
Chapter 10

The Balkan Dimension of the Czech Foreign Policy

Tomáš Dopita

Identically to former years, some representatives of the Czech foreign policy continued with the proactive support of the Western Balkans Euro-Atlantic integration in 2015 as the main long-lasting priority of the Balkan dimension within the Czech foreign policy. Identically to former years, the Czech foreign policy was *polarized* and *politicised* in regard to the independence of Kosovo. The normalisation process between Serbia and Kosovo, commenced by the agreement from April 2013, was not reflected in the Czech foreign policy but it was considered by the Czech media. In 2015, the trend of geopolitical competing continued between the EU and Russia; it started in 2014 and functioned as a catalyst for the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans and the counterbalance to the tiredness from the integration in the old EU member states. The general procedure during the integration of the Western Balkans was accompanied by the further development of direct economic and social relationships with all South East European countries, and the economic dimension in 2015 was less affected by former unsuccessful investment expansion of Czech power generating companies in this area. Like in the previous year, the Greek debts played quite a significant and special role in the Czech foreign policy in 2015; it was strongly discussed in the public debate on European and macroeconomic topics but the communication on the official side of the Czech foreign policy was minimal. The new subject of reaction in 2015 from the Czech foreign policy representatives, the public, and media was the wave of migrants passing through the Western-Balkan migration path. In regard to the structure, this chapter focuses on the current solutions and political context of the Czech foreign policy in regard to the Balkan Peninsula. Subsequently, the attention is focused on the agenda and the events in 2015, namely the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans, the economic and social relations with Southeast Europe, the refugee wave and the migration. Prior to the conclusion, the analysis of the media context of the Czech foreign policy has been introduced with respect to individual Balkan countries.

THE BALKAN DIMENSION OF THE CZECH FOREIGN POLICY: BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

Southeast Europe ranks amongst the priority areas of the Czech foreign policy.¹ In 2015, the development of the multilateral relationships continued with the region which is geopolitically divided between the EU and NATO member and non-member states. The Czech Republic has been developing standard partner political relationships with the countries inside the Euro-Atlantic institutions which is accompanied also by increasing economic, social, and cultural exchange. The countries inside the Euro-Atlantic area have been *proactively* supported within the integration in the Euro-Atlantic institutions by the Czech foreign policy representatives.

The relationship with Southeast Europe was detailed in the new *Foreign Policy Concept* adopted by the government on 13. 7. 2015. In comparison with the concept from 2011, the new concept includes the relations with Southeast Europe negotiated in a similar matter, focusing on cooperation, safety, and Euro-Atlantic integration. The new concept focuses on the European integration of the Western Balkans in a greater detail; it explicitly states that “*The Czech Republic supports the integration aims of Serbia, other Western Balkan countries, and Turkey*”, and also defines that “*The Czech Republic shall support the membership of the candidate countries providing they fulfil all conditions of the membership and, at the same time, it shall refuse the creation of additional conditions in the access process. On the other hand, it shall aim to resolve bilateral problems of the member and the candidate states or potentially candidate EU states outside the scope of the extension policy and to support the reform process resulting in the fulfilment of the membership requirements. [...] The Czech foreign policy will also aim to strengthen the political contacts and the resort cooperation between the Czech state administration and the countries of Southeast Europe which do not correspond to the declared meaning of the region for the Czech foreign policy.*”²

The new concept closely defines the conditions for the Czech political support, highlights the necessity to disconnect the bilateral conflicts from the integration process, and informs about the necessity to strengthen the political and institutional relations with Southeast Europe. In relation to the Balkans, the general priorities of security, cooperation, and integration defined in the concept from 2011 were fulfilled fairly well, despite the conflict with Albania due to the “failed” ČEZ investment. Therefore, it is good that the new concept tries to develop the general statements in a detailed specification of the basic parameters of the Czech policy for the following period.

In 2015, the Czech foreign policy representatives focused on the Western Balkan region comprising of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia. An important part of the solutions and the context of the Czech foreign policy considering this region includes quite complicated relationships amongst individual states in the region. Considering the Czech point of view, the most significant conflict in the Western Balkans concerned the independence of Kosovo and the related relations with Serbia, Albania, Russia, the USA, and other countries. The gov-

ernment of the Czech Republic comprising of ODS, SZ, and KDU-ČSL, acknowledged Kosovo in 2008 despite the disagreement of the President and many legislators.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Karel Schwarzenberg commenced diplomatic relations with Kosovo, but President Václav Klaus never acknowledged the independence of Kosovo and never appointed an ambassador for the relations with Kosovo. *The polarisation* in the matter of Kosovo was also reflected in 2015, despite two parliamentary elections and V. Klaus being succeeded by Miloš Zeman. At the practical level, the polarisation was reflected by a failure to perform some tasks initiated by some representatives but *politicised* and blocked by others. For example, the Agreement to avoid double taxation was signed with Kosovo in November 2013, but the Chamber of Deputies selected in October 2013 never ratified the agreement. The group of deputies, particularly Vojtěch Filip (KSČM), Jaroslav Foldyna (ČSSD), and until recently also Kateřina Konečná (KSČM), managed to postpone the agreement negotiations and block the ratification in the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic.³

Another country from the Western Balkans with a complicated statehood which is discussed by the representatives of the Czech foreign policy is Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the internal arrangement according to the Dayton Peace Agreement from November 1995. Approximately from 2006, the international intervention in the political and administration functions of the country started decreasing which was accompanied by a weakened ability to create and promote a unified policy at the level of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Czech representatives reacted to this situation by supporting the country by means of the development cooperation and efforts aimed at its integration and integration of its citizens and economy into the European area.

