
Chapter 14

The Far East in the Czech Foreign Policy

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THE FAR EAST IN THE CZECH FOREIGN POLICY: BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

This chapter covers the area of the Far East (FE), namely the People's Republic of China (PRC), both Korean states, Japan, Taiwan, and Mongolia. Similarly to the former chapters on the Far East in this monograph, this group includes also Vietnam because it represents an important country for the Czech Republic and it has not been processed in an independent chapter on South-East Asia yet. The Czech Republic has no specific political interests in the FE area; it shares the mainstream EU and EU member states' policy which supports the politically and security-wise balanced and stable situation in the Asian-Pacific area. The main interest of all participating European member states is the strengthening of economic contacts in the area of investment and trade in the exceptionally important economic region.

The selection of topics within the limited scope of this chapter – identically to the former years of the analysis – focuses preferentially on the new and significant events and trends in the agenda of the Czech Republic in the Far East; the goal is not to provide a detailed and comprehensive record of all the above-mentioned FE states. In regard to the Czech interests, the dominant topic in relation to the FE countries is the strengthening of the economic contacts. In relation to the former part within this context, we can state the continual trend of a rapid growth of the agenda with two main partner states: with the Republic of Korea (South Korea, the ROK) and China. In both cases, the Czech bilateral relations achieved the form of strategic partnership; with the ROK it was declared during the visit of the Korean President in Prague, and with China by the notification of the goal on the occasion of the Czech Prime Minister's visit to China with the confirmation of the planned historically first journey of the Chinese President to Prague for the coming year 2016. President Miloš Zeman further moved the level of the Czech-Chinese contacts; he was the only leading representative of the EU who arrived in Beijing for the celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII with the undertone of power ambitions of the PRC.

Whilst the Czech convergence with the Republic of Korea has its own dynamics based on bilateral contacts from the nineties and based on stronger contacts with

the ROK and the EU (see the Free Trading Agreement from 2011), the Chinese strategy is even more anchored in multilateral formats of the EU–PRC strategic partnership (since 2003), regional format 1+16 (since 2012), and lately the global projects *One Belt One Road*, which resulted from the former project *Silk Road*, combining the transcontinental system of regional cooperation projects focused on the construction of logistic and transport infrastructure with extensive investment incentive from the PRC focused on selected branches. The Czech position benefits from long-lasting stable bilateral contacts with Japan and from the existing format V4+Japan.

The proactive policy of the Czech Republic towards China followed up the former years from the fall of the government of Petr Nečas in the spirit of strategic government documents, i.e. particularly the *Government program declaration* (by Bohuslav Sobotka),¹ *The Concept of the Czech Foreign Policy*² and the *Czech Export Strategy for 2012–2020*.³ The section of foreign policy in Sobotka's government declaration differs from the former version of P. Nečas' government by the note on intense relationships with non-European countries which were not explicitly and strongly mentioned in the former document (in the first clause). The new perception of human rights, unlike the former government in the section on foreign policy, places the human rights in the context of the development policy and humanitarian help.⁴ Rapid improvement of the political dialogue with Beijing complies with the government declaration; Prague did not make any concessions within the matter of human rights; however, the statements of the President contained the concessions ever since his start in the office. The Prague politics became more pragmatic and it considers the unusually strong interest of Beijing in the post-communist Europe. The dynamics of the bilateral contacts between the Czech Republic and China was robust in the defined period; the Czech Republic appeared in the so far uncommon role of the favourite amongst the states of regional format 1+16, even within the pan-European (i.e. EU) context. Even though the agenda 1+16 became a significant tool in the Czech policy, the pragmatic policy in Prague focused mostly on the bilateral relationships, identically to other diplomatically active states of the 16, typically Hungary, Poland, and the Balkan states. The format 1+16 in the participating European countries, particularly in the prominent V4, is evaluated with reservations in the academic circles, and even strongly critically considering the real economic benefits.⁴ The association 1+16 is perceived as significantly asymmetric with respect to the greater benefits for China itself; however, the efficiency evaluation from the position of individual European partners requires a greater time reserve considering the three-year history.

