipline is promoted in the decision-making (instead of factual arguments, but the solidarity with the party is still promoted);
- when the political/institutional actors insist not on merely different but contradictory opinions (e.g. for or against the expansion of the EU), the de facto debate is missing and the policy is blocked, or it goes in one direction that significantly changes after the change of the governments (discontinuity of foreign policy);
- when it is not the particularities that are important but the fundamental direction of the policy (e.g. a principled openness towards Russia versus anti-Russian attitudes, and it is not the extent of the support of exports to Russia or of the visa-free contacts that is important here), or the fundamental individual act (e.g. whether we are for or against the radar in Brdy, or the Fiscal Pact);
- when the period of such an attitude has lasted at least throughout the period monitored by us (for the calendar year), or longer if that is possible.

GLOBAL TRENDS

One of the overarching topics of the whole publication is the issue of how the Czech Republic, through its foreign policy, responds to the challenges coming from the external environment, and how (or if) it itself actively contributes to the cultivation or at least to the sustainment of the multilateral, inclusive, and liberal order. We start with the belief that the multilateral order is the one that provides the best conditions for the international political position of a middle-sized country such as the Czech Republic.

Like in the previous years, the first chapter is again devoted to brief and necessarily simplified outlines of the main trends in international policy that can be, at the same time, considered to be crucial also for the Czech Republic.

The year 2015 further deepened the trend of the global order of “moving away from the West” and the trends of the placing of the international political decision-making process outside the multilateral structures of the 20th century and, in general, the erosion of the reliance on the rules of the law in the international arena. This “*crisis of the order is often perceived as something highly abstract, not specific and not graspable, and its regional effects are clearly visible, from ‘the little green men’ occupying the territory of an independent state in the eastern part of NATO and the EU to the proto-state fundamentalist actors, such as ISIL with its ambitions to change the political map of the Middle East and its surroundings*”.² The particular manifestations of the weakening of the global order took multiple forms in 2015. Like in the year 2014, the inner uncertainty and disunity of the European Union were abused by the strategic rivals of Europe. Russia transformed into a direct challenger of the post-war ordering in general and, with its aggressive behaviour towards Ukraine in 2014, it also contributed to the worsening of the environment in Europe. There was no sign of normalization in the relation with Russia; on the contrary, we can see a tendency towards the paradigm of “a new cold war” in it. Also in response to this development in 2015, the re-militarization of the European continent and the development of its defence capabilities, the gradual abandonment of the intervention identity of NATO, and the orientation toward the defence of territory as the main goal of the Alliance continued.³ Daniel Keohane, in his contribution to the annual analyses called *Strategic Trends* (The Centre for Security Studies, Zurich), draws attention to the important European security and defensive trend that is not evident at first glance, but that can be a fundamental aspect of the erosion of the European multilateralism – it is about regionalization and re-nationalization of the defensive cooperation. The individual cooperations of the national countries in defence and security projects are gradually gaining importance, while the multilateral institutions fight for their relevance in this term.⁴

In 2015, for the first time in a few decades, Europe directly felt the consequences of the war conflicts in the Middle East. The long-term tension in the Middle East, conserved for many years by the autocratic regimes, prolapsed in 2014 in the form of the creation of the so-called Islamic State and the announcement of the world caliphate. The conflict in Iraq and Syria, together with the fifth year of the war in Libya, which is a dysfunctional and fallen state, set in motion millions of refugees, who are heading for the neighbouring countries, and in 2015 they went further to Europe through various different migration routes. This so-called refugee crisis in the second half of 2015 basically dictated the nature of the political debates as well as the politicians as such throughout Europe. Europe and the European Union – at least in the short term – came out weakened and indeterminate from this crisis. In addition, the externalization of the solutions for the migration problems (e.g. the agreements with countries neighbouring the EU on cooperation in detaining the refugees) severely takes away from the value base of the European project and makes the European values even less credible.⁵ This multiple and multi-annual decrease of the reliance on the EU is one of

the main challenges for the Czech domestic policy, but also for the Czech diplomacy and foreign policy.