The third problematic area is the Republic of Macedonia which has been in long lasting conflict with Greece over the title “Macedonia” and the general entitlement to the Macedonian cultural heritage. The Czech Republic uses the term Macedonia for the former Yugoslav Republic in the bilateral relations which indicates the preference of “Macedonian Macedonia” to “Greek Macedonia”. Many other states, including Greece and other EU member states, use the term “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”. Greece has also been blocking the process in the integration of the former Yugoslav Republic in EU and NATO. Euro-Atlantic integration of Macedonia is, therefore, blocked and the Czech representatives had to *adapt* to that. Additionally, from 2006 Macedonia has suffered one political crisis after another which was accompanied by the necessity to search for compromises between the political leaders of Macedonian and Albanian ethnic groups.

In the last decade, the multilateral development of relations resulted in the strengthening of the political, economic, cultural, civil, and social relations between the Czech Republic and individual areas in Southeast Europe. After entering the EU in 2004, Czech companies entered the region *with proactive investment expansion*. However, this expansion turned to be problematic. Larger or smaller business conflicts kept occurring between individual states, particularly due to the investment of the state-owned company ČEZ. This problem was apparent in the relationships with Bulgaria and Romania, and most strongly with Albania. In 2013 and 2014, the Czech repre-

sentatives reacted by threatening the Albanian status of candidate for the membership in the EU due to the failed ČEZ investment (see the former issue of this almanac).

In 2014, an important change occurred within the geopolitical context when the EU entered in the region of Southeast Europe in clear geopolitical competition with the Russian Federation after the Crimea and East Ukraine events.

This *polarisation* of the relations with Russia was transferred to 2015 and it was reflected at the practical level even in the series of the integration decisions considering the Western Balkans states accepted within the EU and NATO after the initiatives from the Great Britain, Germany, and the USA. The Czech representatives have *fully accepted* the shift in the integration dynamics. The change in the geopolitical situation in the region was highlighted by the construction of American Missile Shield Base in Romania in 2015.⁴

In 2015, Southeast Europe became the new focal point of the politicians, media, and the public due to the wave of refugees passing through this region in high number to Western Europe. The reaction to the refugee and migration wave passing through the Western Balkans route and the development within all the above-mentioned topics shall be discussed in the following part of this chapter.

As indicated in the following parts of this Chapter, the Western Balkans migration route and the matter of Kosovo's acceptance are identified as the only topics related to the Balkan dimension of the Czech foreign policy which were discussed in public by the elected political representatives of the Czech Republic, particularly the legislators in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, and President Zeman and Prime Minister Sobotka.⁵ The discussion related to the Balkan foreign policy topics also continued at the events organised, for example, by the Institute of International Relations⁶ and the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University.⁷ A special section of this chapter focuses on the reactions in the media.

THE BALKAN DIMENSION OF THE CZECH FOREIGN POLICY: AGENDA AND EVENTS

Euro-Atlantic integration of Western Balkan

In relation to the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans, the year 2015 was quite interesting and successful. More countries of the Western Balkans moved on within the integration process, and the regional cooperation was further developed. The article further introduces the year 2015 in relation to individual countries of Western Balkan. The end of this part further focuses on some steps accepted within V4.

At the end of 2014, the six-month boycott was terminated by the opposition, and in 2015, the country accepted some reforms required for opening the accession negotiations with the EU. The elections in local councils in June 2015 took place without significant incidents and within the context of the ongoing process of decentralisation of the regional administration; however, the complete independence of the election process was questioned by the OSCE/ODIHR observers (with the participation of the observers from the Czech Republic).⁸ In 2015, Albania also continued developing the

cooperation with its neighbours. In May, Tirana welcomed Aleksandar Vučić, and it was historically the first visit of Serbian Prime Minister in Albania.⁹ Vučić and Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama identified the investment priorities which could help to connect both countries and the whole region. It included particularly the motorway in the Serbia-Albania direction which would go through Kosovo, and also motorway in the direction Croatia–Montenegro–Albania–Greece.¹⁰ After the fight at the football match between the national teams from Serbia and Albania in October 2014 caused by the flag of Great Albania brought above the stadium by a drone,¹¹ and also after mutual teasing of Rama and Vučić in regard to the status of Kosovo,¹² the year 2015 introduced the calming of mutual relations and the acceptance of a more constructive approach.

In 2015, the vivid Czech interest in bringing Albania closer to the EU as well as the interest in the opportunities related to the continual development of the Albanian market and the infrastructure continued. After the elimination of the problem with the investment of ČEZ, we witnessed a series of mutual visits and further multilateral development of relations in 2015.¹³ A notional highlight was the visit of Albanian Prime Minister E. Rama in Prague on 13. 10. 2015; it was accompanied by a business forum and the signature of many documents on mutual cooperation in various areas.¹⁴ The Czech Republic became more noticeable in Albania also due to the small-scale development projects completed by means of the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Tirana. The newly established Slavkov Cooperation comprised of the cooperation of the Czech Republic, Austria, and Slovakia included the project for the development of tourist potential in Dajt National Park in the vicinity of Tirana.¹⁵