The Czech Republic utilised its Presidency in V4 at two prestigious summits: V4 with South Korea and V4 with Japan. Particularly the agenda with the Korean Republic graduated swiftly upon the announcement of the strategic partnership between the Czech Republic and the ROK; the concurrence of the Korean and Chinese activity proves the continually growing relevance of the Czech Republic in regard to the strong FE states. Similarly, the summit of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs V4+Japan (November 2015) in Luxemburg confirmed the permanently active relationships of V4 with Japan (former summit in 2013) and the interest in further meetings at the high level with a two-year interval.⁶

Whilst the intense contacts with the Republic of Korea have a strong support from political and economic elites, including the opposition and media, the results of the new pro-Chinese policy do not have convincing economic effects, and a part of the economically uninvolved opposition criticizes the government for withdrawing from the protection of human rights. The media perceived China as an intra-politically polarising topic and the intensity of the negative interpretation of the new Czech policy disclosed a limited capacity of the state institutes to defend the need for a political dialogue with the internationally unpopular PRC that lacks *soft power*. The alienation of the new pragmatic policy towards China from the public opinion continued in the monitored year. Defending the proactive policy towards Beijing against the lack of support of the media and the public is an ungrateful task in the Czech Republic. In regard to the national interest and the context with multilateral formats of the regional association 1+16 and the strategic partnership EU–PRC, the restart of the Czech policy towards the PRC seems promising.

THE FAR EAST IN THE CZECH FOREIGN POLICY: AGENDA AND EVENTS

Historically, the best bilateral contacts with the Republic of Korea were confirmed by the visits of Prime Minister Sobotka in Seoul (February) and President Park Geun-hye in Prague (December). The Czech government delegation led by the Prime Minister visited the capital of the ROK after 14 years to attend the business forum and the negotiations on business and investment projects; the visit of the Korean President in Prague was pre-negotiated for the same year, and the strategic partnership between both states was announced. Then the Prague meeting at the level of Presidents and government finalised the pre-agreements: it introduced the *Action Plan for Czech-Korean strategic partnership*, which included the cooperation in the area of security, investment, trade, culture, education, and science-technical contacts.⁷ The Korean partners showed interest in the additional construction of nuclear blocks in Temelin and Dukovany; however, it was without a clear reply from the Czech Republic, which had more applicants. The plan for the construction of the new power plant Nexen Tire in the Ústí nad Labem Region and Hyundai Mobis was confirmed (in the case of Hyundai, it was worth around 4 billion CZK) for the construction of headlamps.⁸ The Korean side also offers to sell army helicopters to the Czech Republic; it is also interested in the cooperation within bio- and nano-technologies. The Republic of Korea was statistically the third largest investor in the Czech Republic after Germany and Japan.⁹

Additionally to the bilateral negotiations, President Pak participated in the meeting of the format V4–KR. Seoul aims to keep up with the Chinese economic expansion in Central and East Europe, and the prestigious summit with the participation of Prime Ministers (Sobotka, Orbán, Fico, and Szydło) confirmed the stronger contacts of the ROK–V4, defined in the extensive 38-point joint declaration.¹⁰

The increasing political and economic contacts with the PRC confirmed the visits of Prime Minister Sobotka and president Zeman. President visited Beijing after one

year (August) for the celebration of WWII end. Miloš Zeman was the only official representative of the EU, to a great dislike of the Czech opposition, to participate in the pompous celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the end of the WWII convened on the Tiananmen Square; Beijing perceived the gesture especially positively.¹¹

Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka and Minister of Foreign Affairs Lubomír Zaorálek refused the opinion that the European partners perceived the President's visit in Beijing as problematic, even though the joint statement of the EU countries did not recommend such visit.¹² For example, *Hospodářské noviny* commented the participation of the President in Beijing as a betrayal of the EU boycott.¹³