The absence of a firm security architecture and of the “bilateralization” of the defence and security has been a long-term aspect in the development of the Asian-Pacific region. In 2015, this area also recorded further militarization resulting from the growing strategic rivalry between the USA and China. Rudolf Fürst, in his article about the security development, wrote that “*China, as an unstable actor, in terms of being a central driving force in the region, has already left the low-profile policy of ‘the theory of the peaceful growth of China’, and it is passing into an open assertive role of a superpower, in its rhetoric as well as its action. The territorial claims against the Asian neighbours are an indirect call to the USA and its allies, and the proof that Beijing is systematically moving towards the gradual establishment, de facto, of its own version of the Monroe Doctrine but without an explicit naming of this claim or presenting it in a way that would exacerbate the tension with the USA.*”⁶ This conflicting trend, in which the Chinese activities in the South Chinese Sea begin to evoke a hybrid war, is also the manifestation of the unilateralism of the main actors (especially China)⁷ and the proof of the insufficient relevance of multilateral frameworks.

According to *Strategic Trends*, one of the most disturbing trends of the present time is the renaissance and modernization of the nuclear arsenals of the nuclear superpowers that is indirectly proportional to the decreasing relevance of the nuclear arms control, whether on a bilateral or a multilateral level.⁸ The more common vocabulary of the security experts even includes the scenario of the use of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe or in its neighbourhood. The expectations and the reality of the nuclear agreement with Iran, which was concluded in December 2013, are still inconsistent; in an ideal case, this would lead to the avoidance of the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the region, but, according to the experts, it may lead to the exact opposite and, at the same time, to the strengthening of Iran as a regional superpower.

The efforts of the global management were at least expressed at the Paris Climate Change Conference in December 2015, which – despite a certain vagueness – prepared the basic global political framework for the fight with people causing climate changes and global warming.

Like in 2014, we have to mention the fact that the global multilateral order in 2015 adapted to the new, often undemocratic superpowers or new non-state actors. The old as well as the new superpowers enforce their priorities in a more assertive way and on a unilateral basis. This happens partly *within* the existing order, not exclusively without it, but the rules are modified according to the superpowers’ own preferences. The global liberal order and its “western” rules, therefore, have only a limited impact, and the attractiveness of the liberal and democratic norms has been further weakened. A large part of international affairs thus has moved into the parallel, non-multilateral area, so we can see the parallel and more dangerous development of the direct impeachment of the relevance of the multilateral order. The signs of such decay include the setbacks in the multilateral business dealings, the mercantilist business practices, the weak macroeconomic surveillance, the increasing interstate contest for resources, the fragmentation of countries (and also of the EU) along the ethnic or national lines,

or the inability to deal with the newly emerging issues, such as the above-mentioned nuclear threats.⁹ In the last version of this chapter, it was stated that “*under these conditions, it is imperative for a small country to utilize all the potential to strengthen the “smart” multilateral dealings that primarily include foresight, predictability, and reliability, as an international partner as well as the ability to consensually or at least clearly proactively define one’s own foreign-policy priorities.*”⁹ The analysis for the year 2014 was not favourable in this regard: “*For a long period of time, we have stated that this ‘smart’ dealing has not been successfully set up in the Czech Republic, mainly because of the deep domestic political division inside the Czech Republic, the institutional and personal rivalries but also because of the non-transparent interests that influenced the external as well as internal policy.*” How did the Government of Bohumil Sobotka act in this regard in its second year of its foreign-policy activities?