In 2015, Serbia also moved on within the European integration and the Czech representatives continued in the development of multilateral relations with Serbia. The conditions for the cooperation with Serbia improved after Serbia started to implement the ambitious administration and macroeconomic reforms and finalised the action plans required for opening the first negotiation chapters.¹⁶ Serbia also started playing an important and constructive role in the whole region when it continued in the standardisation of the relations with Kosovo and in the development and settlement of the relations with other neighbouring states. During the May visit of Serbian Prime Minister in Tirana, Vučić and his Albanian counterpart agreed that the different perceptions of Kosovo should not prevent mutual cooperation of the countries focused on stabilising and developing the whole region.¹⁷ Vučić also focused on the improvement of the relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly the representatives of the Bosniak nation. It happened despite the serious incident at the Genocide Memorial Potočari, which commemorated the events in Srebrenica in summer 1995. When Vučić arrived at the annual commemoration of Srebrenica massacre on 11. 7. 2015, the situation was very tense. On 8th July, the UN Security Council held the vote on the resolution on the twenty-year anniversary of Srebrenica; Great Britain proposed to declare the events from July 1995 as genocide. The resolution was not accepted due to the disagreement of the Russian Federation; China abstained from voting.¹⁸ The UN SC voting resulted in many antagonistic reactions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. It was within this context of the international dispute considering the interpretation of

the event in Srebrenica when Vučić faced the stirred reaction from the crowd; he was attacked and had to be evacuated due to the security reasons. The crowd threw stones, plastic bottles, and other items.¹⁹ The attack on Vučić in the centre of Potočari was criticised from many sides, but Vučić still continued with his conciliatory, quite friendly approach to the representatives of the Bosniak nation and Bosna and Herzegovina.

In 2015, the relationship between Serbia and Croatia was also tense due to the interpretation of the recent history. At the beginning of February, the International Criminal Court turned down the bilateral genocide claim,²⁰ which was accompanied by a new wave of mutual accusations. In 2015, two significant elections took place in Croatia (Presidential in January and Parliamentary in November) when the matters of national awareness and the determination of anti-Serbia and anti-Serbian approach played a significant role.

The attention was also paid to the blockade of vehicles from Serbia imposed by Croatia at the end of September in reaction to the wave of refugees using the Western-Balkan route (see below). The blockade was terminated after the intervention of the EU representatives, particularly the Commissioner of the EU for Foreign Affairs, Frederica Mogherini.²¹

In regard to the European integration, the most important aspect for Serbia in 2015 was the progress in the normalisation of relationships with Kosovo. At the end of August, the Serbian and Kosovo representatives reached breakthrough in important matters related to the implementation of agreement on the normalisation of relations from April 2013, particularly the agreement on the function of the Association of Serb Municipalities, and on matters related to energy, water management, traffic, and on electronic communication. This agreement was crucial for Serbia and it resulted in opening the first chapters on the accession to the EU in December 2015.²² The Czech representatives appreciated this development and tried to support it. Prime Minister B. Sobotka visited Serbia in September in the company of the business mission organised by the Chamber of Commerce of the Czech Republic.²³ Soon, Minister of Foreign Affairs L. Zaorálek welcomed First Deputy Minister of Serbia, Ivica Dačić, in the Czernin Palace and the Ministers discussed particularly the development of bilateral relations and the actual situation in the process of the European integration of Serbia.²⁴ The year 2015 was also important for Kosovo in regard to the European integration. On 27th of October, the representatives of the EU and Kosovo signed and Stabilisation and Association Agreement in reaction to the stabilized relations with Serbia. Kosovo became the last country in the Western Balkans which contractually joined the business relations with the EU. However, the negotiations on visa-free status have not been completed yet, and Kosovo has remained the last country in the region with the visa obligation for entry to the EU.²⁵ In addition to the conclusion of the agreement with Serbia on the matters of functioning of the Association of Serbian Municipalities, telecommunication, power engineering, and the bridge in Kosovo Mitrovica, the evaluation report of EC highlighted the establishment of special court to investigate crimes during the Kosovo conflict.²⁶ The activation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement brought Kosovo closer to the starting point of the European integration. The integration process shall be decided by the fulfilment of general ac-

cession conditions and also further process of normalizing the relations with Serbia. The European integration of Kosovo and Serbia is subjected by the normalization of their mutual relations.²⁷

Kosovo plays a special and important role in Czech foreign policy. On one hand, the Czech army, police, and judiciary significantly contributed to missions KFOR and EULEX and the Czech Government and Ministry of Foreign Affairs actively accepted the policy of Kosovo independence, stabilisation of relations between Pristina and Belgrade, and the European integration of Kosovo. On the other hand, Presidents Klaus and Zeman, and the group of legislators, *actively refused* the policy of Kosovo independence and *ignored* the process of stabilising the relations between Serbia and Kosovo. The controversy of the Czech foreign policy resulted from the general polarisation in regard to the acknowledgment of Kosovo; the Kosovo sovereignty was acknowledged by 108 from 193 UN member states, 23 from 28 EU states, and 24 from 28 NATO states. The polarisation is reflected in the Czech Republic by the high politicization of the relations and the cooperation with Kosovo which is related to the general underdevelopment of the Czech relations with this country. Diplomatic contacts function at the level of *chargé d'affaires*, and the Czech Republic has concluded only one new inter-state contract, i.e. the readmission agreement valid from the beginning of 2013.