Two months later (in November), the Czech President was accepted by President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Li Keqiang. In Beijing, Prime Minister Sobotka signed the memorandum on the participation of the Czech Republic in the extensive platform New Silk Road; it is currently (2015–2016) renamed *One Belt One Road*, abr. OBOR).¹⁴ The Prime Minister, in the company of Minister of Health Svatopluk Němeček, also visited Shanghai and had a speech at the summit of Prime Ministers from 1+16 in Suzhou. During the meeting at the highest level, the intention was confirmed to conclude a bilateral strategic partnership between the Czech Republic and the PRC with the pre-agreed visit of President Si in Prague for the upcoming year.¹⁵

Further visits at the presidential level attract attention. Mongolian President Tsakhiaagiin Elbegdorj (January 2015) and Vietnamese President Truong Tan Sang negotiated in Prague on restarting their joint economic agenda.¹⁶ In both cases, it includes the partners with strategic prospects for the Czech Republic; however, the implementation of economic goals is lengthy and difficult. The agenda with North Korea still suffers from international isolation of the military government and the security tension produced by the regime.

Economic agenda

The Far East countries are always related to the expectations to strengthen the position of the Czech export and to receive alternative investments from states outside the EU; the biggest hopes are focused on the huge economy of the PRC; however, the effects are mostly at the stage of expectations, like in the case of all other EU states and the states in 1+16. In the area of trade, the format 1+16 does not offer much to the European partners except for diplomatic incentives; the exporters must pursue their own ways, as the investments are realized sporadically.

China is the fourth strongest business partner of the Czech Republic as defined by Prime Minister Sobotka during his visit to the PRC.¹⁷ The statistics of foreign business with China indicates a small increase of export and a permanently growing import: export 45.54 billion CZK, import 464.68 billion CZK, balance -419.15 billion CZK; in comparison with 2014 (export 42.3 billion CZK, import 359.3 billion CZK, negative balance -316.9 billion CZK). Even though the year-to-year comparison does not indicate any clear conclusions, the trend of the increase of the Czech export from the previous years continues; however, the already high deficit grew much more (year-to-year by 32%).¹⁸ The Czech deficit with China is a very well-known matter which

is not perceived as a significant problem considering the traditionally surplus trading balance with the EU.

The agenda of 1+16 focuses mostly on the investment support from China; however, the results are in the state of expectations. The investment from the PRC related to the Warsaw initiative (2012) from a special investment fund (*China CEE Investment Co-operation Fund*) is aimed mostly at the transport and logistic infrastructure where the Czech Republic was not able to provide the Chinese partners with specific projects. The inflow of investment from the Asian countries cannot be recorded due to the unavailability of PZI statistics from 2014 (June 2016); the trend can be identified only according to the development and implementation of the projects in progress. The first ground-breaking notes on the high volume of investments from the Chinese investment company CEFC were announced during the visit of President Zeman in China which was related to the agreements prepared for signature on the announced visit of President Si for the following year. The investment shall be defined in the following analysis for 2016. Preliminarily, it included the involvement of an investor in the property shares of the Slovak-Czech financial group J & T in the area of banking, in the aviation industry (Travel Service), and also in media (Média Group and Empresa Media), the brewery Lobkowicz, and the football club Slavia Prague. The estimated investment (i.e. its initial share) was approximately 10 billion CZK.¹⁹

The Czech business diplomacy continued the expansion in the field; CzechTrade opened a branch in Chengdu (in relation to the new open consulate), and CzechInvest opened the office in the Korean city of Seoul. The active involvement of the Czech healthcare in China and the related economic activities are defined in the following section about the players.