At the beginning of 2014, the new Government took over the Czech diplomacy with two laudable goals: firstly, to awaken the Czech foreign policy from a sleepy lethargy into which it had fallen after joining the European Union, and secondly, to make it more predictable and thus also more effective. Unfortunately, the *form* of the awakening surpassed the *content* for some reason, and the consequence was that the new leaders of the Czech diplomacy could explain their positions on the domestic as well as the international scenes only with extreme difficulties. Along with the turbulent international environment and non-consensual and conflictual behaviour of directly elected President Miloš Zeman, this fact meant that the year 2014 recorded a record level of unpredictability and obscurity of the Czech foreign policy.¹¹

In 2015, the turbulent domestic political debate on the values of the Czech foreign policy, which had dominated in the domestic political context in 2014, gradually calmed down. During the year, the Government adopted a few conceptual and strategic documents, particularly *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Czech Republic (Koncepce zahraniční politiky České republiky)*, the upgraded version of the security strategy and the concept of the work in the EU. In the foreign-policy concept¹², the authors, on an analytical basis, talk about the change of the global power relations and about the shift towards multi-polarity, the increased contest for resources, the increasing number of fallen countries, and the general weakening of multilateralism and international law. Compared to the previous concept from 2011, the new document is not directly linked to the sustainment or development of the liberal world order, but the preamble states that the most effective way of solving global issues is again multilateralism. In the concept, multilateralism is not considered to be a mere tool of foreign policy, but it has the elements of “moral multilateralism” (see the chapter by Jan Blažek in this publication), and then it also places a strong emphasis on the international law and the international organizations in the field of safety. Despite this, the concept does not bring a clear and robust strategy of the Czech multilateral policy. The concept is a document that, compared to the discussions that had preceded its approval, is continual and quite consensual.

The turbulent international development (the situation in Ukraine and the onrush of war refugees and migrants) that directly hit Europe caused tensions that strengthened the polarization and politicization of the domestic context of the Czech foreign

policy. The chapter *The Media Context of the Czech Foreign Policy* (Vlastimil Nečas and David Chudoba) demonstrates this statement in the most distinctive polarization framework in the media, which is named “a sovereign state versus the EU” and which uses the traditional polarization of us versus them and expresses a negative attitude and resistance to the dictates from outside. The inputs of President Zeman into the political context of foreign policy formation in 2015 were even more destructive than in 2014; in 2015, the President got the position of the main critic of the union migration policy, but he also adopted some key anti-union attitudes in general - exactly on the mentioned polarization axis “us versus them”, which is in direct conflict with his original “pro-European” political programme.

The calming of the political debate is described in the chapter *The European Dimension of the Czech Foreign Policy* (Vít Beneš), which emphasizes the positive fact that the coalition abstained from the crucial inter-coalition conflicts of the European political parties. The polarization of opinions on the refugee crisis also hits the Czech political scene, mainly in the disputes between Prime Minister B. Sobotka and President M. Zeman, but also partially inside the coalition and ČSSD itself. The year 2015 was not only the year of the polarization of the Czech opinion spectrum on the EU, but also the year of deepened politicization, and all this took place under the conditions of the decreasing trust of the public in the project of the European integration. Vladimír Handl notes that “*the long-term ignorance of what the EU actually means has gradually changed to the rejection of the EU in the Czech Republic under the influence of chaining crises and in the situation of missing political leadership*” (see the chapter *The Federal Republic of Germany in the Czech Foreign Policy*). The Czech actions on the Union level can be characterized as a mixture of *indifference* to the particular policy among the political parties, and *the adaptation, and formation of common policy* in the partial sectoral policies. In the key issues of the year 2015 (Russia, the Greek financial crisis, and migration), it was then *the adaptation to the external policy or the active resistance to the external policy*.

In the chapter on the security and defence dimensions, the authors (Ondřej Ditych and Jan Eichler) devote considerable space to the strengthening of the conceptual and strategic background of the Czech foreign policy. They warn (like the chapter on Europe) of the deepening politicization of the security agenda that had been strengthened by the politicization and securitization of the migration agenda and, in connection with this, they even appeal to the caution about the risks of *securitocracy*, which manifests itself, for example, in the form of normalization and broad adaptation of the uniqueness of the security situation. The security chapter also deals with the non-constructive behaviour of President Zeman, who, according to the authors, lived in “*a different universe of facts*” than the other representatives of the executive power. But in terms of final negotiations, the authors state that like in 2014, there is the existence of a further shift towards the more positively tuned reactive type of behaviour that they characterize not as proactive, but as reactive, but it is still about a more constructive *adaptation* with some elements of pro-activity, especially within NATO.