In 2015, the blocking of the contract ratification on preventing the double taxation with Kosovo continued. As apparent from the former issues of this book, the current debate on the international contract in the Chamber of Deputies was dominated by depicting Kosovo as an illegitimate formation removed from Serbia in breach of the international law. The approach “Kosovo is Serbia” was opposed by the arguments of economic benefits resulting from suitable conditions for Czech companies in Kosovo. However, the contract was not yet ratified. The Chamber adopted the decision that the negotiations considering this governmental proposal should be interrupted “*until the Minister of Finance and Minister of Foreign Affairs are present*”.²⁸ As a result, the contract negotiation on double taxation with Kosovo was interrupted six times and postponed once.²⁹ The refusal to cooperate with Kosovo in the Chamber of Deputies was supported by the statements of President Zeman on Kosovo and its representatives. Internationally quoted statements were made during the presidential visit in Serbia 2015 when Czech President called the Kosovo President, Hashim Thaci, a war criminal, and Kosovo a weird state with a strong influence of drug cartel.³⁰ The stabilisation of the relations between Serbia and Kosovo developed significantly. Free movement of persons between both countries is possible solely upon submitting an identity card, and the Serbian authorities consider the inclusion of Kosovo in the regional cooperation and the infrastructure projects, see the above-mentioned motorway from Serbia to Albania via Kosovo. Within the Czech context, the normalisation concept was not yet enforced and in 2015, the Czech foreign policy considering Kosovo *was blocked* by the negative approach of some representatives.³¹ Also, Bosnia and Herzegovina achieved a noticeable progress within the European integration in 2015. After local parliamentary elections in October 2014, the British-German initia-

tive by the EU followed with the aim to stimulate the pro-European political reforms by unblocking the validity of the Stabilization and Association Agreement in reaction. This contract was signed in 2008 but its coming into force was postponed by the EU. In the first months of 2015, the governments were constituted at individual levels of governance in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the representatives of 14 various governance structures signed the obligation to develop the European integration.³² In reaction to the obligation, the EU unblocked the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the validity from June 2015. In July, the local representatives accepted the reform steps to be taken in order to make progress within the integration. In the end of 2015, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina Dragan Čović announced that his country should file the application for EU membership³³ (which took place in 15. 2. 2016). The process within the European integration was accompanied by improved cooperation with the neighbouring countries. The shift in the relations was apparent in relations with Serbia, despite the attack on the Serbian Prime Minister on 11 July by stirred crowd at the memorial centre Potočari at Srebrenice. In November 2015, the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina had a joint meeting with the Serbian Government with the focus on economic and human rights issues.³⁴ During 2015, economic growth accelerated and attracted extensive investment in the tourist sector.³⁵ In 2015, the Czech representatives appreciated and supported the development as mentioned by Minister of Foreign Affairs L. Zaorálek during the visit of Bosnia and Herzegovina on 15. 10. 2015.³⁶ Significant and frequently reported, both worldwide and in the Czech Republic, event was the visit of Pope Francis in Sarajevo in June 2015.³⁷

In 2015, Montenegro also proceeded in the integration in the Euro-Atlantic institutions. Montenegro commenced the accession negotiations with the EU in June 2012 and by the end of 2015, it opened 22 of 35 negotiation chapters. An important shift was the December invitation to NATO; the membership in NATO shall represent the fulfilment of long lasting foreign policy goals of Montenegro. In September 2015, the country faced the protests against the government of the Democratic Socialist Party led by Milo Đukanović, who had been in power in the country from 1991. The protests were accompanied by violence and clashes between the demonstrators and the police.³⁸ However, the leading position of Đukanović and his party was not threatened. Montenegro was until recently at the edge of interest of the Czech foreign policy representatives. During recent years, the Czech diplomacy established direct diplomatic representation and the economic relations face dynamic development.

The progress within all the above-defined countries contrasted with the continual paralysis of Macedonian Euro-Atlantic integration. In spring 2015, the leader of the Socialist Party, Zoran Zaev, started publishing transcripts of the telephone tapping of government politicians which included bribes, cheating during elections, and political murders. Long lasting public protests started in reaction to the published transcripts, but the government did not change the situation except for the resignation of two ministers.³⁹ The attention was partially diverted from this problem due to the conflict of security forces with the group of militants in North Macedonian Ku-

manovo,⁴⁰ and by a strong wave of refugees passing via Macedonia towards Western Europe (see below). However, the opposition boycotted the parliament work due to the tapping. In June and July, the political crisis was resolved with the contribution from the representatives of the European Union and the Parliament. The valuation report from the EC on the preparedness of Macedonia to commence the accession talks was very critical.⁴¹ Euro-Atlantic integration does not play a significant role in the Macedonian political life considering the long-lasting blocking by Greece. Local political elites focus more on their own internal power conflicts. The achievement of the compromise on the title of Macedonia is not impossible. Recent statements of Prime Minister Gruevsky or the Greek representatives⁴² create a certain space for negotiation.

The Czech Republic has been developing activities related to the Western Balkans by means of bilateral relations and institutes of the EU and NATO, and also within the regional association V4. On 1. 7. 2015, the Czech Republic took over the annual Presidency in the Visegrad Group from Slovakia, and one of the priorities included also the “*The European policy of neighbourhood, expansion policy, support for transformation and development cooperation – the support for pro-European focus of the countries from East and Southeast Europe*”.⁴³ Prague hosted the traditional conference of V4 and the Western Balkans ministers of Foreign Affairs in November 12–13. Special guests of the meeting were Frans Timmermans, First Vice-President of the European Commission, Goran Svilanović, Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), and the representatives of Croatia, Slovenia, and Great Britain. The conference participants have focused on regional cooperation within the context of European integration. Visegrad Group has so far tried to provide the Western Balkan countries with experience from regional cooperation and to commence stronger cooperation between both regions. A significant step in this direction was taken at the end of the conference when the agreement was signed between all the Western Balkan states on the establishment of the *Western Balkans Fund*.