THE FAR EAST IN THE CZECH FOREIGN POLICY: IDENTIFICATION OF THE MAIN PLAYERS

The continuous convergence with the strategically important states (the Republic of Korea and the PRC) was reflected in the monitored year and it followed up the previous years; it is not an accidental divergence but the confirmation of the concurrent multilateral and bilateral agenda with the predominant consensus of the political and economic elites. The significance of Central Europe including the Czech Republic for the economic and political interests of the leading players in the FE is rising. It is true especially in the case of China, which combined the project 1+16 with the main strategy OBOR. The Czech party acted similarly to the most members of the sixteen states (except for frustrated Slovakia) with the proactive politics.

The Czech policy in the FE is not a controversial topic amongst the main state institutions and the coalition political parties; it contributes to the utilization of the currently beneficial period particularly for the convergence with China which does not have a good reputation with respect to the human rights. In the case of China, it is necessary to mention the exceptionally active and effective role of President Zeman

who clearly takes the credit for the manner how Beijing started perceiving the Czech Republic. However, this truly historical success bears the negative stigma of Zeman's statements in the media which basically started the feedback of the Czech public which negatively perceives his statements in the Chinese media (refer to this chapter in 2014) and the President's explicit refusal of the human rights policy in the PRC. The Czech President increases his political capital in China where he is perceived as the main representative of the Czech Republic. Zeman's policy towards China is not perceived as problematic by the government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, even though it verbally crosses the limits of official political opinions in the area of human rights, EU, and transatlantic relations. President Zeman can be considered the most dominant (even though not the only) player bearing the main credit for the rapid improvement of the relations with Beijing.²⁰

In addition to the active President, the pro-active policy towards the PRC is followed by the state institutes, namely the government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, competent ministries competent ministries (particularly the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, and the Ministry of Regional Development). The active institutions engaged in intensifying the contacts with China also include the Association of the Regions.

The non-governmental institutions with a close relationship to China include the Czech-Chinese (the Combined Czech-Chinese Chamber of Mutual Cooperation) and the lobbyist circles, particularly those related to ČSSD and ODS; refer to the think-tank "China Investment Forum", which is occupied by persons with close relations to ČSSD, led by the active lobbyist and former high-ranking politician Jaroslav Tvrdík. The annual meeting of the China Investment Forum under the patronage of President Zeman was convened at the Prague Castle, as was also the case in 2015. The present people included President Zeman, Prime Minister Sobotka and Du Qinglin, the Vice-Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (i.e. the second parliament chamber).²¹ The Czech lobby groups are interested particularly in the financial sector, engineering (transport vehicles and aviation industry), food industry, and healthcare. The growth of non-political and less politicised agenda applies to China – particularly within aviation lines, inter-regional contacts, science, education and research, tourism, sport, and individual contacts.

The first Summit of the Ministers of Health within the format 1+16 took place in Prague (15.–16. 6. 2015); it was organised by the Ministries of Health of the Czech Republic and the PRC with the participation of the Vice-Premier of the People's Republic of China, Liu Yandong, and Ministers of Healthcare of the Czech Republic and the PRC, and also by the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Margaret Chan.²² On the occasion of the summit, the Czech-Chinese Centre for Traditional Chinese Medicine Research was opened at the University Hospital in Hradec Králové. Based on the signed agreements, the Clinic of Chinese Traditional Medicine should be built within three years for 250 million CZK. A sharp growth of medical agenda between the Czech Republic and the PRC is demonstrated by seven signed agreements between the science and business subjects. The Clinic in Hradec Králové will

be the first and the largest in Central Europe; similar facilities are mostly in the USA, France, Great Britain, and Germany.

The summit in the format 1+16 was a success for the Czech Republic which confirmed the growing prestige of Prague in the Chinese perception, and also with respect to the practical side of 1+16 agenda with the proclaimed massive investments from the PRC which were still rather rhetorical, not factual in that year. The Czech side has its own ambitions in the area of healthcare in China resulting from the activities of companies supplying equipment for the Chinese medical facilities and also PPF investment activities in the area of the research of cancer treatment (project SOTIO).