In the neighbouring and regional relations, we can see a quite precipitous development of political context. In the case of *Germany*, V. Handl further talks, for the year

2015, about minimum politicization, even in the case of “big issues”, such as the EU or security, which did not resonate in the political debate. It related only to the issue of migration, which had been related to Germany and Chancellor Angela Merkel and which had reached a high level of politicization.

In the political field, there was some politicization of this issue, but most of the parliamentary parties agreed on the rejection of the German approach to the solution of the migration situation (one exception was, for example, the Minister of Human Rights, Jiří Dienstbier). Thus, the polarization related rather to the public than the political field when, according to V. Handl, the German issue was discussed in the Czech media in a polarized form and in a much more vigorous way than in the past. At the same time, the author points to the phenomenon of the interconnection of the nationalistically oriented groups in the region and the support of these powers in Germany on the part of the Czech nationalists. The depoliticization of the German agenda contributed to the significant development of the practical and pragmatic cooperation, so the Government of B. Sobotka created a *proactive and cooperating* policy, but in terms of migration the Government, as already mentioned, sustained the policy of *active rejection*, and it wanted to compensate this by a *cooperating* policy in other fields, such as the protection of the external border of the EU, the sustainment of Schengen or the help given to the refugees in the conflict areas. The increasing level of politicization (and the greater interest of the political representatives) and the gradual polarization are mentioned by Michal Kořan in the chapter *The Visegrad Cooperation, Poland, Slovakia and Austria in Czech Foreign Policy*. The polarization of the issue of Central Europe, which was visible in 2014, was partly muted, but the polarization of the opinions continued in the public and the media. The Czech Central-European policy, to a greater extent than in the previous years, was seeking for a *pro-active, cooperating* attitude leading to the formation of a common regional policy. It was due to the Czech presidency in the Visegrad Group and also the generally moderate attitude to the dominant international political issues that were supported by the Czech Government in comparison with the other regional partners.

In 2015, the relations with *the United States* were accompanied by increased polarization in the political and public fields, with some exceptions that were not politicized. The author of the corresponding chapter, Jakub El-Ahmadieh, notes that the USA continued to act as a key ally of the Czech Republic, especially in the field of security, but in the Czech policy we can see an apparent disunity of the related attitude, mainly due to the behaviour of President M. Zeman. According to the authors Lukáš Tichý and Nikita Odintsov, in the relation with Russia, the Czech diplomacy, at the political and security level, turned to the Europeanization of its attitude and thus to the *adaptation to external policy*; but at the economic level, it supported mainly a *proactive policy*, while the context of the Czech and Russian relations, in terms of domestic policy, was *politicized, securitized as well as polarized*. In relation to *the Eastern-European countries* in general (Lucia Najšlová), compared to the year 2014, there was an alleviation of the polarization and also a reduction of the politicization potential of this issue. The most polarizing steps of the Czech political parties towards the Eastern-European countries (and mainly towards Ukraine) were – as in some other

relations – taken by President Zeman. Then Najšlová describes the Czech policy as a *reactive* one, and even if the Czech Republic tried to jointly form the European policy, it did not set higher goals, such as the continuation in the previously agreed priorities – the association process and visa liberalization. The higher level of politicization was visible in the region of *the Western Balkans* (Tomáš Dopita), again because of the refugee crisis and the so-called Western-Balkan migration route. But the issue was not significantly polarized; a high degree of polarization was visible only in the issue of the independence of Kosovo, but in the discussions in 2015, this was polarized more than in the previous year. The author of the related chapter also notes that the actors of the Czech foreign policy continued in the proactive support of this process and in the passive adaptation to the policy of the conflict between Macedonia and Greece. Also, the issue of *the Middle East* was, in the domestic political context, viewed primarily through the prism of the refugee crisis that contributed to the unprecedented politicization and polarization of the debate about the region. The topic of migration was discussed several times even in the Parliament. There was an increase in the Islamophobic and anti-migration as well as anti-union initiatives. According to the authors of the related chapter (Marek Čejka, Michaela Ježová, and Bronislav Bechyňský), the public as well as the political debates were chaotic, highly emotional, and not very rationally led and President Zeman interfered with them unilaterally and populistically. In the field of the Czech Republic's own execution of policy towards this region, however, the authors talk mainly about a proactive and cooperating attitude.