The Western Balkans Fund shall function based on the model and principles of the International Visegrad Fund with the head office in Tirana. Every member state of this fund shall invest 30,000 EURO annually and the fund shall use the finances for the projects of regional cooperation. V4 Countries shall provide 80,000 EURO for the expert help during the commencement of the fund activity.⁴⁴ The Czech Presidency of V4 became more visible in the Western Balkans by means of a joint article of the Visegrad Group Ministers of Foreign Affairs titled “We offer a helping hand on the way to EU” published on Wednesday 11. 11. 2015 in the main newspapers in the Western Balkans.⁴⁵

Finally, we can summarise that the Euro-Atlantic integration in 2015 was dynamic and successful in all regions of the Western Balkans except for Macedonia. The representatives of the Czech foreign policy continued in the proactive support of this process, and also the polarisation and politicising of relations with Kosovo, and in the passive adaptation to the policy of the conflict between Macedonia and Greece.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Especially after the Czech Republic entered the EU, the relations with Southeast Europe intensified within the economic, social, and cultural aspects. Recent investment expansions of Czech companies in the area of power engineering experienced problems that continued in 2015 too. They included mostly the problems of ČEZ and Energo-Pro in Bulgaria, where the companies were fined by local regulations offices. In reaction to the development, Energo-Pro commenced the arbitrary procedure in Bulgaria at the amount of 54 million EUR.⁴⁶ ČEZ announced a similar intention in 2015;⁴⁷ it faced problems also in Romania, where the company, in reaction to the reduced state contribution for “green” energy, reduced the value of its assets by 6.6 billion CZK.⁴⁸

The problems with the investment in power engineering never prevented the investment and business activities in other branches. For example, AWT Transport received the contract for the transport of 60,000 tons of wood annually between Bosnia and Rumania.⁴⁹ The success was achieved in the sale of vehicles Škoda; e.g. in 2015 in Albania, it became the number one in the market with new passenger vehicles.⁵⁰ In the summer season, Travel Service opened direct flights from Prague to Tirana and Podgorica,⁵¹ which resulted in sharp growth of interest in Albania.⁵² a sad chapter of the increased tourist interest was the murder of a Czech couple during their stay in the mountains in North Albania. This event received strong media coverage both in the Czech Republic and in Albania where it received comments from political representatives.⁵³ Czech business persons tried to succeed in Serbia which commenced the privatisation of more than 500 state-owned companies.⁵⁴ This was noticed by ECPI Management, established and co-owned by the former Prime Minister, Mirek Topolánek, which was interested in the Serbian state-owned Chemical plant HIP Azotara.⁵⁵ Great success was achieved by Škoda Praha, which won a tender in 2015 for the construction of the 2nd block of Pljevlja thermal power plant in Montenegro worth 338 million EUR.⁵⁶ This business shall probably introduce the intensification of so far weak bilateral relations between Montenegro and the Czech Republic. Further activities of the Czech business subjects in Southeast Europe included the construction and opening of aqua-park *Aquacolors* near the town of Poreč on the Croatian Istria by company Signum,⁵⁷ the extension of production company Jihlavan Airplane to Bulgaria,⁵⁸ winning the contract of worth over 130 million CZK to finish the construction of power plant in Bulgaria by the company Hutní montáže from the Vítkovice Machinery Group⁵⁹ or regular flights from Pardubice to Bulgaria.⁶⁰ We should mention the planned expansion of the investment Group Penta,⁶¹ retail chain Sportissimo⁶² and the manufacturer of vehicle parts Forez to Romania.⁶³

An independent topic which overlaps to politics and security is the issue of gas lines from Southeast Europe. Southeast Europe is interlaced with the network of “future” gas lines; however, it is just a tangle of various plans. From 2002 to June 2013, the planned gas line was Nabucco leading from Azerbaijan and Iran via Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary to Austria. Between 2007 and 2014, the plan and prepared project focused on South Stream leading from Russia over Bulgaria and Serbia

to Hungary with the turn via Greece to Italy. After cancelling the South Stream due to conflicts between the European Union and Gazprom as the investor, the project Turkish Stream was developed in 2015 leading gas from Russia to the Anatolian part of Turkey. However, the project was also cancelled in December 2015 because the Russian and Turkish sides, after shooting down Russian aircraft by the Turkish forces on 24. 11. 2015, failed to agree on the conditions for the project continuation.⁶⁴ The most realistic project seems to be TAP, which would lead gas from Azerbaijan via Turkey, Greece, and Albania to the south of Italy, and connect Macedonia and Serbia too.⁶⁵ So far, the topic of gas lines in Southeast Europe is more of a political topic than an economic topic. In 2015, the approach of the political representatives of individual countries of Southeast Europe was clearly deviating from the ideas of the connection to gas sources from the Russian Federation.⁶⁶

Generally, in 2015, further *proactive development* continued within the economic and social relations with the states of the Balkan Peninsula. The problems of Czech investors within the energy sector continued in 2015; nevertheless, they were not so visibly *politicised*.