The Governor of South Moravian Region, Michal Hašek, who participated in the delegation of Prime Minister Sobotka in the PRC, actively lobbied for building a spa project in Pasohlávky in the Břeclav region) (for the Chinese investment of 2.5 billion CZK). The new Czech consulate was established in Chengdu, the capital of the Sichuan Province, and President Zeman participated in the opening ceremony. South West China represents a very well evaluated area with a rapid development of economy which attracts the attention of other European players (Germany, Poland). The Czech business diplomacy is very interested in the region with respect to the access to the neighbouring provinces (Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangxi), which were placed aside for a long time from the quickly developing parts of China and they offer new opportunities, often more beneficial than the East Coast with over-investment. The Czech Republic has lobbied in these regions for a long time for the offers of the Czech companies producing (among other things) small aircraft and land transport vehicles.

The active political agenda in the concerned year was also supported by the parliamentary delegation (April 2015) led by the Chairman of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, Jan Hamáček, in China, where they met Zhang Dejiang, the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, and the Vice-Premier of the People's Republic of China, Liu Yandong. The delegation also included the Zhejiang Province and culminated in Shanghai in the follow-up to the cultural program of the Czech Days and the International Technological Trade Fair.²³

Despite the very proactive policy to continental China, Prague continued in the discreet politics of unofficial contacts with Taiwan. The Senate delegation represented by Přemysl Sobotka, Petr Bratský, and Jan Horník was received by President Ma ying-jeou.²⁴ This visit, which was paid by the Taiwanese side, resulted in an official complaint of the PRC Ambassador at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. The protest referred to the "Principle of One China" at the joint declaration of the Czech Republic and the PRC signed at the end of the visit of Minister of Foreign Affairs Zorálek in 2014.²⁵ The assertive behaviour of the Chinese Embassy brought to mind how the Chinese side tried to utilize the wording of bilateral agreements. Nevertheless, the PRC itself maintains contacts with the official representatives of Taiwan; in 2015, the historically first meeting at the level of Presidents of the PRC and Taiwan even took place in Singapore.

THE FAR EAST IN THE CZECH FOREIGN POLICY: PUBLIC AND MEDIA SPACE

The Far East countries do not rank amongst the countries with a great media attention; however, the stable growing influence of China has become a domestic topic. Media have started to politicise the Czech-Chinese relations from the start of President Zeman's function and Rusnok's government; clearly from the first visit of Minister of Foreign Affairs, L. Zaorálek, in China, and in relation to media attacks aimed at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, namely Petr Drulák and his proposal to review the Czech policy towards human rights. During the monitored period, the greatest attention was focused on the visit of President Zeman to China and his controversial participation in the Military show in Beijing, which demonstrated the growing international ambitions of the PRC more than the celebration of the end of the war. The EU countries perceived the celebrations coldly – without the participation of the political leaders; the USA and the Asian allies, particularly Japan, considered the manifestation of power disturbing, and the leaders did not arrive to celebrate the anniversary in Beijing. The Czech media criticism of President Zeman focused on the violation of joint EU process and glossy behaviour to a non-democratic power.²⁶ Miloš Zeman sat on the tribune on the Tianmen Square next to high-ranking representatives from Serbia, Belarus, Russia (President Vladimir Putin), Central Asian countries, South Korean President Pak, representative of one of the most pro-American states in Asia, and also next to former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and next to former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder.²⁷ The participation of the Czech President in the celebrations in Beijing was criticised by some coalition partners, e.g. Ondřeje Benešik from KDU-ČSL.²⁸ Prime Minister Sobotka and Minister Zaorálek did not have any objections to the President's visit in Beijing; some Ministers raised objections; *Lidové noviny*, with the reference the web of the Czech Government, mentioned Daniel Herman who voted against the visit and some Ministers who abstained from the vote.²⁹

The opposition politicians presented their criticism of President Zeman through media and at the conference Forum 2000 where Karel Schwarzenberg (TOP 09) and Petr Fiala (ODS) repeated the reservations to forsaking the policy of protection of human rights and fawning authoritative China.³⁰ The topic of China and of the violation of human rights of ethnical minorities appears at the general appeal of non-government organisations called "Do not fawn the dictators" which addresses the state representatives and politicians in general to support human rights in countries with non-democratic regimes.³¹