The bilateral relations with *France and Great Britain* in 2015 remained without a greater politicization and polarization potential and, in the spirit of the cooperating policy, without any major controversial issues. Of course, the domestic professional and also the political debate were influenced by the issue of the British referendum on the exit from the EU and by the issues connected with the Islamist terror in France, but these issues did not influence the debate of the parties about the bilateral relations to these countries. The exemption was the negotiation about the so-called British exemptions in case Britain remains in the EU, and the British proposals, especially those that relate to the free movement of the workforce, and these brought increased political interest on the Czech side.

Rudolf Fürst, in his chapter devoted to *China* and the region of *the Far East*, characterizes the Czech policy as a *proactive* one (particularly in relation to China and Korea); he defines the policy towards China as a polarizing and gradually politicized one. In contrast, *Sub-Saharan Africa* was completely outside of the political and public interest in 2015 (Kateřina Rudincová), but this field is discussed more in the new concept of the Czech foreign policy. Also, a very low degree of politicization and low polarization (also compared to the previous years – and particularly in relation to Cuba) characterize the domestic context of the *Latin-American* parties. Martin Hrabálek highlights the increasing interest of the Czech business entities in this region, which is also visible in some departmental activities.

Despite the deepening crisis of multilateralism, Jan Blažek, the author of the chapter *Multilateral Dimension of the Czech Foreign Policy*, has not found signs of any higher interest in, or politicization or polarization of this agenda (with the exception

of some traditional conflicts among the *autonomists*, *Atlanticists* or *Europeanists*, but these were not a significant topic in 2015 in the public or political debates). The author of the chapter characterizes the dealing of the Czech Republic as proactive in the search for common policy in the field of human-right multilateralism, and then he points to the higher degree of Europeanization in the field of security multilateralism and thus also to *the adaptation to the external policy* with elements of proactive behaviour (e.g. in the field of nuclear weapons control). But this behaviour is not based on a political interest or political background; according to J. Blažek this is “*an inert tendency, primarily in the hands of experts from permanent missions and partial unions*”.

The year 2015 was already the third year in which “*the support for the external economic relations of the Czech Republic (VEV) belonged rather to the calmer part of the Czech foreign policy*”, which is mentioned in the chapter *The Economic Dimension of the Czech Foreign Policy* (Štěpánka Zemanová and Miloslav Machoň). The public and the professionals paid increased attention to this issue. The politicization and mainly the polarization of the issue were of a partial nature, and it related to the frequently mentioned dilemma of trade versus human rights. But we can see there also the decreased interest in or the normalization of the opinions that these two dimensions are not in a fundamental conflict of depoliticization and decreasing polarization; according to the authors, they contributed to the desired development of the institutional basis of VEN and also of the tools in this field.

The statement on the limited politicization and polarization is also the result of the analysis of Lukáš Tichý in the chapter *Energy in the External Relations of the Czech Republic*. The issue of energy was present in the debates of the institutional actors (departments and the President); the political parties or movements did not deal with it in 2015, however. As for negotiations, the proactive, cooperating ones prevailed with the formation of a common policy; in the case of energy relations with Russia, the Czech Republic adapted to the external policy as a result of reactive negotiations and its neutral position. According to Jana Peterková and Eliška Tomalová (*The Cultural Dimension of the Czech Foreign Policy*), the cultural and also the public diplomacy enjoyed a livelier interest, but it was rather a departmental and professional interest that was transferred to the public or political field.