Refugee wave and migration

The movement of the refugees through Southeast Europe to the countries in the West and North Europe was a heavily politicised topic already in the previous years. For example, Hungary increased the protection of borders in June 2013 and Bulgaria started building a fence on the border with Turkey. In 2014, the number of illegal crossings of the EU border on the Western Balkan route more than doubled to 43,360. In 2015, the number grew sixteen times to 764,038, with the citizens mostly from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. In the beginning of the year, the route was used by many Kosovo citizens.

The exponential growth of migration using the Western Balkan route placed Southeast Europe to the centre of European politics. In addition to the receiving countries, particularly Germany, the movement strongly affected Turkey which hosted about three million refugees in 2015. In 2015, many of those people travelled to Greece by sea, and then via Macedonia to Serbia. The Serbian refugees then entered Hungary in great numbers and they travelled to West and North Europe. After Hungary built the fence at the border with Serbia, the refugees moved to Croatia.

In 2015, Frontex reported the total of 764,000 illegal crossings of the EU border using the Western Balkan route.⁶⁷

The coming winter made the situation more complicated. It was caused by the weather and also increasing resistance in the countries at the end of the migration inflow. The European Committee in September 2015 introduced a plan to create quotas for accepting the refugees, which met the disapproval of many countries, especially strongly the V4 countries. This more restrictive flow in the EU required stopping the migration wave by stronger border control. This *refusal reaction* to the migration flow of refugees started to be gradually implemented during winter 2015/2016 in the whole Southeast Europe with growing fences or barriers all over the border areas. The reaction to the migration crisis also resulted in the new categorisation of countries con-

sidered the sources of migrating persons. From September, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic listed all countries of Southeast Europe and the Western Balkans as so-called safe countries, which meant significant lower chances for asylum status for all persons from those countries.⁶⁸ In relation to Southeast Europe, the representatives of the Czech foreign policy *proactively helped* manage the flow of refugees, both financially and materially, and also by means of the border protection.

THE BALKAN DIMENSION OF THE CZECH FOREIGN POLICY IN PUBLIC AND MEDIA

The goal of this part, similarly to the general chapter on the media context of the Czech foreign policy (see the *Media Context of the Czech Foreign Policy*), is to identify and name the basic character of Czech media broadcasting of the foreign events, specifically in relation to the Balkan Peninsula countries. The initial data file for the analysis introduced in this section is the selection of news printed in Czech media in 2015. This year, the selection of news was provided by Newton Media and included articles in *Právo*, *Hospodářské noviny*, *MF Dnes*, *Lidové noviny*, on web news *E15.cz*, *ParlamentniListy.cz*, *Ceskenoviny.cz* and on other information platforms. The report introduces the unified information on the issues directly related to one of ten countries of Southeast Europe, i.e. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Romania, Greece, and Serbia. This file excludes the sports results and the comparison of price levels. Then the reports were classified (coded) into eight contextual categories: Policy and company; migration; economics; conflicts and security; crime rate and terrorism; travelling and lifestyle; the relations with Russia; diseases, accidents, and disasters. The quantity comparison of the report context on individual countries is introduced in Table 1 below.

Similarly to 2014 (see the former issue of this book), the reports on *Greece* were mostly covered in the Czech Republic due to the European policy and threatening financial collapse and exit from the Eurozone. In 2015, the *strong media coverage* of the debt crisis of Greece contrasted with *low politicization* or addressing of the issues related to this country in Czech policy.

The Czech political and public representatives did not have any options to actively intervene in the matter; however, the Greek debts became a strongly discussed social issue used by the authors to express their opinions on the past, presence, and future of the European integration process. The second mostly mediatised country in 2015 was *Kosovo*, which exceeded Serbia and Bulgaria, unlike 2014. The reports on Kosovo were most frequent in relation to the conflicts, security, and migration. The media debate quite strongly reflected the topics of settling the relations between Kosovo and Serbia which was an element of the development in the region without noticeable reaction of Czech foreign policy representatives (see above). At the same time, the representatives who addressed Kosovo at the political level as a conflict and threat did so in the media. For example, Kateřina Konečná (KSČM), former Deputy in the Chamber of Deputies and the Deputy in the European Parliament, made such state-

ments in the Chamber and on pages of *Haló noviny*. In 2015, Serbia received similar media attention as Kosovo; however, the topics of general political and social aspects were discussed strongly, and the topics of conflicts, crime rate, and security received lower attention. Croatia was strongly monitored especially considering migration, travelling, and lifestyle. Migration was related to more than one-half of analysed reports from Macedonia. It is interesting that in 2015, the number of refugees passing through Macedonia was almost as high as in Greece, but the media attention in the context of migration was four times higher than in the case of Greece. In relation to Bulgaria and Romania, the media covered mostly the crime rate and economy, in relation to Albania mostly the issues of national conflicts and security, and in relation to Bosnia and Herzegovina mostly the issues of national conflicts and security. Montenegro received the lowest media attention in 2015.