President Zeman, who was the centre of criticism from the Czech media for excessively pro-Chinese policy, focused the negative attention on himself whilst the government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs avoided the sharp criticism in 2015. The proactive policy of the President in regard to the convergence with non-popular China became the main topic for the public. Unlike the previous year, the pragmatically open style towards Beijing was not a completely new topic; it just focused more on the President. M. Zeman pragmatically used the visit to China to negotiate eco-

conomic projects, particularly the investment with the Shanghai financial group CEFC; he visited the new open consulate in Chengdu and focused on the presentation in the Chinese media. The presentation in a popular form organised by CzechTourism and the Consulate in Shanghai for the support of the Czech Republic with the participation of Minister Zaorálek and football player Nedvěd (and other popular celebrities) was broadcast on a Chinese TV show on a regional channel of the Hunan Province; however, in the Czech Republic, it received sarcastic comments.³² President Zeman also supported the cooperation of the Czech Republic and China in the area of sports, particularly football and ice-hockey. One of the triumphs of this mission with respect to the public relations was the participation of Pavel Nedvěd, who was considered a world class football icon in China. The Czech football player should replace David Beckham as the advertising figure of the Chinese football super league.³³ The Chinese side also showed interest in the Czech assistance in improving the level of the Chinese ice-hockey for the Winter Olympic Games in 2022. Even independently of the active President Zeman, the Czech cultural policy continued in the high style of the recent years as it was demonstrated for example by the Czech days in Shanghai organised by the Czech Consulate. Although this text does not mention the details, the Czech public diplomacy with Czech culture is traditionally very active in Japan, South Korea, and in Taiwan.

Whilst the media continued in covering the Chinese topics in a very critical spirit, the relevant topic of the market economy status (MES) awarded to China by the European Union, which should come into being at the end of 2016, remained outside the public debate, despite clearly problematic impacts on the Czech industry and employment.³⁴ The opposition of a large part of the Czech public to the convergence with China is becoming somewhat peculiar. It is interesting that, for example, the annual analysis *European Foreign Policy Scorecard* by the London research centre ECFR included the Czech Republic, for the particular year (in the issue dated 2016), amongst the main initiative EU member states (“the leader”) within the policy of human rights.³⁵

The positive aspects of the Czech public area in the monitored period include the continual success of the adaptation of the Vietnamese community, the largest Asian minority in the Czech Republic, within the majority society, and the success of the Vietnamese-Czech citizens in media and social networks.

CONCLUSION

The year 2015 can be considered promising within the FE policy despite not many specific results in the form of trade and investment growth. The media sphere in the case of the FE agenda strongly focuses on the individual policy of President Zeman outside the policy of the Government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs when the President, specifically in the case of China, pushes the limits of the pro-Chinese course despite a strong consensus against it. The continual convergence with China in the monitored year is a historical event with the potential for further relations for

the coming years. The public reception of this trend is strongly negative; the question remains if M. Zeman, who is increasingly distancing himself from the Czech media and intellectual mainstream, should not consider the justified right of the Czech public to representative behaviour of the head of state or if it concerns a matter of chronic, negative prejudice of media, non-government organisations, and political opposition in their view of the problematic China. The China case demonstrates that foreign policy and its effects are less important for the Czech public than its identity and security. The agenda with other countries – except for North Korea, which embodies the fear of difference and a totalitarian regime even more – is problem-free and non-irritating. The relations with Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan do not suffer from extreme politicisation and polarisation by the Czech public. It is not a coincidence because, in comparison with China, these countries exercise a significantly more sophisticated and efficient public diplomacy.