The chapter dedicated to *The Developmental Dimension of the Czech Foreign Policy* (Ondřej Horký-Hlucháň) evaluates the political context of this policy by pointing out that there is a continuing decrease of *polarization* and increasing *technocratization* in it, but at the same time Horký-Hlucháň points to the unprecedented increase of *politicization* and even *securitization* of the issue that had emerged in connection with the political argument of the refugee crisis, namely that “there is a need to help in place”. According to the author, the long-term lack of politicization led to insufficient impulses that would have helped, for example, to increase the budget for the developmental cooperation. The politicization and securitization of the issue brought by the year 2015 meant “*unprecedented mobilization of resources reportable as ODA*”, but the chapter avoids the assessment of whether this is a long-term positive phenomenon or a negative one, because, hand in hand with politicization and increased interest, we can see the fragmentation of development cooperation there.

Veronika Bílková, the author of the chapter *The Human-Right Dimension of the Czech Foreign Policy*, also brings a thesis about the calming of the domestic political context in her examined field and shows that there was no revolution in political thinking on human rights. The professional public was involved in the preparation of two basic conceptual documents in 2015 (*The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Czech Republic* and *The Concept of the Support of Human Rights and Transformation Cooperation*), but the majority of the political public was not interested in this process. Compared to the lively debate that accompanied the preparation of the human-right concept in 2014, the very acceptance of the concept was not accompanied by lively political or public interest. Only some of the journeys of President Zeman attracted the interest of the public and political groups.

In general, the issue remained politicized but it underwent depolarization. So, it seems that the year 2014 – with its increased interest in the agenda of human rights – was rather an exception.

CONCLUSION

The Government that was established after the Parliamentary elections (October 2013) had, due to the chronic political crises of the previous governments, a very low threshold of success in terms of cultivation of the foreign-policy environment. The new coalition Government (made up of ČSSD, ANO 2011 and KDU-ČSL) promised mainly a stability that, after many years of coalition conflicts and the intermezzo of the Government without a parliamentary mandate, would offer a meaningful context also for the formation of foreign policy. After two years of functioning of the coalition, we can say that the coalition Government, under the leadership of ČSSD, actually offered this stability.

Also thanks to this, some of the tense debates from 2014 were calmed down in the field of foreign policy. But at the same time, it is true that even in 2015 the foreign policy did not avoid the traditional conflict of the Czech policy when many problems that the diplomacy was dealing with were formed by the political environment itself and often unnecessarily. In particular, President Zeman holds most of the responsibility. Moreover, in 2015 the “domestication” of the foreign-policy issues was further strengthened when a large part of the agenda of the foreign policy was interpreted through the prism of the Czech vision of the so-called refugee crisis. The year 2015 was – despite the highly turbulent environment – the year of normalization of the foreign policy. But this normalization did not mean that the Czech Republic became a predictable and proactive player that, through its acting, helps to sustain or even cultivate the international order. But it is also true that the Czech diplomacy is able to largely take over this role in its immediate regional surroundings. In 2015 the Czech Republic presented itself as a more reliable player in NATO as well. But the assessment of the Czech action in the EU is different, where, in terms of political context, the puzzling impression of it was not mitigated and the country had made this impression in the Union for many years.

With the exception of the immediate region, the Czech Republic is still mostly passive or even defensive, it is often a reactive player and not an active player for most of the time, and the sporadic initiatives and statements that the Czech political representatives come with from time to time, are often not understood at the international level. Therefore, the assessment from the previous year can be applied again: we can say that the Czech Republic, in general, behaves like a fare dodger that utilizes all the benefits of the European or global multilateralism, but it does not contribute to its cultivation because our activity, if there is any, is often of a conflicting nature. Thanks to the higher “normalization” and higher internal political stability, the year 2015 contributed to a calmer and more predictable performance of Czech foreign policy that was interfered with, in the long term, only by the directly elected President Zeman.

Endnotes

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