Table 1:
Numbers and context of reports on countries of the Balkan Peninsula

Report context → Country↓	Politics and society	Migration	Economics	Conflict and security	Crime rate and terrorism	Travelling and lifestyle	Relations with Russia	Diseases, accidents, and disasters	Total
Greece	106	10	52	2	1	3	3	0	177
Kosovo	24	33	1	35	12	1	3	0	109
Serbia	31	31	7	21	6	2	6	0	104
Croatia	13	13	13	8	5	21	0	5	78
Macedonia	6	40	3	10	4	4	5	3	75
Bulgaria	4	9	20	2	6	11	4	1	57
Romania	6	3	22	2	14	5	3	1	56
Albania	6	7	2	9	15	7	3	1	50
Bosnia and Herzegovina	7	1	3	7	1	2	0	0	21
Montenegro	5	1	2	0	1	1	0	0	10
Total	208	148	125	96	65	57	27	11	

CONCLUSION

This chapter indicates that in 2015, the representatives of the Czech foreign policy continued with the *proactive* support of the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans. This year was quite successful considering the integration priority, but not due to the activity of Czech diplomacy. None of the main initiatives during recent

years, i.e. the agreement on normalization of relations between Belgrade and Priština in 2013, the start of European integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2015, and the planned integration of Montenegro in NATO, resulted from the diplomatic initiative of the Czech Republic but they resulted from the geopolitical competitions with Russia which changed the priorities of the representatives from the big countries, such as the USA, Germany, and Great Britain. The Czech Republic is not and probably never will be the decisive player. The influence of the Czech Republic on this agenda within the EU and NATO probably weakened in the recent years because it minimised its presence in the security missions EUFOR-ALTHEA and KFOR. The trustworthiness of the Czech integration support approach greatly suffered when the Czech representatives did not hesitate to use the integration process to create pressure on the government in Albania to help the ČEZ Group to secure the investment. The Czech foreign policy was still *polarised* in relations to Kosovo which was reflected by the *politicising* and blocking of the partial tasks. Particularly the Chamber of Deputies has a strong anti-Kosovo faction. The change within this matter can be expected with new presidential and parliament elections. However, it is necessary to mention that a part of Czech media in 2015 considered the process of the settlement between Serbia and Kosovo as commenced by the agreement from 2013. This constructive development in the region was not reflected in the Czech foreign policy because some significant representatives *are not interested* or just *ignore it*. The fixation of some Czech representatives on the events which accompanied the declaration of Kosovo independence in 2008, effectively prevents a further process in the Kosovo and Serbia integration, i.e. the fulfilment of official priorities of Czech foreign policy. In 2015, at the level of EU and NATO, the officially declared interests of the Czech Republic were fulfilled, however, without a contribution from the Czech Republic. The space to increase the visibility of the Czech foreign policy in the Balkan area in the future is provided by regional frameworks of cooperation with the involvement of the Czech Republic, such as V4 or the Slavkov cooperation.

In 2015, further development occurred within the development of direct economic, social, and cultural relations with the Southeast Europe. On one hand, the area of economic cooperation in 2015 did not require any reaction from the Czech foreign policy considering significant problems such as in 2014, and the economic relations in the region were not strongly politicised. On the other hand, the Czech representatives *reacted negatively* to the migration wave passing through the Balkan Peninsula in 2015, and *aimed for* stronger protection of the borders in Southeast Europe and also *proactively helped* the Western Balkan countries to manage the humanitarian and security aspects of the crisis. Within this context, the Czech foreign policy demonstrated a certain ability to react with respect to ensuring the internal Czech and European security.

Finally, the analysis of the selected news on the Balkan Peninsula confirmed the trend of high *media coverage* of the Greek debt crisis contrasting with the quite low *politicization* of the topic in the Czech Republic. The development of these and further areas of the Balkan dimension within the Czech foreign policy shall be interesting to watch in the future issues of this book.

Endnotes

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- ³ The Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic: Viz www.psp.cz, Jednání a dokumenty, Mezinárodní smlouvy, Smlouva o zabrání dvojitého zdanění mezi Českou republikou a Republikou Kosovo.
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- ⁶ *Albania and the Westernern Balkans in a Challenging Geopolitical Context*, 9. 4. 2015. On-line: iir.cz/article/albania-and-the-Westernern-balkans-in-a-challenging-geopolitical-context.
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- ⁸ *Albania 2015 Report*. European Commission, Brussels, 10. 11. 2015.
- ⁹ *Srbský premiér jel poprvé do Albánie*. MF Dnes, 28. 5. 2015.
- ¹⁰ *Albánci a Srby mají usmířit nové dálnice – s pomocí EU*. MF Dnes, 29. 5. 2015.
- ¹¹ *Kvůli vlajce Velké Albánie se rozhořely nepokoje v Srbsku i v Kosovu*. iDNES.cz, 17. 10. 2014.
- ¹² *Rama pobouřil Srbsko výrok o spojení Kosova s Albánií*. Právo, 9. 4. 2015.
- ¹³ In March, the Albanian delegation of experts visited the Czech Republic. The delegation was led by the Deputy of the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Entrepreneurship, Brunilda Pascali. In the end of September, the delegation of the European Integration Committee of the Albanian Parliament visited the Czech Republic as retribution for the May visit of the Czech Senate Committee in Albania. On 20.–22. 9. 2015, the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Michaela Marksová, visited Albania. On 15.–16. 11. 2015 the Minister of Agriculture, Marian Jurečka, visited Albania. On 10 4. 2015, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, Lubomír Zaorálek, met in the Czernin Palace the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Albania, Ditmir Bushati, who arrived at the Czech Republic for two-day official visit. In the end of the meeting, the Ministers signed a Memorandum on Cooperation in the area of European Integration between the MFA of the Republic of Albania and MFA of the Czech Republic. Albania also joined the Declaration on Jurisdictional Immunities of State Owned Cultural Property. During his visit on 9 April, Minister Bushati gave a lecture in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs titled “Albania and the Western Balkans in a challenging geopolitical context”.
- ¹⁴ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic: *Prime Minister Rama visited the Czech Republic*, 14. 10. 2015. During his visit, the following documents were signed: an agreement on social security, an agreement on cooperation within tourism, agreements between the Ministers of Education on student exchange programs for the years 2015–2018, a memorandum on cooperation amongst the fire brigades, and a memorandum of understanding amongst the environmental protection agencies.
- ¹⁵ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic: *Zahájení Slavkovské spolupráce v Albánii*, 2. 3. 2016.