The Czech Republic seeks primarily the economic benefits from Asian partners, which are present and show an increasing trend, but the practise shows that the real results are behind the expectations. It is defined by the difference between the expectations after signing the memorandum and contracts and common difficulties and delays during the implementation which is frequent in the matters related to the Asian partners. This difference creates space for politicisation where there is interest in it: The political and economic players related to the proactive policy try to present their achievements, whilst the opposition, non-governmental organisations, and media use failures for their critical rhetoric. The most typical example is China which has soft powers in the Czech Republic and faces anti-Chinese moods, the failures and delays in cases of Vietnam, South Korea, Taiwan, and other partners are less presented. The advantage of the Japanese and Korean partners is the more convincing history of implemented projects from the previous years which are more beneficial for the Czech structural requirements. As regards the critical response, the Czech media are not sharp towards Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea. The disadvantage of the bad reputation of the PRC with the European public is generally the non-democratic character of the regime and the problematic state of human rights.

The topic of China and the efforts of the Czech Republic for a more pragmatic policy which is otherwise common within EU-28, are interpreted due to the media influence as an alleged failure of the Czech human rights policy. The public debate accepts the political opinions of the minority right-wing opposition which is not anti-Chinese in practise except for the conservative groups of politicians inside TOP 09 and KDU-ČSL.

In contrast to the successful mission of President Zeman appreciated by a part of professional community working in the state institutions directly in China³⁶ due to a very positive perception of the Czech President in the media of the PRC and amongst the political leaders,³⁷ the Czech public is disappointed due to some statements of the President from 2014 when he failed to consider the expectations of Czech public which was sensitive to the human rights issues, and assertive examples of Russian and Chinese policies within international relations. Further complicating circumstances supporting the justified mistrust of the Czech public to China include the increas-

ingly centralised and authoritarian tendencies of the PRC regime, the strengthening of censorship, never-ending bullying and criminalisation of dissent. The difference between the wide-ranging consensus of political and economic elites with respect to the convergence with China on one hand and the refusal of pragmatic policy in media on the other hand reflects the behaviour of the Czech society, which is repeatedly interpreted by the author as a need for the self-reconstruction of the democratic identity by means of a discourse on some different non-democratic non-European societies.³⁸

Generally, the position of the Czech Republic in the Far East is rising and the trend is suitably represented in modern industrial branches, namely engineering, ecological, technologies, financial services, healthcare, glass making industry, and tourism. Successful areas include science, research, and culture. The lasting interest of Asian partners, particularly Japan, Republic of Korea, and China, solid economic references and growing *soft power* of the Czech Republic represent the positive aspects of 2015. The position of the Czech Republic in the existing cooperation formats between the EU and the Asian states is solid and stable. The Czech interests in the monitored period were promoted particularly in China where the position of the Czech Republic had been very weak until 2013, in the area of political contacts it had been the worst from the whole Europe. Prague negotiated the visit of President Xi Jinping for 2016, the preliminary agreement on massive investments from the PRC became clearer, the Czech interests were promoted in the 1+16 format in the area of healthcare and lobbying amongst the Chinese investors. The presidency of the Czech Republic in V4 in the agenda towards Japan, South Korea, and China can be evaluated as significant and contributing to a good reputation of the Central European countries in the Asian states, strengthening the reputation of the Czech Republic.

Endnotes

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- ⁵ Szcudlik-Tatar, Justyna: *Poland-China Strategic Partnership: Waiting for More Results*. Bulletin PISM, No. 106 (838), 19. 11. 2015; also, for example, Matura, Tamás: Hungary and China: Hopes and reality. In: Huotari, Mikko–Otero-Iglesias, Miguel–Seaman, John–Ekman, Alice (eds.): *A report by the European Think-tank Network on China (ETNC)*, p. 41–45.
- ⁶ *The V4 Ministers of Foreign Affairs met their Japan counterpart on margins of the EU-ASEM meeting in Luxemburg on November 4, 2015*. Joint Statement, MOFA JP. On-line: www.mofa.go.jp/files/000006466.pdf.

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- ¹¹ Interview of the author in *China Academy of Social Science*, Peking 2016.
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