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- ¹⁷ *Vučić jako první srbský premiér v Albánii*. Právo, 28. 5. 2015.
- ¹⁸ At Meeting Commemorating Twentieth Anniversary of Srebrenica Killings. Security Council Fails to Adopt Resolution, Security Council, Meetings Coverage, 7481st Meeting (AM), 8. 7. 2015.
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- ²¹ *Záhřeb po střetu ukončil blokádu vozidel ze Srbska*. Právo, 26. 9. 2015.
- ²² *Serbia 2015 Report*, op. cit.
- ²³ *Praha plánuje rozšířit investice v Srbsku*. Právo, 3. 9. 2015.
- ²⁴ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic: *Ministr Zaorálek přijal ministra zahraničí Srbska*, 15. 9. 2015.
- ²⁵ *Velvyslanci v EU prodloužili sankce*. Právo, 19. 12. 2015.
- ²⁶ *Kosovo 2015 Report*. European Commission, Brussels, 10. 11. 2015.
- ²⁷ *First agreement of principles governing the normalization of relations*, Brussels, 19. 4. 2013.
- ²⁸ The Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic: *Usnesení PS PČR No. 1128*. On-line: www.psp.cz.
- ³⁰ *Zeman: Thaci je válečný zločinec*. Haló noviny, 2. 5. 2015.
- ³¹ On June 3rd-4th, 2015, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Petr Drulák visited Kosovo. There he negotiated with representatives of the country and visited the Czech members of the EULEX mission. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic: *Náměstek Drulák v Kosov*, 8. 6. 2015. On-line: www.mzv.cz.
- ³² Written Commitment of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Agreed by the BiH Presidency on 29 January 2015, Signed by the leaders of the 14 parties represented in Parliament, and Endorsed by the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina on 23 February 2015. On-line: www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014_2019/documents/dsee/dv/0507_11/0507_11en.pdf.
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- ³⁴ *Poprvé od války jednaly vlády Bosny a Srbska*. Hospodářské noviny, 5. 11. 2015.
- ³⁵ *Ropní šejkové postaví v Bosně luxusní městečko*. Lidové noviny, 24. 10. 2015.
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- ³⁷ *Papež povzbudí věřící v Bosně*. Lidové noviny, 6. 6. 2015.
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- ⁴⁰ *I Makedonie je evropská*. Hospodářské noviny, 19. 5. 2015.
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- ⁴⁵ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic: *Článek ministrů V4: Nabízíme vám pomocnou ruku na cestě do EU*, 13. 11. 2015.
- ⁴⁶ *Energo-Pro podalo arbitráž na Bulharsko*. E15, 10. 6. 2015.
- ⁴⁷ *ČEZ oznámil Bulharsku záměr vést arbitráž*. Právo, 20. 11. 2015.
- ⁴⁸ *ČEZ snížil hodnotu aktiv v Rumunsku*. E15, 16. 3. 2015.
- ⁴⁹ *AWT bude v Srbsku přepravovat dřevo*. Hospodářské noviny, 22. 12. 2015.
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- ⁵¹ *Travel Service otevře nové linky do Portugalska a Albánie*. E15, 28. 1. 2015.

- ⁵² One of the manifestations of the increased tourist exchange is the new project Albanian Challenge (**albanianchallenge.org**), which is focused on marking tourist paths and interconnecting the Curraj Eperm valley in the Albanian Alps with the rest of Albania. The Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Albania Bronislava Tomášová was one of the people who personally supported the project. On-line: www.mzv.cz/tirana/cz/albanie_informace_nejen_pro_turisty_a/cesti_dobrovolnici_ozivuji_udoli.html.
- ⁵³ *Albánie: Pár z ČR zavraždil narkoman*. Právo, 7. 7. 2015.
- ⁵⁴ *Srbsko hledá kupce pro více než 500 firem. Zatím marně*. Hospodářské noviny, 14. 4. 2015.
- ⁵⁵ *Topolánkova ECPI loví v Srbsku*. E15, 9. 2. 2015.
- ⁵⁶ *Škoda Praha vyhrála tendr na elektrárnu v Černé Hoře*. E15, 21. 5. 2015.
- ⁵⁷ *Miliardář Studěnka otevře akvapark v Chorvatsku*. E15, 16. 2. 2015.
- ⁵⁸ *Jihlavan vyráží do Bulharska*. Právo, 14. 8. 2015.
- ⁵⁹ *Hutní montáže do Bulharska*. Právo, 1. 7. 2015.
- ⁶⁰ *Do Bulharska bude létat pravidelná linka*. MF Dnes, 9. 1. 2015.
- ⁶¹ *Další cíl Penty: Rumunsko*. Hospodářské noviny, 20. 11. 2015.
- ⁶² *Sportisimo chce do Rumunska*. Hospodářské noviny, 30. 11. 2015.
- ⁶³ *Firma roku Pardubicka míří do Rumunska*. Hospodářské noviny, 21. 9. 2015.
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